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More is less: Partisan ideology, changes of government, and policy integration reforms in the UK

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have argued that political parties in government matter for policy integration reforms, but the way they do so remains somewhat undetermined. In this paper, we contribute to this literature by tackling two interrelated open questions: How does the presence of different political parties in government, which rely on policy programs on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, shape the intensity of policy integration reforms? To what extent do changes in governing political parties affect the political motivation of policy integration reforms and thereby influence the goals and means of these reforms? To explore these questions, we examine a case where institutional capacity is generally favorable to such reforms. Specifically, we compare policy integration reforms in the UK under the New Labor government (1997–2010) with those passed by the Conservative governments (1979–1996), and by the coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats (–2010–2014). We find that political parties' policy positions, and respectively, their political motivations, decisively shape the intensity of policy integration reforms, as well as their substantial goals and means. Furthermore, our results imply that changes in governing parties increase the overall frequency but can reduce the coherence of reform programs over time. These results point to a paradox for the governance of problems through policy integration, whereby the presence of high institutional capacity as provided by a majoritarian system can have negative long-term consequences for policies aiming to solve complex problems.


KEYWORDS

Party politics; political cycle; institutional capacity

Introduction

The integration of different sectoral public policies is an increasingly common policy-making approach that is attracting considerable attention from public policy scholars and practitioners. The concept of policy integration refers to policy changes that combine existing public policies and public sector organizations, so as to connect, for instance, environmental protection with objectives to combat climate change, or to coordinate immigration policy with measures to favor the inclusion of migrants. Policy integration is typically seen as a functional byproduct of structural macro-phenomena such as the

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed [here](#).

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emergence of complex policy challenges to which policymakers are confronted in the context of internationalization (Peters, 2017; Tosun & Lang, 2017). It also derives from the demand for coordination stemming from the fragmentation of authority created by delegation to specialized agencies and by the decentralization of competencies (Chow, Humphrey, & Moll, 2007; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2007). Furthermore, policy integration follows up from the need for policy coherence and harmonization in front of uneven policy accumulation over time (Adam, Steinebach, & Knill, 2018; Bolognesi & Nahrath, 2020).

Against this background, policy capacity is an important intervening variable that helps explaining whether governments are able to pursue policy integration reforms. Specifically, a high policy capacity should facilitate policy integration reforms (Catalano, Graziano, & Bassoli, 2015; Rayner & Howlett, 2009a). Various dimensions of policy capacity are expected to affect policy integration (Domorenok, Graziano, & Polverari, 2020; Howlett & Saguin, 2018; Tosun & Lang, 2017). A key dimension that is likely to structure the policy integration process is institutional capacity. Institutional capacity can be defined as ‘the capacity to act’ of governments in democratic political systems, which is typically high in the context of a majoritarian political system (Armingeon, 1997). However, institutional capacity can be seen as just an enabling factor that is in itself insufficient to determine the trajectory of policy integration reforms. To this aim, governing parties’ policy positions and changes thereof – i.e. the politics dimension – are crucial.

Up to now, the literature on the role of political parties for policy integration has tackled this topic from different angles. Firstly, environmental policy integration studies have pointed out that the presence of a new left party could trigger environmental policy integration reforms (Jordan & Lenschow, 2010; Nilsson, 2005). Secondly, researchers focusing on coordination between different departments have found that party differences can impede policy coordination (Hustedt & Danken, 2017; Peters, 2015, p. 35–36). Third, researchers dealing with relationships among public sector organizations have shown that both New Labor and conservative parties tend to pass reforms that coordinate agencies towards better coherence (Chow et al., 2007; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Fourth, scholarship addressing intergovernmental policy coordination has stressed the role of party organization and role of single- compared to multi-party governments for policy integration (Bolloyer, 2011; Bolloyer & Börzel, 2010; Treib, 2010).

A common finding of political research is that a new government comes along with policy changes and may even dismantle existing policy programs (Hall, 1993; Rabe, 2018; Stokes, 2020). The precise consequences of governing parties with different ideological backgrounds – and of their change – on policy integration reforms remain however unclear. How does the presence of governing political parties on different sides of the ideological spectrum shape the intensity of policy integration reforms? To what extent do government changes affect the political motivation of policy integration reforms and affect the goals and means of these reforms? These questions are particularly important to ultimately gauge the long-term coherence of policy integration reforms aiming at solving complex problems. The time consistency of policy integration reforms is indeed crucial, as these reforms affect both the style and the substance of policymaking by intervening on a systemic level.

To contribute to the study of these questions, we examine policy integration reforms in a context that is generally favorable to large-scale reforms by the governing party or coalition, that is, when institutional capacity is high. Specifically, we analyze the case of epitomizing a majoritarian political system in advanced democracies – the United Kingdom (UK) (Lijphart, 2012). This system implies high institutional capacity, providing governments with the capacity to act, and, at the same time, a political cycle entailing a turnover of governing parties with different ideologies and thereby potential radical policy changes. Consequently, the UK offers an ideal institutional setting to examine how the different ideology of governing political parties impacts on policy integration reforms that span across different policy sectors.

Concretely, we examine how the Conservative government, the New Labor cabinet and the Conservative and Liberal-Democrat coalition differently affect policy integration reform trajectories, and how the goals and means of these reforms changed from one government to another. Our study relies on an original dataset on policy integration reforms covering four policy fields, as well as on insights from 16 expert interviews. We proceed with a qualitative analysis of how changes in governing parties with different ideologies affect the intensity of policy integration reforms, conceived as their frequency over periods of time, as well as the political motivations underlying these reforms. The results of our empirical analysis confirm that ideology matters for policy integration reforms. Furthermore, they indicate that a majoritarian policy process increases the frequency of reforms but can reduce the overall coherence of policy integration reform programs, jeopardizing the problem-solving capacity of the political system in the long run.

Political parties, institutional capacity, and policy integration reforms

In what follows, we develop an argument about how the policy positions of political parties that rely on policy programs on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum may affect policy integration reforms when high institutional capacities provide them with a large room for maneuver once they are in government.

As we conceive them, policy integration reforms correspond to statutory policy changes, which cut across policy fields or across subsectors within a policy field. Scholars have analytically distinguished policy integration *stricto sensu* from administrative coordination, that is, from the organizational dimension (Cejudo & Michel, 2017; Trein & Maggetti, 2020; Trein, Meyer, & Maggetti, 2019). For the purposes of this article, we adopt a more encompassing definition of policy integration, which includes changes in policy strategies, policy instruments, executive orders, laws, as well as public sector organization reforms that bridge previously separated policy programs or administrative separated structures (Rayner & Howlett, 2009b; Trein, 2017). The reason is that policy integration and administrative coordination reforms can be considered in conjunction when we look at their overall dynamics as an output stemming from the alternation of governing parties with different ideologies.

In a majoritarian political system, such as in the UK, the government usually has a large room for maneuver to pursue policy integration reforms. This implies that once a political party is in government, it has the institutional capacity to pass policy integration reforms without facing many political constraints. In the short run, such

capacities can translate into a high reform intensity in line with the governing party's policy preferences, meaning that many substantial reforms of wide scope are likely to be brought into being. Nonetheless, a majoritarian political system also implies a turnover in governing parties along with the political cycle. Thereby, any new incumbent party would also be able to radically alter previous policy decisions and trigger new waves of policy integration reforms in another direction or by other means, especially when the new government has a radically different political ideology.

Therefore, repeated waves of reforms can run against the overarching goals of long-term policy integration agendas, such as the combination of environmental protection and climate change policies, as they may induce policy incoherence or even policy disintegration. The discrepant reform dynamic under alternating governments is a common feature of the political cycle in democracies, especially in majoritarian systems. Nevertheless, as we will discuss more in detail in the next section, this trajectory poses specific challenges for policy integration reforms.

The impact of political parties' policy positions

Political ideologies are a set of beliefs (Hall, 1993) that embed prescriptions for public policies (Grafton & Permaloff, 2005) and shape how governing parties frame and eventually conduct policy reform. The baseline argument in the literature is that parties with different ideologies – namely, left-wing vs. right-wing – take different policy decisions once in office, as they ultimately rely on different constituencies, and produce thereby different policy outputs (Häusermann, Picot, & Geering, 2013). For instance, it is typically considered that the level and prioritized areas of public spending (e.g. defense vs education) significantly depend on partisan ideology (Russo & Verzichelli, 2016). In a winner-takes-it all system, the space for policymaking is particularly reduced when political parties are located on very polarized or even irreconcilable ideological positions, for example regarding morality or public spending issues (Hinich & Munger, 1997) (Poole & Rosenthal, 2011). This scenario is likely to result in policy reversal notwithstanding that the governance of complex problems would require integrated policy solutions in the long run.

Up to now, the consequences of governing parties' ideologies have been mostly approached from the perspective of their impact on specific instances of policy adoption, rather than on the overall trajectory and motivations of policy integration reform. Scholars have pointed out that center-left parties are more favorable to environmental policy integration reforms compared to center-right parties (Jordan & Lenschow, 2010; Nilsson, 2005). Nevertheless, the literature on environmental policy has also emphasized that the impact of green parties on policy integration reforms is quite mixed. For instance, the strengthening of the Green Party in Sweden in the late 1990s did not result in environmental policy integration (Nilsson, 2005). At the same time, the Italian case shows that a center-left coalition, which includes (small) green parties, can be favorable to the development of an integrated approach towards environmental policy (Lewanski, 2002). Concerning the integration of active and passive instruments of labor market policy, comparative research has shown that strong social democratic parties in government have a positive effect on policy integration reforms (Knotz & Lindvall, 2015; Trein,

Maggetti, & Meyer, 2020). Traditional right-wing parties favoring ‘small government’ are unlikely to pursue ambitious policy integration reforms, but the post-new public management literature has demonstrated that both left and right parties tend to pass reforms that coordinate agencies towards better coherence (Chow et al., 2007; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

These insights imply for the UK that the policy approach of New Labour, which explicitly claimed to focus on cross-cutting policy goals, such as social investment, sustainability, and public health, should result in a larger use of policy integration instruments, such as encompassing policy strategies and joined-up government measures (Finlayson, 2003). Therefore, under this government, the intensity of policy integration reforms should be higher. Contrariwise, the neoliberal vision of Conservative governments should result in a lower intensity of this type of policy integration reforms and come along with different goals and means of these reforms.

Institutional Capacity and Majoritarian Government

The role of governing parties’ ideology in policy integration reforms is magnified when institutional capacity is high. Therefore, in such a context it is possible to observe and identify more easily the impact of party politics on policy integration.

Institutional capacity is an expression that is frequently used in the literature to denote the possible scope of action for policymakers (Blomquist & Ostrom, 1985; Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; Wolsink, 2000; Woo, Ramesh, & Howlett, 2015). Nevertheless, the mentioned literature does not provide an explicit definition for the term. For the purposes of our analysis, we refer to institutional capacity as the ability to act and make decisions that is granted to the government by the formal and informal institutionalized rules of the political game. Institutional capacity is typically maximized in majoritarian systems, whereas it is reduced when the government faces political constraints such as those implied by the presence of many veto players (Armingeon, 1997).

As mentioned earlier, in majoritarian democracies such as UK, the executive has in principle high institutional capacity. Thereby, governing political parties can usually influence public policies to a large extent (Schmidt, 1996). This implies that, in these political systems, governments can more directly enact their policy preferences when passing policy integration reforms, compared to political systems where the government needs to forge and maintain a consensus with other political actors (Lijphart, 2012).

At the same time, like for Ulysses with the Sirens, limited constraints on governmental action can be dysfunctional. Political systems that provide governments with high institutional capacity face the risk of undergoing more dramatic, i.e. large-scale, policy punctuations in comparison with consensual systems. As governing parties can directly enact their preferred policies, they can also revert to previous decisions more easily. These punctuations may have a clear partisan footprint, as it was the case of the privatizing reforms that took place in UK in the 1980s (John & Bevan, 2012). Overall, this feature may create a trajectory of policymaking involving back and forth as well as time inconsistencies. In addition, the presence of a coalition government in these systems might increase coordination problems between ministries controlled by different political parties (Hustedt & Danken, 2017; Peters, 2015, p. 35–36).

As a consequence, political systems where the majoritarian logic is very strong, such as in the UK, a high degree of institutional capacity can sometimes produce policy failures or even policy disasters due to 'elite preoccupation with speedy policy-making [...], a strong form of political hyperactivism induced by the UK's particular system of party competition [...], over-confidence of a talented but inexpert administrative elite, and the periodic failure of internal checks and balances inside the core executive' (Dunleavy, 1995, p. 68). Whereas this point is potentially true for any type of policy reforms, we point out that this could be particularly relevant—and challenging—for policy integration reforms. The reconfiguration of policy programs and administrative structures to achieve cross-sectoral integration in the view of dealing with complex policy problems would indeed require, on the one hand, a long-term oriented and pragmatic collaborative governance approach (Ansell, 2011), and, on the other, a considerable amount of policy consistency over time. These reforms are indeed particularly delicate and sophisticated, as they operate at systemic level and affect both the style and the substance of policymaking. Therefore, high institutional capacity might result in more reforms but also in uneven, incoherent, or merely symbolic policy integration reforms. Such a policy dynamic would ultimately run against the overall goal of the policy integration approach, which seeks to address complex policy challenges. Paradoxically, a high intensity of policy integration reform coupled with (repeated) radical policy change could lead to disintegration. For instance, a new wave of policy integration reforms might follow a government shift, which might unravel and disrupt coordination efforts from previous governments (Biesbroek & Candel, 2020).

Summary of the argument

Figure 1 summarizes our argument. We contend that the governing political parties' policy ideologies affect policy integration reforms. In particular, (1) we expect (traditional) left-wing parties in government to increase the frequency of policy integration reforms when compared to (traditional) right-wing governments, which are more inclined to reduce the scope of government. This expectation builds on the aforementioned literature on comparative political economy and environmental policy. In addition, (2) we expect shifts in governments, namely between governing parties on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, to produce large-scale changes in the goals and means of policy integration. This is expected to occur especially because ideological polarization reduces the policy space and induces political parties to enact policy decisions that oppose the agenda of the preceding government. Our argument focuses thus on the conjunction of two conditions: i) a change in government AND ii) a large ideological distance between the parties in these governments.

The impact of this conjunction implying changes in government under a large ideological distance between governing parties should be particularly important in majoritarian democracies, as this institutional setting should come along with a higher institutional capacity for the government to pursue a high intensity of policy integration reforms. However, this may come at the expense of the long-term consistency of policy integration reforms, i.e. the very *raison d'être* of these reforms. Indeed, radical shifts in governing majorities following the political cycle can come along with a disruption of policy integration reforms because the new government could dismantle previous transversal programs and start new ones from scratch, according to its own political agenda, ultimately leading to policy incoherence.

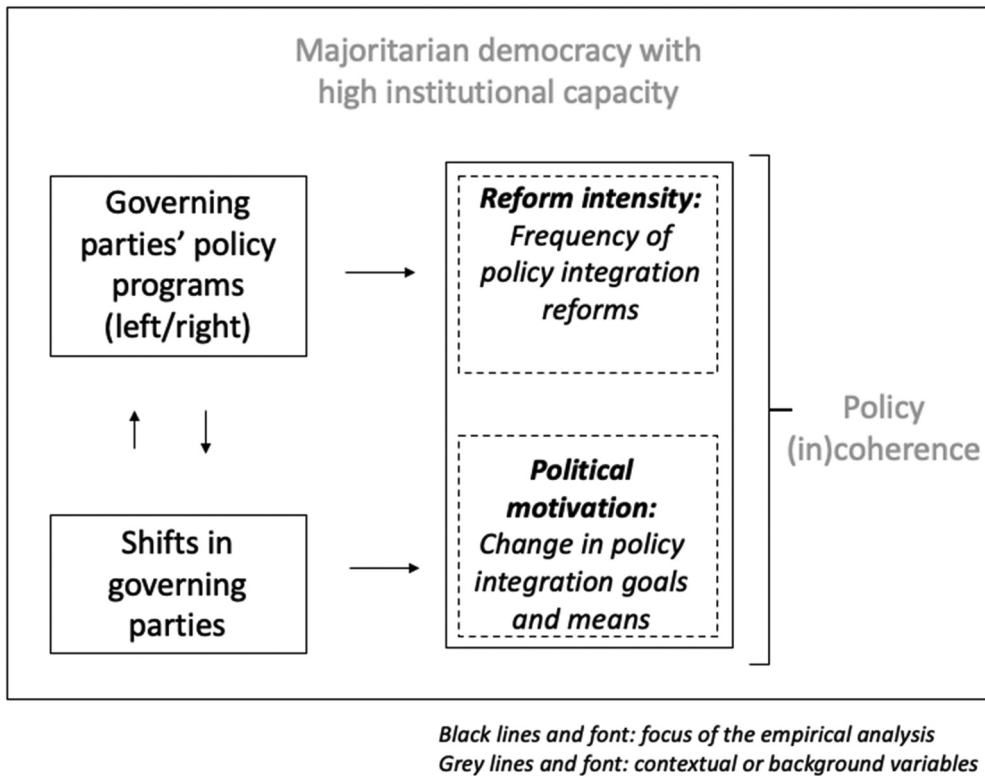


Figure 1. Political Parties in Government and Policy Integration.

Research Design and Materials

To investigate the above-mentioned arguments, we conduct a within-case analysis of policy integration reforms in UK. This is a pathway case for the relationship between parties' political ideologies and changes in governing parties on the one hand, and the intensity of policy integration reforms as well as shifts in the goals and means of policy programs on the other. This analytical choice implies that this case study can serve to illustrate and clarify the theoretical argument we are proposing (Blatter & Blume, 2008; Gerring, 2007, p. 238). We focus on UK as the government has high institutional capacity, and therefore a considerable room for maneuver to pursue policy integration reforms. The two main political parties, the Conservatives and the Labour Party, have a clearly different ideological background based on distinct party platforms.

Our empirical analysis proceeds in two steps. Firstly, we analyze patterns of policy integration reforms between 1980 and 2014 to gauge the intensity of these reforms, conceived as their frequency across time periods. To do so, we use information from an original dataset covering such reforms in environmental, public health, migration, and unemployment policy. The dataset, which is part of a larger comparative project on policy integration, lists formal policy integration reforms, in the form of policy change events, focusing on one specific policy integration problem in each of the four policy fields. Data collection was based on a review of the secondary literature, policy documents for each

policy field as well as a review of our data sheets by selected experts. Specifically, in exchange with experts, we excluded reforms that were not pertinent from the policy integration perspective we are interested in. More details about the dataset can be found in our previous publications (Trein & Maggetti, 2020). The [online appendix](#) to this article presents the reform events included in the empirical analysis for UK. The counting of substantial reform events over time periods provides us with a measure of reform frequency. During the period under observation, there were two major changes in government, in terms of an ideological change. In 1997, the New Labour took over from the Conservatives. In 2010, the government changed from New Labour to the coalition of Conservatives and Liberals. The second change of government entailed a shift from a single party to a coalition government. We take this into account for the interpretation of the results.

We focus on the four policies mentioned above, as they represent examples of policy integration reforms in a most different selection of policy fields: Environmental and migration policy characterize issues where policy integration requires to connect different policy fields, whereas public health and unemployment policy reforms mostly occur by integrating other policies within their policy field. What is more, environmental and public health policy represents issues considered as highly technically complex, while migration and unemployment policy are less perceived as such. Obviously, the four policy fields differ also concerning the substance of policy integration. Regarding environmental policy, our dataset focuses on reforms that entail the integration of environmental policy measures in several policies. Concerning migration policy, we focus on the integration of migration and immigration integration measures. With respect to unemployment policy, our analysis covers the integration of cash benefits and labor market activation measures. Regarding health policy, we analyze the integration and coordination of preventive and curative policy instruments. We provide more examples that illustrate the focus of policy integration reforms for each policy field in the next section along with the presentation of the results. Although the scale of policy integration reforms varies between these policy fields, these examples allow us to assess policy integration reforms in different policy contexts where they are relevant.

Secondly, we conducted 16 interviews with experts to examine the political motivations behind policy integration reforms. Interview partners were experts in the four policy fields (the anonymized list of interviews can be found in the [appendix](#)). During the interviews we discussed the political context of policy integration reforms and the specific political motivation for these policy changes. In environmental policy, we focused on the 1999 sustainable development strategy and its aftermath. Regarding migration policy, the interviews cover reforms in the period 2005–2009, which is around the implementation of the refugee integration strategy. Concerning public health policy, the interviews focus on the period 2009–2012, which covers the health checks program but also the Health and Social Care Act of 2012. With respect to unemployment policy, the interviews focus on the 2003 Pathways to Work program and its reverberations. We chose these reform periods as we judged them representative of the policy integration agenda in the relevant policy field. What is more, they occurred relatively recently, which allowed us to find interview partners who possess a first-hand knowledge of the reforms we are interested in. We selected as interview partners a number of recognized experts to be as evenly as possible distributed over the various policy fields.

Intensity of policy integration reforms between 1980 and 2014

We now turn to a description of policy integration reforms in UK during the period 1980–2014 focusing on environmental, migration, public health, and unemployment policy. We set the starting point in 1980, as, after this conventional date, governments in many countries started to delegate competencies to specialized agencies and devolved their powers, which in turn created a demand for more policy integration and coordination (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). The data shows that the trend of policy integration reforms continued to increase over time and peaked around the year 2000. Furthermore, these reform trends present some relevant differences between the Conservative government before 1997, the New Labour government from 1997 to 2010, and the coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats after 2010 (Figure 2).

During the period of Tory rule (1979–1996), governments under Margaret Thatcher and John Major claimed to follow an ideology of privatization and ‘small government’. However, they also pursued policy integration reforms particularly in the fields of environmental policy and health policy. Regarding environmental policy, the relevant reforms entailed for example the creation of the *Inspectorate of Pollution*, in 1987, and the *Environmental White Paper* and the *Environmental Protection Act* of 1990 (Weale, 1997). These reforms aimed at integrating environmental protection into other existing policies (Blowers, 1987), which were in fact largely driven by the European Union’s environmental policy agenda (Fairbrass & Jordan, 2001). Regarding the integration of preventive and curative health policy, subsequent Conservative governments enacted a public health policy approach, which integrated preventive and curative aspects of health policy. This

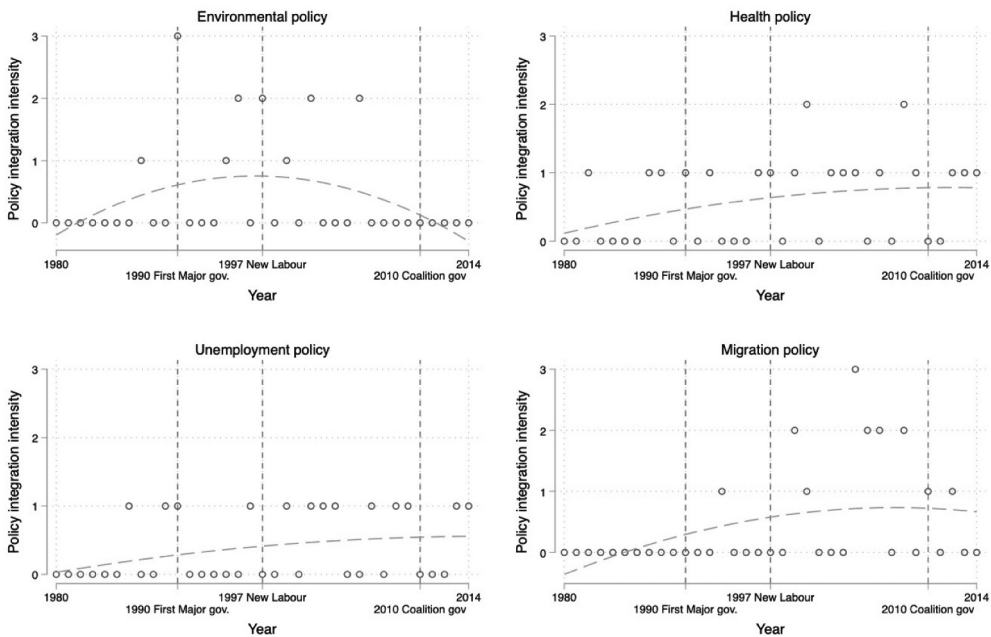


Figure 2. Policy integration in the UK between 1980 and 2014.

change is visible in the *National Breast Cancer Screening Program* (1988) and in the *Health of the Nation Strategy* (1992). These reforms followed a logic of path dependence to some extent, as they are built on previous reforms under different governments (Trein, 2018). A major policy change, which was not directly related to policy integration of prevention and cure in health policy, concerned the strengthening of the private sector in this area (Dolowitz, Marsh, Fiona, & Richards, 1996, p. 462).

Regarding unemployment policy, conservative governments pursued reforms that integrated cash benefits with measures aiming at labor market activation for unemployed. Examples for these reforms are the *Actively Seeking Work Tests* (1989) and *Employment Back to Work Plans* (1990) (Clasen, 2011, p. 32). These reforms entailed a liberalization of the labor market in the sense that they imposed work requirements on job seekers. They fitted the ideology of the Thatcher government, which shifted responsibilities – and risks – from the state to individuals. In unemployment policy, integration reforms occurred later compared to environmental and health policy because, until the mid-1980s, UK governments considered inflation the more important political problem compared to unemployment (Dolowitz et al., 1996, p. 463–64). With respect to migration policy, there were only few policy integration reforms under the rule of the Conservative governments, in the 1980s and early 1990s.

After New Labour came to power in 1997, the new government started to put its electoral agenda of a ‘Third Way’ approach to social policy into practice (Finlayson, 2003). As shown in [Figure 2](#), this change in government came along with an increase in the number of policy integration reforms. Regarding environmental policy integration, New Labour strengthened sustainable development policy, notably with the creation of a new *Sustainable Development Strategy* (1999). The main change put forward with this strategy was the broader inclusion of social justice into the sustainable development agenda (Ross, 2005, p. 36). In public health policy, policy integration reforms consisted of measures that integrate preventative and curative aspects of health policy. Such ideas were not akin to the Conservative government, which passed the *Health of the Nation Strategy*, in 1992, aiming at including more action against social inequality in health policy. Then, under New Labour, this agenda gained momentum, for example through the *Public Health White Paper* of 2004 (Hunter, Linda, & Smith, 2010). Again, these reforms were part of New Labour’s broader political agenda that sought to combat inequality through integrating medical and non-medical policy measures (Mackenbach, 2010).

Concerning unemployment policy, integration reforms entailed the combination of cash benefits with activation measures aiming at getting people back into jobs. Such reforms had started already under the Conservative government and continued after 1997. Nevertheless, they changed substantially, as they incorporated the political agenda of the new welfare state that departed from the liberalization reforms of the conservative governments (Powell, 1999). Examples of these reforms are the *Pathways to Work* program (2003) and the establishment of nationwide *Job Centre Plus* (2006) (Clasen, 2011). These reforms were accompanied by a rhetoric of empowerment, which emphasized the importance of the social inclusion of benefit claimants. However, researchers have pointed out that these reforms incorporated elements of liberalization (Powell, 2000) and paved the way for a stronger workfare state (Daguerre, 2004). Regarding immigration policy, New Labour pursued reforms

that integrated immigration and immigrant integration policies. Examples of these reforms are the *Refugee Employment Strategy and Program* (2004) and the *Refugee Integration Strategy* (2005) (Bijl & Verweij, 2012; Cangiano, 2008). These reforms were instrumental to the economic liberalization strategy during the second Blair government (2001–2005) and contributed to forming a ‘migration state’ in UK (Consterdine & Hampshire, 2014, p. 276).

The shift from the New Labour to the coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal-Democrats came along with a slight reduction in the frequency of policy integration reforms (Figure 2) and with a change in their substance. For example, our research did not uncover substantial reforms towards more environmental policy integration from 2010 until 2014, when our data collection ends. Already in 2009, the Labour government had changed the status of the *Sustainable Development Commission* to a Non Departmental Public Body (DEFRA, 2009, p. 53). Concerning unemployment policy, the government created more detailed requirements for claimants of social benefits (2013) (OECD, 2014, p. 23), as part of the austerity agenda of the coalition government (Taylor-Gooby, Peter, 2012).

Our case study shows that changes in government – from the Tories to New Labour and from Labour to the Conservative-Liberal Democrats coalition – came along with a change in the intensity of policy integration reforms. As expected, the frequency of these reforms increased especially under the auspices of New Labour. Our analysis also lends support to the argument that a change in governing parties in a context of high institutional capacity results in variations in the trajectory of policy integration reforms. Nevertheless, our analysis also shows that the reform trajectory does not change abruptly when the government changes. We will return to this point in the discussion of the results. In the following section, we focus on understanding the political motivations of policy integration reforms and the corresponding changing goals and means, based on expert interviews.

Political motivations for policy integration reforms under different governments

Policy integration reforms after the election of the New Labour government

The New Labour government, which came to power in 1997, was elected on a program that pledged a different approach to many policy problems compared to the conservative governments under Margaret Thatcher and John Major. The government aimed at proposing a broadly conceived policy agenda that changed the approach to dealing with pressing policy problems. This approach resulted in a number of reforms related to policy integration, which covers different policy problems.

The interviews that we conducted with different experts in the four policy fields support the argument that a shift to a new government entailed a change in the policy integration agenda, which reflected the different ideology of the new government. Regarding environmental protection and related policies, New Labour put the focus on the sustainable development agenda. It complemented environmental policy integration with other issues, such as social justice and climate change (Int-UK7, Int-UK4). This policy agenda intended to signal a problem-solving type of policymaking by explicitly

including an evidence-based approach (Int-UK5). One interviewee described this approach as follows, ‘When Blair took over [...] It was a pretty coherent set of plans connecting new bodies, institutions and strategies, and is all informed by work that has been done in opposition’ (Int-UK4). Although reforms related to environmental policy had already started under the Conservative governments (Figure 2), New Labour politicians framed the issue in a different way, namely by introducing new policies with a sustainability approach. Regarding public health policy, there was a broader rhetoric towards more policy integration against social inequalities, which resulted in a variety of policy programs to address non-medical aspects of health (Mackenbach, 2010)(Int-UK13).

This different approach to policy integration under New Labour is also visible regarding employment policy. After New Labour formed a government, it pursued an approach that emphasized labour market activation, with a focus on special groups, such as persons with disabilities (Int-UK10). This policy approach resulted in reforms aiming at integrating labour market activation measures with cash benefits, such as the *Job Centre Plus*, which was implemented in 2002 (OECD, 2014, p. 47)(Int-UK11).

Electoral and partisan motivations for policy integration under New Labour

The interviews reveal also the political motivation behind the policy agenda for integration. Regarding environmental policy, there was a change from environmental policy integration towards sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Strategy (1999) had very broad goals ranging from crime over environment to employment. Contrariwise, environmental policy integration (EPI) focused on the environment only. Nevertheless, the Sustainable Development Strategy evolved out of the EPI strategy and was a political project for New Labour. According to one expert, ‘It [the Sustainable Development Strategy] benefitted the New Labour government that wanted a new approach to dealing with policy. It fitted as well with the pro-European attitudes of New Labour and was something that could be exported to the EU level and led to the Cardiff process [Re-enforcement of environmental protection at the European level]’ (Int-UK4).

The sustainable development strategy allowed to add New Labour’s perspective to environmental policy and it allowed to include the idea of social inclusion into environmental policy. These efforts led to some policy changes and the infusion of social justice ideas into environmental policy. Nevertheless, sustainable development can be complicated from the perspective of environmental protection as it moves the focus of integration away from the environment. One of our interview partners put it as follows: ‘if you look at integrated policymaking, it is at the heart of sustainable development but it can also be very problematic as there is a tradeoff between the social and the environmental dimension’ (Int-UK3).

Employment policy is another example for how the political agenda of the New Labour shaped the party’s policy integration reform agenda when it came to power. After years of Conservative government, New Labour tried to pursue a different policy approach. Rather than just implementing new cash benefits, the party focused on coordinating employment support policies with activation measures that put people back into jobs and would combat poverty by providing employment rather than

payments only (Int-UK10). One interview partner puts it as follows, ‘the whole idea [labor market activation] was identified with Tony Blair and the New Labour. It was this way that the party aimed at dealing with the challenges of globalization. The famous slogan ‘Education, Education, Education’ was part of it.’ The aim of this policy was to increase productivity through training and social investment (Int-UK11).

The interviews show that the social investment agenda (Bonoli, 2011; De La Porte & Jacobsson, 2011) of New Labour was clearly tied to the party’s electoral program and that this ideological stance implied more policy integration reforms. During the Thatcher and Major governments, policy change was ideologically grounded in austerity and small government. These insights fit with the observation on the intensity of reforms derived from the trajectory of reforms at macro level, which shows that policy integration reforms peaked under the rule of New Labour (Figure 2).

Re- and dis-integration under the Coalition Government after 2010

The change from New Labour to the coalition of Tories and Liberal-Democrats in 2010 altered the intensity of policy integration reforms and resulted in less reforms events compared to the period under the New Labour government (Figure 2). Ideologically, there was a return to austerity and small government, although the change was less radical compared to when New Labour took power. For example, the sustainable development reform agenda, which was so prominent under New Labour, vanished. According to one interview partner, ‘A lot of things were put into place when Blair was Prime Minister and John Prescott was the Deputy Prime Minister. During Brown, this work declined and dropped completely out of use after David Cameron took over’ (Int-UK4).

For example, this change in policy orientation resulted in the dismantling of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Rather than having encompassing sustainable development goals, the sustainable development agenda was integrated in the development plans of single departments. In addition, the political ideology of the conservative government resulted in cutting governmental agencies that contributed to implementing the sustainable development agenda (Int-UK8).

Other interview partners suggested that the different approach to policy integration after the New Labour government is rooted in a different problem-solving setting, which increased the focus on climate change policies (Int-UK4). As one interview partner implied, ‘At the end of the New Labour period and the beginning of the rule by the conservatives, there is a shift to climate change. For example, a new department for climate change was created that focused on the global level but had little thought about the sustainable development policies that were much more broadly focused’ (Int-UK5). Interview partners describe the policymaking approach of the coalition and Conservative governments as more ‘pragmatic’, since decisionmakers focused on one or two key goals, such as climate change. This is a more specific problem than environmental policy integration and sustainable development, which focus on rather general policy problems (Int-UK4).

The integration of activation measures with cash benefits changed after 2010, when the coalition government came into power. One interview partner put it as follows: ‘The punitive and regulative ideas had always been there but they became stronger. For

example, they [the mentioned policy ideas] are associated with Ian Duncan Smith who promoted the punitive aspect after 2010. Notably the harsh program towards unemployed people' (Int-UK11). This interview implies that after the change of government the practice of coordinating cash benefits with activation measures put more pressure on unemployed people to take up new jobs. For example, this new approach is also visible in the tightening of requirements for claimants of a job-seekers allowance (OECD, 2014, p. 23).

Nevertheless, the conservative government continued to pursue policy integration reforms regarding public health policy with a focus on integrating preventative aspects into health care (Int-UK12). For example, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 created Health and Wellbeing Boards at the local level of government. The boards included, '... representatives from the NHS, public health, adult social care, children's services and Healthwatch. The idea is that local groups can best know how to address inequalities in health and how to meet the needs of the local population' (Cylus et al., 2015, p. 20).

These findings illustrate that the changes from the Conservative government to New Labour and from New Labour to the Tory and Liberal-Democrats coalition government resulted in a change in the goals and means of policy integration reforms. Nevertheless, this change seems less fundamental compared to the discrepancy between New Labour and the preceding conservative governments. This smaller-scale policy change from New Labour to the coalition government could be attributed to the less pronounced ideological difference, but also to the fact that a coalition government may pursue sparser policy integration reforms to accommodate a larger variety of policy positions. Overall, the interviews illustrate that policy integration reforms were attuned to the political agenda of the party in power, especially as regards environmental protection and labor market policy.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we set out to analyze the impact of governing parties' changes on policy integration reforms under the scope condition of high institutional capacity. We argue that under a majoritarian government, such as in the UK, there is ample room for maneuver to pass policy integration reforms. We then argue that in such a context, governing political parties will use this institutional capacity to put into place their policy agenda through policy integration reforms. Shifts between governments with different ideological orientations should therefore increase reform intensity but also alter the political motivations of policy integration reforms and redefine the corresponding changing goals and means. Over time, such a high frequency of policy integration reforms with different goals means can ultimately lead to policy incoherence and even disintegration.

We analyzed this argument with a case study in UK. We compared policy integration reforms broadly defined in four policy fields – environment, migration, public health, and unemployment policy – using secondary literature and insights from expert interviews. Differences are visible between the Conservative government 1979–1996 and the Conservative-Liberal Democrats coalition government (2010–2014) on the one hand, and the New Labour, 1997–2010, on the other. The findings show that changes between governments with different ideological orientations resulted in variations in the

frequency of policy integration reforms. New Labour's focus on social investment, public health, and sustainability resulted in a high intensity of policy integration reforms. The New Labour government passed such reforms to implement its social justice agenda focusing on sustainability, health inequalities, employment and immigrant integration. The Conservative governments' 'small state' ideological background, especially under the Thatcher and Major governments, resulted in a smaller – but nonetheless non-negligible – number of policy integration reforms.

The empirical analysis also shows that it is important to keep in mind the contextual factors enabling such reforms. When the New Labour came into power, in 1997, the country had just overcome an economic recession. The relatively favorable economic context contributed to a positive climate for the government to pursue such ambitious policy reforms. Contrariwise, the coalition government, which came into power in 2010, faced the aftermath of the economic crisis with the adoption of austerity policies. Furthermore, the EU pushed some of the policy integration agenda, for example the efforts by the Conservative governments regarding environmental policy integration in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Moreover, our results are particularly clear-cut for environmental policy and unemployment policy. Regarding public health policy, the difference between New Labour and conservative governments seems to be less outstanding, although some changes in the reform patterns can be observed. This could be related to the technical complexity of public health policy and to the presence of the National Health Service, which poses persistent coordination challenges. Eventually, it is worth noting that critical junctures in reform trajectories do not always overlap with the transition between governments with a different ideological background. For example, the dismantling of the implementation architecture for the sustainability agenda started already towards the end of the Labour government in 2009.

Our article contributes to the policy integration literature especially by pointing out how partisan ideology differences in a context of high institutional capacity can lead to frequent but at the same time volatile policy integration reforms. It is well-known in the literature that high institutional capacity, i.e. the 'capacity to act', results in more reform activity. We apply this insight to the policy integration literature, wherein researchers have often pointed out that parties' political interests can be an obstacle to policy coordination (Hustedt & Danken, 2017; Peters, 2015). Another finding from the literature is that coalition governments offer favorable conditions for the coordination of specific policy instruments (Knotz & Lindvall, 2015) and therefore for the achievement of policy integration reform. We extend and nuance these arguments firstly by showing that, especially in a majoritarian system, governing parties enact policy integration reforms according to their political motivations, besides a problem-solving logic. Secondly, we examined how both single-party and coalition governments drive policy integration reforms. Thirdly, we contribute to the literature on the institutional capacity of majoritarian systems by documenting that – at aggregate level – this setting results in a high intensity of policy integration reforms by subsequent governments, which have policy agendas with different ideological backgrounds; nevertheless, the polarizing effects of high institutional capacity in such a context might undermine the purposes of policy integration reforms, which aim at providing coherent solutions to complex policy challenges (Briassoulis, 2004).

This latter finding specifically contributes to the policy integration literature as it illustrates how high institutional capacity can ultimately undermine the expediency of policy integration (in line with Candel, 2019). This issue is particularly challenging as policy integration reforms often deal with complex problems and decision-making structures requiring long-term commitment and consistency in policy design. The UK example shows that changes from one party in government to another one might well produce a high intensity with respect to policy integration, for which there is however a risk that these reforms perform a mere symbolic function to show to constituencies that political parties take immediate action, regardless the long-term trajectory of reform. Such frequent changes in the content of public policies (Dunleavy, 1995) might be ultimately harmful to dealing with the complex problems that policy integration reforms usually address, such as environmental protection or public health. Further research is needed on the relationship between capacity and policy integration reforms, which would extend the empirical analysis beyond UK and scrutinize this interplay in other contexts.

List of interviews

- (1) Int-UK1: Expert/practitioner, migration policy
- (2) Int-UK2: Expert/consultant, migration policy
- (3) Int-UK3: Expert/researcher, environmental policy
- (4) Int-UK4: Expert/researcher, environmental policy
- (5) Int-UK5: Expert/researcher, environmental policy
- (6) Int-UK6: Expert/researcher, environmental policy
- (7) Int-UK7: Expert/researcher, environmental policy
- (8) Int-UK8: Expert/former bureaucrat, environmental policy
- (9) Int-UK9: Expert/researcher, unemployment policy
- (10) Int-UK10: Expert/researcher, unemployment policy
- (11) Int-UK11: Expert/researcher, unemployment policy
- (12) Int-UK12: Expert/researcher, health policy
- (13) Int-UK13: Expert/researcher, health policy
- (14) Int-UK14: Expert/researcher, health policy
- (15) Int-UK15: Expert/researcher health policy
- (16) Int-UK16: Expert/researcher, politician

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Schweizerischer Nationalfonds zur Förderung der Wissenschaftlichen Forschung [162832].

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