

Crisis from Within: Elite Defection, Intraparty Competition, and the Breakdown of Dominant-Party Systems*

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Abstract

When and how do dominant-party systems break? I argue that the splits from which they do not recover begin within, after years of dominance, led by its most successful politicians rather than its marginal ones. Candidate-level career panels covering UMNO in Peninsular Malaysia (1959–2018), the LDP in Japan (1958–1993), and the KMT in Taiwan (1986–2001) identify which elites exit and when, conditional on a split: because the party monopolizes access to office, losing an internal contest becomes a choice between marginalization and exit, and defection tracks the internal political calendar. Exits take two forms: bloc exits, cohesive factions leaving together after lost leadership struggles, and marginal exits, weakened candidates departing alone. Whether a split ends dominance is decided downstream: breakaways endure only when they attach to a social cleavage the parent cannot absorb. Dominant-party system breakdown is an elite phenomenon in its onset and a cleavage phenomenon in its consequences.

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1 Introduction

Dominant parties (parties that monopolize access to executive office across multiple election cycles, in regimes democratic and authoritarian alike) do not typically break under pressure from voters or opposition forces. They break from within, after years of routine electoral dominance, when the contest for office has become a contest among co-partisans rather than between parties. The monopoly of state power that makes the party dominant also makes internal defeat far harder to absorb, turning intraparty contests into structural choices between marginalization and a costly exit. This paper asks when and how dominant parties break from within. Across 4,638 candidate-elections within these parties, the onset of breakdown turns on which of a party's own elites exit, and when; whether the break proves fatal turns on whether the parties they build survive to end the dominance. Because the cases analyzed here are parties that did split, the design identifies the onset and form of breakdown (which elites exit, and when), not which dominant parties fracture and which hold together; the Discussion returns to this boundary.

The empirical record poses a challenge to dominant theories. Malaysia's United Malays National Organization (UMNO) fractured in 1988 during an industrial boom that produced an average of nine percent annual growth across the late 1980s. The expulsion of Anwar Ibrahim at the peak of the Asian Financial Crisis did not, by contrast, lead to a sizable elite defection, even though UMNO lost badly in the 1999 election. Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) split in 1993 after thirty-eight years of single-party governance; the operative defection cycle (1987–1990) had averaged 5.4 percent annual growth, with the actual exit occurring just as the post-bubble recession bottomed out. Indeed, this defection coincided with the burst of the economic bubble, but the vehicle it created dissolved within five years, and the LDP was back in government by 1994. Taiwan's Kuomintang (KMT) lost the New Party in 1993 and the People First Party (PFP) in 2000 after years of the Taiwanese economic miracle, when its institutional infrastructure for managing elections, patronage, and media access remained intact. Cross-national work showing that aggre-

gate growth declines correlate with elite defection (Reuter & Gandhi, 2011) captures an important macro pattern, but the consequential splits in these three parties did not arrive on that schedule (del Río, 2022).

The composition of these splits sharpens the puzzle. The defectors who mattered most were not marginalized politicians anticipating electoral collapse. Razaleigh Hamzah, the architect of *Parti Melayu Semangat 46* (Spirit of '46 Malay Party, Semangat 46), controlled UMNO's Kelantan base and had narrowly lost the 1987 party presidency by forty-three votes. Ozawa Ichirō (小沢一郎), who led the 1993 Renewal Party (新生党) out of the LDP, was a leading figure within the Takeshita faction (竹下派), the largest in the party. James Soong (宋楚瑜), who founded the People First Party (親民黨) in 2000, had been Provincial Governor of Taiwan and a major contender for the KMT presidential nomination. If voter signals or economic conditions were driving these exits, the cohort composition should look different: weaker politicians anticipating defeat, not factional leaders departing during years of unchallenged electoral dominance.

One might object that stronger elites have the most reason to abandon a sinking ship. That logic is the elite-side corollary of Lupu (2014)'s account: his mechanism runs through voters rather than elites, but once the brand has eroded, the party itself becomes a liability for anyone whose career rides on it. Yet in the cases examined here, the defecting elites were still actively competing for top positions in the party at the time of their departure. The justifications they offered afterward were largely post hoc; the exits followed lost internal contests, not deteriorating party prospects.

Then why do they defect? I argue that since dominant parties monopolize access to state power, contests over nominations, leadership positions, and factional dominance become structurally consequential in ways that internal party competition is not in pluralist democracies. Losing such a struggle does not bar a politician from politics outright (elections still run, and the option of competing from outside is part of what makes the regime electoral rather than closed), but it forecloses the secure, high-return path that runs

through the dominant party itself. Ambitious politicians who lose internal contests face a structural dilemma: accept marginalization inside the only viable political vehicle, or exit and attempt to build a new one. The exit decision is driven first and foremost by elite-level dynamics; voters enter the story only afterward, when the new party must compete for seats to survive.

However, defections alone are not enough to break the party system. A second stage is required: the breakaway party must establish itself as a viable competitor across multiple elections. This is the stage where voters enter the story. If a new party merely competes with the dominant party on a similar platform, it is unlikely to build its own voter base or party brand, since it is asking for votes while unable to deliver the same returns, whether in policy or patronage. The breakaway parties that survive are those that distinguish themselves from the parent party by either capturing an existing constituency the dominant party has neglected or articulating a new cleavage.

I test this argument using original candidate-level career panel datasets that I constructed from primary electoral records across three countries. The panels track every dominant-party candidate across the entire era of dominant-party rule; the analysis covers the 4,638 candidate-elections at which a subsequent party label can be observed: 599 UMNO candidate-elections in Peninsular Malaysia from 1959 through 2018, 3,751 LDP candidate-elections in Japan from 1958 through 1993, and 288 KMT candidate-elections in Taiwan from 1986 through 2001. The three countries represent distinct configurations of electoral system and party structure (single-member plurality (first-past-the-post, FPTP) in Malaysia, factionalized single non-transferable vote (SNTV) in Japan, and SNTV with centralized nomination control in Taiwan), allowing me to assess whether the intraparty competition mechanism operates across institutional contexts. This variation is the point of the design: holding the office-monopoly scope condition fixed while spanning these institutions lets a common pattern implicate that condition rather than any single electoral system (Section 7). The identification strategy works most cleanly in Japan, whose within-

district SNTV structure yields the sharpest natural experiment; Taiwan supplies a corroborating within-year contrast, though on a small sample; and Malaysia, where plurality rule removes co-partisan ballot competition altogether, is consistent with the mechanism operating outside SNTV (the evidence for Malaysia rests on the process tracing in Section 9, not on a within-year gradient). I further track the survival of these breakaway parties, examining how they performed in subsequent elections and whether they endured or dissolved (Section 9.4).

Four findings emerge from the analysis. First, losing intraparty competition predicts defection, in a form that depends on the electoral system. Under Japan's single non-transferable vote system, each step down the intraparty district ranking roughly doubles defection risk, and Takeshita-faction membership is the single strongest predictor in the LDP (a coefficient that partly describes the factional organization of the 1993 exit itself; Section 8.2 separates the readings). Under Taiwan's SNTV system, losing one's seat, the sharpest indicator of intraparty marginalization, separates stayers from defectors: within the same district and year, the last KMT candidate to hold a seat defected at five percent and the first to lose one at forty percent, a contrast built from the fifteen first-losers the risk set contains. These within-year results are identified off comparisons among co-partisans and survive election fixed effects. Under Malaysia's FPTP system the relationship is cohort-structured rather than continuous: the within-year vote-share gradient is flat ($p = 0.56$), but defectors as a group averaged 7.5 percentage points below stayers, a gap produced by the composition of two distinct defection waves rather than a smooth within-year decline (Section 8.1).

Second, defection follows two distinct patterns that reflect different types of intraparty competition. *Bloc exits* occur when factionally cohesive cohorts of electorally strong politicians leave together after losing leadership struggles: Japan's Renewal Party, 87 percent Takeshita faction with vote shares statistically indistinguishable from stayers; Malaysia's Semangat 46, eight winning incumbents centered on Razaleigh's Kelantan base; Taiwan's

New Party, Taipei-based elites from the New KMT Alliance. *Marginal exits* occur when individually weak candidates leave alone: Japan's LDP Independents with a 22 percent win rate, Malaysia's Bersatu-era marginal defectors with vote shares fourteen points below stayers, Taiwan's independent KMT exits by senior politicians with individual grievances. These two types of defections have different consequences and implications for dominant parties.

Third, I examine economic conditions alongside intraparty variables to compare what aggregate-level work suggests with what individual-level data show inside these three parties. Following Reuter and Gandhi (2011), who establish across 227 elections that elite defection rises as aggregate growth declines, I replace election fixed effects with election-cycle GDP growth, GDP per capita, and resource rents. The intraparty competition variables retain their sign and significance under these controls; because coefficients from different logit specifications are not on a common scale, the comparison is made on the probability scale, where the average marginal effects are essentially unchanged (Appendix B). The GDP growth coefficient is positive in Japan and Taiwan: at the individual level within these two parties, LDP and KMT defections were more likely during periods of robust growth. Only Malaysia shows a negative growth coefficient, and this is confounded by having only two major defection waves whose timing happens to coincide with growth deceleration. With $N = 19$ defectors concentrated in two political crises, the Malaysia case cannot cleanly separate the economic and intraparty mechanisms; the process-tracing evidence in Section 9 carries the analytical weight for that country. The candidate-level pattern need not reproduce the cross-national one (aggregate and individual-level results can hold simultaneously if the channels they capture differ), but it does suggest that, inside these three parties, the timing of consequential defection ran through internal contests rather than the macroeconomic cycle.

Fourth, following the breakaway parties forward shows that whether a split actually ends a dominant party's hold is decided after the exit, not during it. Of the eleven break-

away parties the three cases produced, those that endured (the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) lineage, Malaysia's keADILan/PKR (the National Justice Party and its successor, the People's Justice Party) and Bersatu) are the ones that attached to a social cleavage the dominant party could not absorb, while pure factional exits with no such constituency (Semangat 46, the Renewal Party, Taiwan's New Party) dissolved. The social cleavages that the cleavage tradition places at the origin of new parties operate here one stage downstream, selecting which elite-driven exits survive rather than explaining why they occur (Section 9).

These findings draw attention to a within-party channel that complements existing aggregate-level and societal accounts of dominant-party breakdown. To probe whether this channel is peculiar to three Asian cases, I turn to a larger cross-national panel of twelve electoral authoritarian regimes, which confirms that elite defection is a general phenomenon and that its incidence tracks internal-political conditions while its intensity tracks the macroeconomic cycle. Because that panel measures fragmentation at the level of the ruling coalition rather than within a single party, it corroborates the mechanism's logic one level up rather than testing it directly, a distinction I make explicit in Section 10. The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 locates the argument among three traditions in the party literature (functionalist, social cleavage, and coalitional); Section 3 situates it against the recent accounts nearest to it; Sections 4–6 develop the intraparty competition mechanism, the two types of exit it produces, and their observable implications. Section 7 describes the data and identification strategy. Section 8 presents the quantitative results. Section 9 traces defection cohorts and follows the resulting breakaway parties to see which survived. Section 10 probes external validity. Section 11 discusses implications and scope conditions.

2 Three Traditions and the Two Foundations

The empirical scope of this paper is the *dominant-party system* (Greene, 2007; Magaloni, 2006; Scheiner, 2006): a polity in which a single party or party coalition monopolizes access to executive office and substantial state resources across multiple election cycles. Some dominant-party systems operate inside electoral authoritarian regimes, where regular multi-candidate elections coexist with systematic violations of free and fair competition (Brownlee, 2007; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Schedler, 2013); others operate inside democracies. I make no attempt to place the cases on one side of that line, which is contested for two of them anyway (Japan's LDP era is conventionally classified as democratic; Taiwan's KMT under Lee Teng-hui transitions between categories), because the structural feature driving my mechanism (intraparty contests under access monopoly) operates across both classifications (Fell, 2006; Hrebendar, 2019; Huang, 2017; Scheiner, 2006). The theory's scope is the structural condition of monopoly over office, not regime classification *per se*.

Two features of the splits in UMNO, the LDP, and the KMT motivate the framework developed in this section. The splits occurred not during episodes of opposition mobilization or electoral decline, but in their absence: after years of routine electoral dominance, while the party was still winning, with patronage budgets intact and the dominant party's institutional infrastructure unchallenged. And the defectors who mattered most were electorally strong incumbents at the height of their careers, not marginal politicians anticipating defeat. The Japanese case literature has posed precisely this puzzle. Reed and Scheiner (2003, p. 469) frame the 1993 LDP split as the desertion of a "still seaworthy craft": the LDP was the largest party in the system, in power, and well placed to stay there, so on a simple office-seeking logic its members had every reason not to leave. Cox and Rosenbluth (1995), by contrast, read the same episode as the fission of a party best understood as a coalition of factions, in which faction leaders' anticipations of electoral consequences set the timing of exit. Kohno (1997, p. 136) presses the electoral logic furthest, explaining the pattern of the breakup by the reaction of electorally vulnerable politicians to public

pressure for reform. All three find an electoral connection: Cox and Rosenbluth through anticipated electoral consequences, Kohno through the vulnerability of junior members, Reed and Scheiner through electoral incentives interacting with reform preferences and career stage. Section 8.2 returns to how the faction-first result reported below relates to these electoral-connection findings.

My framework takes the puzzle they pose for the LDP and asks whether its resolution travels: whether the within-party logic they document for one party under one electoral system is a special case of a mechanism that operates wherever a single party monopolizes access to office. The argument developed below locates the operative mechanism inside the party itself: in the structure of internal competition under party monopoly over state power, where losing an internal contest forces a choice between accepting subordination inside the party and a costly exit from it. This complements rather than replaces aggregate-level and societal accounts of elite defection; it identifies a within-party channel that operates alongside environmental pressures and, in the three cases analyzed here, sets the timing of consequential exit.

Three traditions in the comparative study of parties have addressed why parties form, fragment, and fail. They are usually posed as rival answers to a single question; underneath them, though, lies a single picture of what a dominant party is and how it comes apart, which the framework developed below makes explicit.

The *functionalist tradition* treats parties as instruments that solve coordination problems for ambitious politicians and for voters organizing policy choices (Aldrich, 1995; Cohen et al., 2008; Cox & McCubbins, 2007; Hicken, 2009). The account predicts that new parties form when established parties fail to absorb new political entrepreneurs, and that career incentives drive exit when staying becomes uncompetitive. Reuter and Gandhi (2011)'s cross-national analysis of elite defection from hegemonic parties (227 elections for the chief executive) sits within this tradition: their finding that *poor* economic performance predicts elite exit treats forward-looking career calculation as the operative mechanism, with de-

cline supplying would-be defectors discontent to mobilize; their outcome, defection to challenge the incumbent at chief-executive elections, is narrower than the one used here.

The *social cleavage tradition* treats parties as the political expression of durable social divisions (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Parties form when underlying cleavages (religious, class, ethnic, urban-rural) find no representation in existing political institutions, and new entrepreneurs construct vehicles to mobilize the unrepresented (Kitschelt, 1989). The cleavage tradition predicts that new parties emerge when voter demand outruns existing party supply, and that successful new parties capture identifiable constituencies whose preferences the established parties have failed to articulate (De Leon et al., 2009; Eidlin, 2016).

The *coalitional tradition* treats parties as historically contingent alliances among investors, social groups, and political entrepreneurs (Bermeo & Yashar, 2016; Ferguson, 1995; Karol, 2009; LeBas, 2011; Pepinsky, 2009; Riker, 1962; Schickler, 2016). Parties are not stable mappings of cleavages onto institutions but ongoing negotiations among constituencies with different intensities of preference, and party leaders survive by balancing the demands of new constituencies against the loyalty of existing ones. In this view, defection occurs when leaders fail to manage these tensions: when the patronage budget runs short (Magaloni, 2006), when distributive promises become impossible to keep, or when new social groups demand recognition the existing coalition cannot accommodate (Riedl, 2014).

Underneath the three traditions lies a single picture of what a dominant party is and how it comes apart. It stands on two foundations: inside, a coalition of elites who use it to reach office; outside, a base of voters who recognize what it represents. The functionalist and coalitional traditions describe the inside foundation, the elites and the bargain that binds them; the cleavage tradition describes the outside one, the base a party must hold to endure. A party can break from either. If the base dealigns, the party loses its outside foundation, a crisis from *outside*; if the elite coalition fragments, it loses the inside one, the crisis from *within* that gives this study its title. These are the two ways the same structure

can fail; to connect the traditions is to see that a party can lose either foundation, and that, in a dominant party, losing the one tends to loosen the other. The device restates the familiar elite/mass distinction; its payoff is the two-stage structure it makes visible, an onset decided on the inside foundation and consequences decided on the outside one. This paper is about the coalitional and the cleavage mechanisms: it asks which elites leave the party (an inside-foundation question) and whether the parties they build survive by finding a constituency (an outside-foundation question). Before developing its mechanism, I situate the argument against the recent work that has taken dominant-party breakdown most directly.

3 Situating the Argument

The most influential recent statement of how dominant-party systems break is a theory of the crisis from outside. Lupu (2014) argues that a party breaks down when its *brand* (voters' sense of the kind of constituency it represents) is diluted by inconsistency and strange-bedfellow alliances, eroding the partisan attachments that once insulated it, so that newly detached voters desert at the first poor performance (Lupu, 2013). Two features of that account bear on what follows. It builds a party-level outcome, breakdown, from individual-level choices, those of voters, rather than treating the party as a unitary actor; and it takes as *exogenous* the very thing that does the diluting, namely the intraparty conflict that sends voters mixed signals, setting aside when and why a party's own elites generate it. Lupu thus gives the canonical modern account of the crisis from outside while bracketing the crisis from within.

In a dominant party the inside foundation gives first, for two reasons. Where a competitive system already offers a dealigning base somewhere to go, dominance means no alternative waits on the shelf: voters cannot defect until someone builds them a vehicle, and the only people positioned to build one are the party's own disaffected elites. And the

coordination an outside challenge would require is itself conditional: opposition parties build full alliances only when they judge the incumbent vulnerable (Ong, 2022), and their voters back those alliances only conditionally, deserting when the likely outcome sours (Gandhi & Ong, 2019). So at the height of a party's dominance, when it looks unbeatable, the coalition that might unseat it tends not to form at all. What breaks that appearance of invulnerability is, characteristically, a break from within: when the party's own strongest figures defect, they supply at once the credible vehicle the opposition lacked and the signal of weakness that galvanizes it. The crisis from within is in this sense not merely prior to the crisis from outside but often its trigger. The factionalism literature, working from inside the party, reached the same verdict on the canonical cases: surveying Japan and Italy, Boucek (2010, pp. 134–35) concludes that the mid-1990s losses of power were “triggered by factional exit and voters' flight,” the exit creating the tipping point that first gave the opposition a real chance to compete.

This is why Lupu (2014) can open the story at the voters and treat the elite fracture as given, while I open it at the elites; and it is the same fracture that Kim et al. (2024), taking the party system as their unit, register from above, finding these regimes destabilize as volatility rises among *repeat* opposition contenders. I ask their question one level down, and the answers nest: the challengers whose volatility they measure are, in part, what a crisis from within supplies. Strictly, their destabilizing quantity is volatility among *repeat* opposition contenders, and a fresh breakaway becomes a repeat contender only if it survives its first elections; that handoff is the two-stage structure this paper theorizes, with the survival stage of Section 5 deciding whether a crisis from within ever feeds their measure.

None of these literatures fixes the channel running through the middle: which specific elite leaves, and after which internal contest. That is the individual-level question this paper answers. Assembling a party-level outcome from individual choices is familiar ground: it is just what Lupu does on the demand side, with voters. Here the choosing indi-

viduals are elites, and the condition that governs their choice is one these traditions did not theorize. Under monopoly over access to office the career incentive runs in reverse: where a competitive system lets it pull ambitious politicians *out* to found new parties, monopoly turns it into a force that holds them *in*, until an internal loss makes exit the only move left (Greene, 2002, 2010). I develop that mechanism next.

Another important determinant of dominant-party system breakdown is whether breakaway parties can form self-perpetuating institutions that operate across multiple elections and pose real challenges to the dominant party. The concept of “political articulation” (De Leon et al., 2009; Eidlin, 2016) offers a useful lens here. As De Leon et al. (2009, p. 194) argue, “political parties work to naturalize some identities and collectivities and suppress others.” This insight helps explain why some breakaway parties survive while others fade.

De Leon et al. (2009) go further, challenging the classic claim from Lipset and Rokkan (1967) that political cleavages predate political parties. I do not seek to adjudicate that debate; for my purposes, the distinction is operationally unnecessary. What matters in my framework is not whether breakaway parties create new cleavages or mobilize existing ones, but whether they can represent a constituency that the dominant party cannot absorb. The difficulty is that breakaway parties typically cannot match the dominant party’s infrastructure, which makes it harder for them to establish durable linkages with any constituency. How they overcome that disadvantage in practice varies by case, and my theory does not specify which strategy works; it specifies only that some form of constituency differentiation is necessary for survival.

4 Intraparty Competition Under Power Monopoly

Dominant parties monopolize access to state power through electoral competition, whether the regime they rule is authoritarian or democratic. The party’s near-permanent

control of nominations, leadership positions, ministerial portfolios, and the distributive levers of government concentrates the contest for these resources inside the party itself (Boucek, 2009; Harmel & Tan, 2003; Zariski, 1965). This concentration has three consequences that drive the intraparty competition mechanism.

The structural meaning of internal competition changes. In pluralist democracies, losing an internal contest for a nomination or leadership position is costly but recoverable: the losing politician may run as an independent, switch parties, or remain inside the original party and try again (Cross & Katz, 2013; Sandri et al., 2015). In dominant-party regimes the loss is far harder to walk back, because no *existing* alternative offers a credible path back to office (a matter of degree: literally so in hegemonic Malaysia and Taiwan, and true in practice in Japan, where the opposition was durably uncompetitive (Scheiner, 2006) and defectors built new vehicles rather than joining it): the loser must either accept subordination inside the dominant party or build the alternative from scratch, from outside and against the party's machine. The cost asymmetry is what gives internal contests their stakes: not that exit is foreclosed, since elections remain open, but that it is the expensive option, taken without the incumbent advantages the dominant party reserves for itself (Balmas et al., 2014; Wauters et al., 2018; Wong & Or, 2020). Boucek (2010, p. 127) describes the LDP's internal politics in precisely these terms: under Japan's asymmetric party system, exit threats by dissidents "were not credible, since joining the opposition meant losing everything," and a rebel faction did better to press its claims inside the party.

Ambitious politicians who lose internal contests therefore face a structural dilemma. They can accept marginalization within the only party that controls state power, foregoing the offices and resources that justified their political careers in the first place, or they can exit and attempt to build a new vehicle. Exit is a costly choice because dominant parties have institutional advantages (electoral machinery, media access, patronage networks) that new parties cannot easily match (Albertus & Menaldo, 2018). But marginalization inside the dominant party is a slow attrition rather than a clean break, and for politicians

whose career horizons are long and whose stakes in office are high, the exit option becomes structurally available even when it is electorally unpromising (Chen & Hong, 2021; Loxton & Power, 2021).

The intraparty competition mechanism therefore identifies the moment of defection as the moment of loss in an identifiable internal contest, not the moment of voter signal or economic downturn, because that moment is determined by the internal political calendar of the dominant party: party-presidential elections, factional succession crises, and policy disputes leading to expulsion. The timing of defection should therefore track these political events rather than tracking economic cycles. The most consequential splits analyzed below all followed such contests: the contested 1987 UMNO presidential election, Anwar Ibrahim's 1998 expulsion from UMNO after an internal policy dispute, the expulsions inside UMNO during 2015–2016 that followed the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) corruption scandal, the Takeshita faction's succession contest after Kanemaru's 1992 resignation, and the KMT nomination disputes around the 1993 New KMT Alliance and James Soong's 2000 presidential bid. The mechanism does not require personalist consolidation of authority in a paramount leader, as some have suggested (Put & Coffé, 2024). The LDP, the least personalized of the three parties analyzed below, produced the largest bloc exit in the dataset.

The mechanism predicts when exit becomes *available*, not that every internal loser takes it. Most do not. The modal response to a lost contest is voice or loyalty (contesting again, waiting out a rival, accepting a subordinate post), and exit is the exception the theory must select into rather than the default (Hirschman, 1970). Kato (1998) brings this framework to the 1993 LDP split that anchors my Japanese data and revises a premise my account inherits: exit and voice are not a seesaw but mutually reinforcing, because the credible capacity to leave is itself what lends an internal challenge its weight, so the elites best positioned to exit are also those whose voice carries furthest inside the party. Three features of a loss move a defeated elite across the margin from voice to exit. The first is the deci-

siveness of the defeat: a narrow, reversible setback invites another attempt, while a public and seemingly final loss (a party-presidential election lost on the floor, an expulsion) forecloses the internal route. The second is the outside option: a faction leader who can take a cohesive bloc and its resources out of the party faces a credible path to a new vehicle, whereas an isolated loser does not, which is why bloc and marginal exits look so different. The third is the career horizon: a younger elite with decades of ambition ahead discounts the cost of rebuilding outside more heavily than one near the end. Razaleigh Hamzah's trajectory illustrates the margin rather than contradicting it. He chose voice first, contesting the 1987 UMNO presidency and remaining in the party, and exited only after the loss was decided against him and the party reconstituted around the victors; he later returned when the calculus shifted again. The theory thus locates defection not at every loss but at losses that are decisive, that come with a portable constituency, and that fall early enough in a career for exit to pay.

5 Two Types of Exit and the Survival of Parties

5.1 Bloc and Marginal Exits

The intraparty competition framework predicts two structurally distinct patterns of defection, corresponding to two types of intraparty competition.

Bloc exits result from leadership competition. When a faction or generational cohort loses a struggle for party leadership, the losing bloc may exit collectively (Pfaff, 2006). Because politicians who are competitive for leadership are typically electorally strong (they would not have been credible candidates for senior positions otherwise), their pre-defection electoral performance is comparable to or above that of stayers. The defining feature of bloc exits is cohort cohesion: common factional affiliation, common generational entry, often geographic concentration in the leader's home base. Bloc exits produce organized parties with leadership, resources, and an inherited network of supporters, but

without a guaranteed voter base outside the bloc's existing constituencies. Examples developed below include Japan's Renewal Party in 1993, drawn 87 percent from the Takeshita faction with vote shares statistically identical to LDP stayers; Malaysia's Semangat 46 in 1988, comprising eight winning incumbents centered on Razaleigh's Kelantan base; and Taiwan's New Party in 1993, formed by Taipei-based elites from the New KMT Alliance.

Marginal exits result from electoral attrition. When individual candidates lose ground within the party, failing to win seats, receiving lower vote shares, or being passed over for nominations, they exit individually or in small uncoordinated groups. Their pre-defection performance is distinctly weaker than that of stayers, and the departures are dispersed rather than cohesive, producing disorganized collections of failed politicians rather than vehicles capable of contesting elections at scale. Examples include Japan's LDP Independents of 1993, with a 22 percent win rate in their final LDP election; Malaysia's Bersatu-era defectors during 2013–2018, with vote shares fourteen points below stayers; and Taiwan's individual KMT defectors of the late 1990s.

The distinction predicts different cohort signatures. Bloc exits should appear as factionally and geographically concentrated waves with electoral performance indistinguishable from or above stayer averages. Marginal exits should appear as dispersed individual departures with electoral performance below stayer averages. The same intraparty competition mechanism produces both patterns, with the structure of the internal contest determining which pattern emerges. Where leadership contests produce clear winners and losers, as in factional successions or party-presidential elections, the losing side exits as a bloc. Where the contest takes the form of incremental marginalization through nomination denial, faction realignment, or seat reallocation, exits accumulate individually.

The distinction also matters for what happens after the exit. Bloc exits inherit the resources to operate as parties but lack a built-in voter constituency beyond the bloc's home turf; marginal exits lack both. Survival, in either case, depends on whether the new party can subsequently connect to an available social cleavage, a contingency that operates

downstream of the exit decision rather than as its cause.

5.2 The Downstream Role of Cleavages

In the language of the two foundations, a party born from a crisis within carries an inside foundation from the start (its founding elites and whatever following they bring) but not an outside one: it has leaders before it has a base. The cleavage tradition's central insight, that durable parties rest on durable social divisions, re-enters here one stage downstream, not as the reason the party formed (it formed because its founders lost an internal contest, not because they detected unmet demand) but as the test it must pass afterward. A break-away begins, in Lupu (2014)'s terms, with no brand: voters have no settled sense of whom it speaks for. Whether it acquires one, whether it comes to rest on an outside foundation as well as an inside one, decides whether it survives.

Two regularities follow, traced empirically in Section 9. A bloc exit, which leaves with leadership and resources but only its founders' following, endures when it later connects to an available cleavage and disappears when it does not; and the connection, where it comes, is discovered through trial and error after the exit, not anticipated before it. A marginal exit, lacking even that organizational core, almost never endures on its own; when it survives, it does so by attaching to a bloc exit that supplies the leadership and resources it lacks.

The contrast is observable, not merely post hoc: the breakaways that endured built a following around a social division broader than their founders' own, while those that failed never grew past the faction or region they left with, and dissolved when that narrow base did. The cleavage connection thus matters enormously for which breakaways survive, yet says nothing about which elites defect: the exit is a crisis on the inside foundation, upstream; the cleavage attachment is the building of an outside one, downstream; and the bloc-versus-marginal typology fixes which exits even carry the inside foundation (the leadership and resources) needed to attempt the outside one at all (De Leon et al., 2009;

Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Riley, 2005).

6 Observable Implications

The intraparty competition framework generates three observable implications that the empirical sections test. First, indicators of intraparty competition (declining vote share within the dominant party, factional marginalization, failure to retain a seat) should predict defection regardless of economic conditions or aggregate party strength. The relationship should hold within elections, so that politicians who lose ground relative to their co-partisans in the same election year are more likely to defect than co-partisans who did not lose ground.

Second, defection should cluster in cohorts whose structure reflects the internal contest that produced it. Factional blocs that lost leadership struggles should exit together, with similar factional affiliations, similar entry cohorts, and geographic concentration around the bloc's base. Marginal exits should appear as dispersed individual departures without these cohort markers.

Third, comparing the intraparty competition framework with the macroeconomic channel at the individual level: replacing election fixed effects with direct controls for election-cycle GDP growth, GDP per capita, and resource rents should not attenuate the intraparty competition coefficients if the within-party channel is operating independently of the macroeconomic cycle. The two channels can in principle coexist; what the three cases analyzed here can show is whether the intraparty variables retain their predictive content after the macroeconomic controls are added, and whether the GDP growth coefficient, which the aggregate-level account would lead one to expect to be negative, instead behaves differently at the individual level when the consequential splits occurred during periods of robust growth.

The empirical analysis below tests these implications using original candidate-level ca-

reer panels from three dominant parties across three institutional configurations: UMNO in Malaysia under FPTP (1959–2018), the LDP in Japan under SNTV (1958–1993), and the KMT in Taiwan under SNTV with centralized nominations (1986–2001). Figure 1 assembles the argument and marks, on each of its parts, the evidence the following sections supply.

7 Data and Identification Strategy

7.1 Case Selection and Comparability

These three parties form a comparison set by design, not convenience. What makes UMNO, the LDP, and the KMT members of a single analytical class is the scope condition the theory turns on: each monopolized access to executive office and the distributive machinery of the state across multiple decades and election cycles (Greene, 2007; Magaloni, 2006; Scheiner, 2006). The class is defined by that condition, not by party-system typology: pooling Japan’s predominant-party democracy with electoral-authoritarian Malaysia under a single Sartori (1976) type would invite exactly the conceptual stretching Sartori (1970) warns against, whereas the elite career under office monopoly is the same object in both, and it, not the regime label, is what the theory operates on. They are not three parties that happen to have split; they are three of the paradigmatic long-lived dominant parties (Pempel, 1990), and each produced the explanandum of interest, a consequential defection led by electorally strong incumbents during a period of dominance rather than decline. Selecting on that explanandum has a price the Discussion states plainly: the design identifies the composition and timing of exit conditional on a split, not the party-level probability of splitting.

What the cases vary on is the dimension most easily mistaken for the mechanism: the electoral system. Malaysia’s FPTP produces no co-partisan competition on the ballot at all; Japan’s factionalized SNTV institutionalizes it, pitting LDP candidates against one another

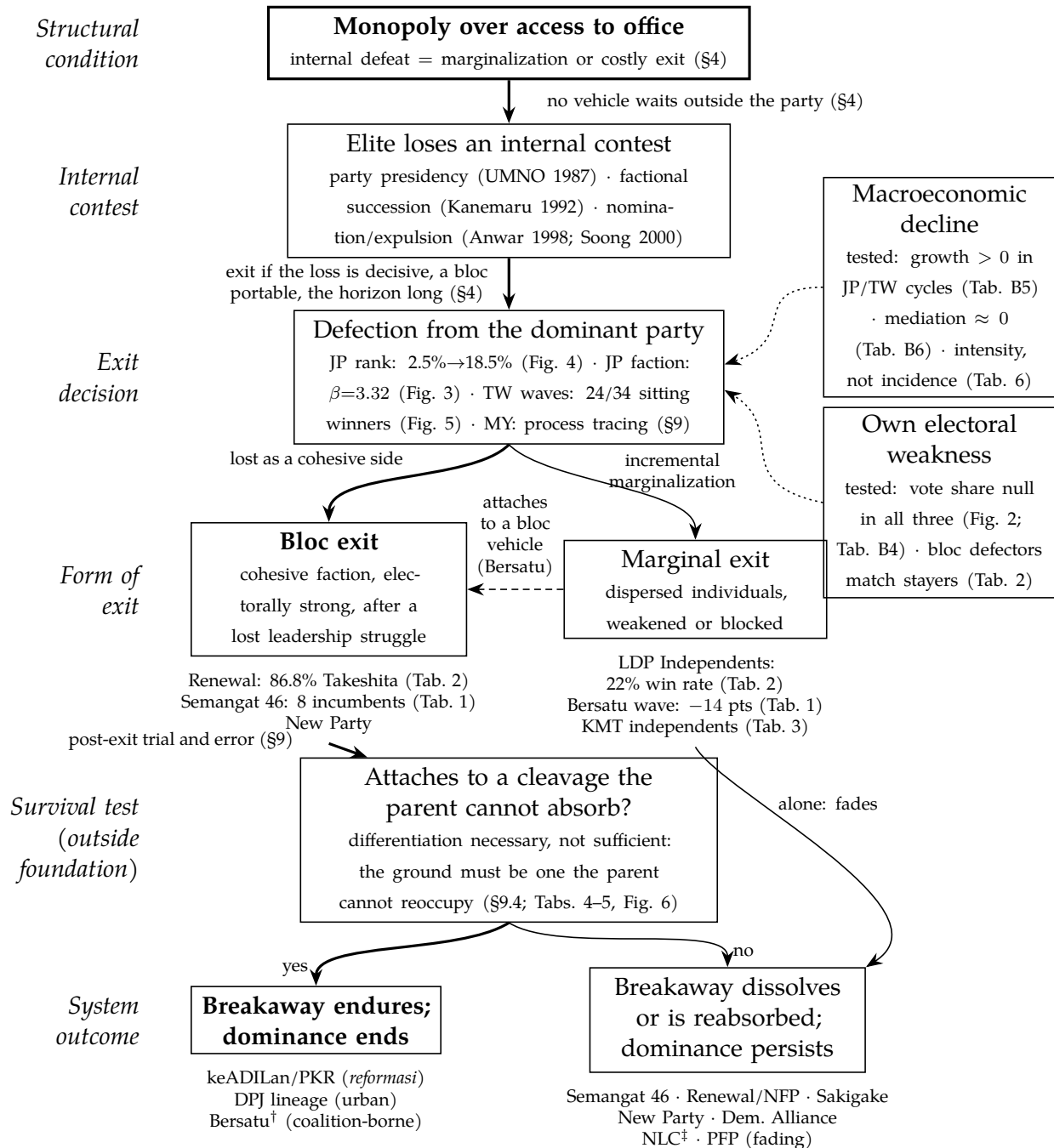


Figure 1: **The argument: dominant-party breakdown as a two-stage process, with the evidence supporting each part.** Stage one (upper lanes) is decided among elites inside the party; stage two (lower lanes) is decided among voters, and determines whether the exit ends dominance.

Note: Solid arrows are paths demonstrated by the sections, figures, and tables cited on each part; thick arrows trace the consequential path. The dashed arrow is a contingent attachment. Dotted arrows mark the two rival channels; each box reports the result of its test. [†]Survived undifferentiated (coalition-borne); fragmented 2022. [‡]Differentiated onto ground the LDP could reoccupy.

for the same district's votes (Cox & Rosenbluth, 1995; Cox & Thies, 1998; Reed, 1990); Taiwan's SNTV with centralized nominations routes it through the party center rather than the ballot. Holding the scope condition fixed while spanning these institutions does two kinds of work. It locates the mechanism in the shared structural condition, monopoly over office, rather than in any one electoral system: were internal-competition-driven exit visible only under SNTV, it would be hard to separate from the co-partisan rivalry that system is already known to generate, but it appears under first-past-the-post as well, where that rivalry does not exist. And the variation supplies three institution-appropriate windows onto one latent quantity, a candidate's standing among co-partisans: intra-district rank in Japan, seat retention in Taiwan, factional-cohort position in Malaysia.

Comparability here is defined relative to the question, not by uniformity. The cases need not share region, regime classification, or sample size to be comparable instances of dominant-party defection; they need to share the scope condition and the phenomenon, and to differ on the institutional dimension in a way that sharpens rather than confounds the inference. That the identification is sharpest in Japan, whose within-district structure yields the cleanest natural experiment, does not make the others ornamental: Taiwan supplies an independent within-year contrast, and Malaysia, precisely because its institutions strip out co-partisan ballot competition, is the case whose evidence is consistent with the mechanism operating without SNTV's co-partisan rivalry. That evidence is carried by the process tracing of its two waves (Section 9), not by a within-year gradient, which in Malaysia is null; the cross-case claim should be read with that weight in mind.

7.2 Career Panel Datasets

I constructed candidate-level career panel datasets from primary electoral records for three dominant parties across three countries.

The Malaysian panel (UMNO, 1959–2018) comprises 599 UMNO candidate-elections in Peninsular Malaysia with non-missing vote shares and consecutive election appear-

ances. The source is the Malaysia Election Panel Data, which covers all fifteen general elections since independence (1959–2022); the analysis here uses the fourteen through 2018. Variables include vote share, victory margin, win/loss, constituency, and coalition membership. Career tracking uses candidate names as identifiers, with manual disambiguation for the small number of name collisions.

The Japanese panel (LDP, 1958–1993) comprises 3,751 LDP candidate-elections during the period of LDP dominance (Scheiner, 2006) through the boundary 1993 election. The source is the Reed–Smith Japanese House of Representatives Elections Dataset (JHRED), a researcher-verified panel with persistent person identifiers, factional affiliation, dynasty status (Smith, 2018), occupational backgrounds, and cabinet appointments for 10,000 unique individuals across twenty-five general elections (1947–2014). The Liberal Democratic Party was formed in the November 1955 merger of the Liberal Party and the Japan Democratic Party and first contested the 1958 general election; JHRED codes the pre-merger conservatives under their own party labels (Liberal Party, Japan Democratic Party, and their predecessors), so the LDP candidate-election series begins in 1958 by construction and no pre-merger candidate-election is coded as an LDP defection. The analysis therefore spans the thirteen LDP general elections from 1958 through 1993. The 1993 split within this series has been analyzed at the individual level before (Cox and Rosenbluth (1995) with a probit of who defected, Reed and Scheiner (2003) with attention to how electoral incentives interacted with reform preferences), and the verified JHRED career histories let me carry that individual-level analysis across the full span of LDP dominance rather than the single split year.¹

The Taiwanese panel (KMT, 1986–2001) comprises 288 KMT candidate-elections with Chinese-character names enabling cross-election tracking, covering the authoritarian era through the boundary 2001 election (the first in which the KMT had lost the presi-

¹The covariate set also reflects the Japanese-language literature on LDP candidate behavior, which has examined factional affiliation, party posts, district characteristics, and public-works allocation as determinants of conservative careers (Kohno, 1997; Saitō, 2010; Tatebayashi, 2004).

dency). Sources include official Central Election Commission archives supplemented by Constituency-Level Elections Archive (CLEA) data and Wikipedia candidate lists for the 1986–1992 elections.

The scope condition for all three countries is the period of dominant-party regime control, including the boundary election at which regime change occurred or began. This means Malaysia through 2018 (when UMNO and its Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition lost power for the first time), Japan through 1993 (when the LDP lost its majority), and Taiwan through 2001 (the first full legislative election after the KMT lost the presidency in 2000). Throughout, a “candidate-election” is an appearance with a positive vote share and an observable next election (a candidate’s final election is excluded, since no switch can be measured); the Appendix B estimation N matches these counts, bar one Malaysian observation dropped for a missing covariate. Exits from electoral politics altogether (retirement, death, defeat without return) therefore fall outside the risk set rather than being modeled as competing events; if internal defeat also pushes elites out of candidacies entirely, the estimates describe defection among those who remain candidates, a selection the design does not model.

7.3 Outcome Variable

The primary outcome is a binary indicator equal to one if the candidate appeared under a different party label in the next election, conditional on that next election occurring within five years (six years for Malaysia, given the longer parliamentary cycle). This gap-awareness condition ensures that long absences followed by returns under different parties (which may reflect name collisions or unrelated career interruptions) are not counted as defections. Throughout, I label a defection wave by the candidate’s final dominant-party election, not the year the breakaway organized: the “1990 LDP wave” and “Semang 46 (1986)” name last LDP/UMNO elections of 1990 and 1986, the splits formalizing in 1993 and 1988.

One coding choice warrants explicit defense. A subsequent appearance under a different party label captures both elites who left of their own accord and elites whom the party expelled: Anwar Ibrahim in 1998, and several post-1MDB UMNO figures, were forced out rather than walking out. Treating these as the same outcome is deliberate. In a dominant party, expulsion is rarely an exogenous shock; it is the terminal move in an internal contest the expelled elite has already lost, the leadership's way of making a marginalization final. Anwar was removed only after losing the succession struggle with Mahathir; the post-1MDB expulsions followed the losing side's challenge to the party leadership. On the choice-theoretic logic of Section 2, the load-bearing variation is whether an elite ends up outside the party after losing internally, and expulsion and voluntary exit are two routes to that same structural destination. Where the distinction does matter, as in cross-national codings such as del Río (2022) that count only voluntary moves, the involuntary episodes here are precisely those with the most fully documented internal contest behind them (Section 9), so they instantiate the mechanism rather than strain it.

The worry is also small empirically. Of the nineteen UMNO defectors in the estimation sample, the only documented expulsion is Muhyiddin Yassin's, sacked from the party in 2016; Anwar himself, whose return in 2008 falls outside the gap-awareness window, is not coded as a defector here at all and enters only the process tracing of Section 9. Dropping Muhyiddin leaves the within-year vote-share gradient unchanged (from $\beta = 0.037$, $p = 0.56$, to $\beta = 0.051$, $p = 0.44$) and the descriptive defector–stayer gap marginally larger (−8.1 versus −7.5 points). The Japanese and Taiwanese defections are, without exception, voluntary moves to newly formed parties or to independent candidacy (Renewal, the Japan New Party (JNP), and Sakigake in 1993; the New Party and People First Party in Taiwan), so the identifying results in those two cases contain no involuntary exits to remove in the first place.

A measurement caveat applies to two of the three panels. Career tracking in Malaysia and Taiwan relies on name matching rather than the verified person identifiers available in

the Japanese JHRED panel, so a small amount of outcome misclassification is unavoidable. The gap-awareness window above and manual disambiguation of name collisions limit it; to the extent the residual error is non-differential, it attenuates the associations I report rather than manufacturing them.

7.4 Identification Strategy

The key challenge is distinguishing intraparty competition from general electoral weakness. A candidate with a low vote share might be losing intraparty competition (party resources directed to rivals) or simply losing ground to the opposition (a party-wide problem). Election fixed effects address the latter by absorbing election-specific shocks, ensuring that comparisons are within-election.

For Japan, the SNTV electoral system provides a uniquely clean identification opportunity. Under SNTV, multiple LDP candidates competed in the same district. The candidate who finished last among LDP contestants in their district directly and observably lost the intraparty competition (same voters, same district, same election year). I exploit this within-district variation by constructing an *intra-LDP rank* variable and comparing the defection rates of candidates at different ranks within the same district.

This design holds district-level confounders constant. If vote share effects were driven by opposition strength rather than intraparty dynamics, we would expect no gradient across intraparty ranks within a district. A strong, monotonic gradient is therefore consistent with the intraparty competition mechanism and difficult to reconcile with an account running through opposition strength alone.

A related concern is reverse causation: an elite who has already fallen out of internal favor may be starved of resources and underperform, so that the observed performance–defection link partly reflects internal marginalization producing the performance gap rather than the other way around. The substantive interpretation survives this concern: on either ordering, the candidate’s eventual exit decision tracks an internal contest.

Two design features mitigate the worry directly. Takeshita-faction membership is a pre-determined attribute, set years before the 1992 Kanemaru succession contest from which the LDP split followed, and yields the largest single coefficient in the Japan models without depending on contemporaneous performance. And the within-district intra-LDP rank design described above compares co-partisans facing the same voters and same election-year shocks, so the gradient is identified off relative within-party position rather than absolute electoral environment.

For Malaysia and Taiwan, where FPTP and SNTV-with-centralized-nominations prevent within-district intraparty comparisons, I rely on election fixed effects combined with process tracing of specific defection waves.

7.5 Economic Control Variables

To directly test the economic performance hypothesis against the intraparty competition framework, I merge election-level economic indicators into the candidate panel datasets. Following Reuter and Gandhi (2011), the primary economic variable is average growth: the mean annual real GDP growth rate over the election cycle (from the year after the previous election through the current election year). I also include GDP per capita (constant 2017 international dollars, purchasing-power-parity (PPP) adjusted), Polity scores (Taiwan only, where the democratic transition creates meaningful variation), and resource rents as a percentage of GDP (Malaysia only, where petroleum and natural gas rents constitute a substantial share of the economy; Japan and Taiwan have negligible natural resource rents and are coded accordingly).

GDP growth and GDP per capita data are drawn from the World Bank World Development Indicators for Malaysia and Japan (1961 onward), the Maddison Project Database for Japan's pre-1961 elections, and the Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (DGBAS) supplemented by International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Economic Outlook data for Taiwan. Polity scores are from the Polity 5 dataset. Resource rents are from

the World Bank.

These economic controls serve a specific analytical purpose: they allow me to replace the election fixed effects, which absorb all election-level variation, with the specific economic variables that aggregate-level work (Reuter & Gandhi, 2011) identifies as predictive of elite defection. If the macroeconomic channel is also the operative individual-level mechanism in these three parties, the economic controls should attenuate the intraparty competition coefficients. If the intraparty channel is operating largely independently of macroeconomic conditions, the economic controls should leave the intraparty variables' sign and significance unchanged. Because coefficients from different logit specifications are not on a common scale, the comparison is made on the probability scale: the average marginal effects of the intraparty variables are essentially unchanged when economic controls replace the year structure (Appendix Table B5, note).

7.6 Model Specifications

I estimate conditional logit models of the form

$$\Pr(\text{Defect}_{i,t} = 1 \mid \delta_t) = \Lambda(\delta_t + \beta_1 \mathbf{Performance}_{i,t} + \beta_2 \mathbf{Career}_{i,t} + \gamma \mathbf{Faction}_{i,t}), \quad (1)$$

where i indexes candidates, t indexes elections, $\Lambda(\cdot)$ is the logistic cumulative distribution function (CDF), δ_t is an election-year intercept treated as a stratum-specific nuisance parameter, **Performance** includes vote share and win/loss, **Career** includes cumulative wins and tenure, and **Faction** (Japan only) includes Takeshita-faction membership and cabinet experience. The within-year sufficient statistic $\sum_t Y_{i,t}$ eliminates δ_t from the conditional likelihood (Chamberlain, 1980), yielding a consistent estimator of β at fixed T as $N \rightarrow \infty$ and avoiding the incidental-parameters bias (Neyman & Scott, 1948) that contaminates naive dummy-variable maximum-likelihood estimation (MLE) in nonlinear panel models. Because the conditional likelihood does not identify δ_t directly, predicted-probability

plots use a parallel year-dummy logit; T per year is large in these panels so the incidental-parameters bias is small in absolute terms. To be explicit that the robustness checks are not the biased estimators the conditional likelihood is meant to avoid, I report alongside the conditional logit a *bias-corrected* fixed-effects logit (Fernández-Val, 2009) and the Mundlak *correlated* random-effects (CRE) estimator (Mundlak, 1978), both variants built for non-linear panels rather than the naive dummy-variable MLE or the independence-assuming random-effects logit, and all three agree to the second decimal (Appendix B). I report three model families: (i) without year strata, (ii) with year strata via conditional logit, and (iii) replacing year strata with direct controls for election-cycle GDP growth, GDP per capita, resource rents, and Polity score. All substantive findings are reported as predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals (delta method), marginalized over the empirical year distribution. One property of the conditional likelihood warrants explicit reporting: strata without outcome variation contribute nothing, and defection is temporally concentrated. The nineteen Malaysian defections sit in five of fourteen year strata (eight in the 1986 stratum, seven in 2018); Japan’s 170 defection events span all thirteen strata, but sixty of them, the 1993 split, sit in the 1990 stratum alone; nineteen of Taiwan’s thirty-four sit in the 1998 stratum. The nominal sample sizes therefore overstate the information available for wave-specific covariates, and the Takeshita coefficient in particular is identified largely off the 1990 stratum, where all thirty-nine Takeshita-member defections in the sample occur. Appendix B reports candidate-clustered and Firth-penalized re-estimations; no starred result moves (Table B7).

8 Quantitative Results

8.1 Malaysia: Cohort-Driven Defection

Figure 2 plots the predicted probability of UMNO defection by vote share, from a conditional logit with election-year strata, marginalized over the empirical year distribution

and the empirical values of other candidate covariates. Within years, vote share is essentially unrelated to defection in Peninsular Malaysia: predicted defection probability rises mildly from 1.5 percent at a 30 percent vote share to 6.6 percent at 80 percent, with 95 percent confidence intervals that cover zero everywhere. The conditional logit coefficient on vote share is 0.037 ($p = 0.56$); coefficients for the full set of specifications are in Appendix Table B1.

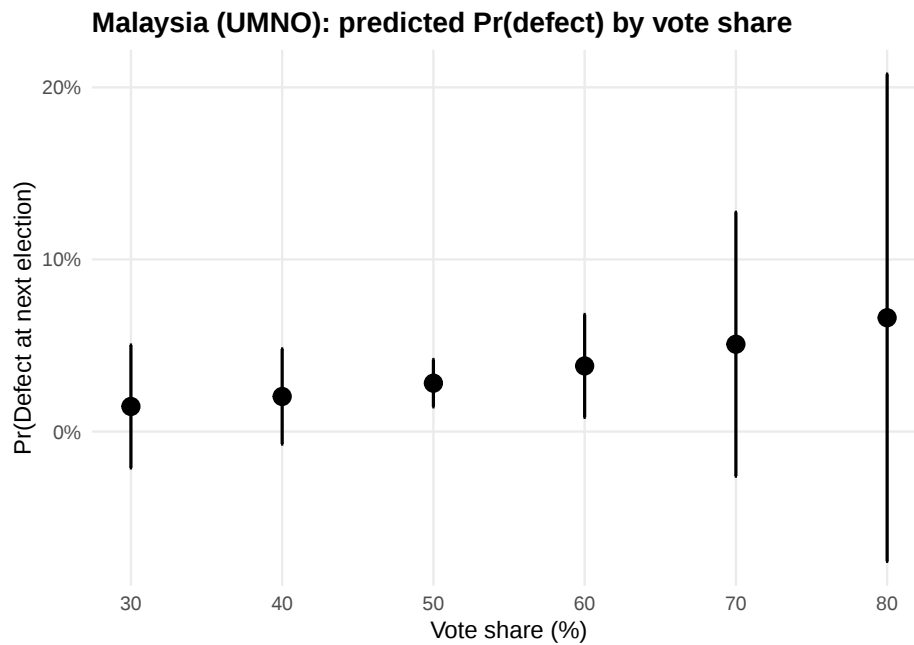


Figure 2: Predicted probability of UMNO defection by vote share, Peninsular Malaysia, 1959–2018. Predicted probabilities are computed from a logit with year indicator variables, marginalized over the empirical year distribution and the empirical values of the other candidate covariates; the conditional-logit coefficients in Appendix Table B1 are the primary estimates. 95% confidence intervals via the delta method.

The within-year null does not mean Malaysia lacks a performance pattern; it means the pattern is cohort-specific rather than continuous. The bivariate comparison across the full panel (Appendix Table A1) shows defectors averaging 55.5 percent vote shares versus 63.0 percent for stayers, lower win rates (84.2 vs. 91.4 percent), and smaller victory margins (19.8 vs. 30.2 percentage points). But this between-year gap reflects the composition of two distinct defection waves rather than a within-year performance gradient. The

1986 Semangat 46 cohort consisted of eight winning incumbents with vote shares of 65.7 percent, slightly above the stayer average; the 2013–2018 Bersatu wave had vote shares fourteen points below stayers. Pooling them produces an apparent negative correlation across years, which the year strata in the conditional logit appropriately remove. The substantive interpretation, that two distinct exit types correspond to two distinct cohorts, is what Section 9 traces directly.

Replacing year strata with direct economic controls (Appendix Table B5) yields a significantly negative coefficient on average cycle growth ($\beta = -0.747$, $p = 0.009$; a log-odds coefficient, not on the same scale as the -0.112 probability-scale mediation total effect for Malaysia in Appendix Table B6), consistent with Reuter and Gandhi (2011)’s cross-national findings. But the two major UMNO defection waves happened to coincide with lower-growth periods, and with only nineteen defectors concentrated in two political crises, the Malaysia case cannot cleanly separate economic conditions from the intraparty power struggles at the center of those crises, which is why the process tracing in Section 9 carries the weight for that country.

8.2 Japan: Faction over Performance

Figure 3 plots the predicted probability of LDP defection across the four scenarios defined by Takeshita-faction membership and seat outcome, from a conditional logit with election-year strata, marginalized over the empirical year distribution and the means of other covariates. The pattern is stark. A non-Takeshita LDP member who won her seat has a 1.8 percent predicted probability of defecting; a non-Takeshita member who lost her seat has 13.3 percent. Within the Takeshita faction the rates are an order of magnitude higher: 27.8 percent for seat-winners and 72.6 percent for seat-losers. The Takeshita-versus-non-Takeshita gap is larger than the won-versus-lost gap within either faction status.

Factional affiliation, not individual electoral performance, predicts defection in the 1990 LDP defection wave. The conditional logit coefficient on Takeshita-faction member-

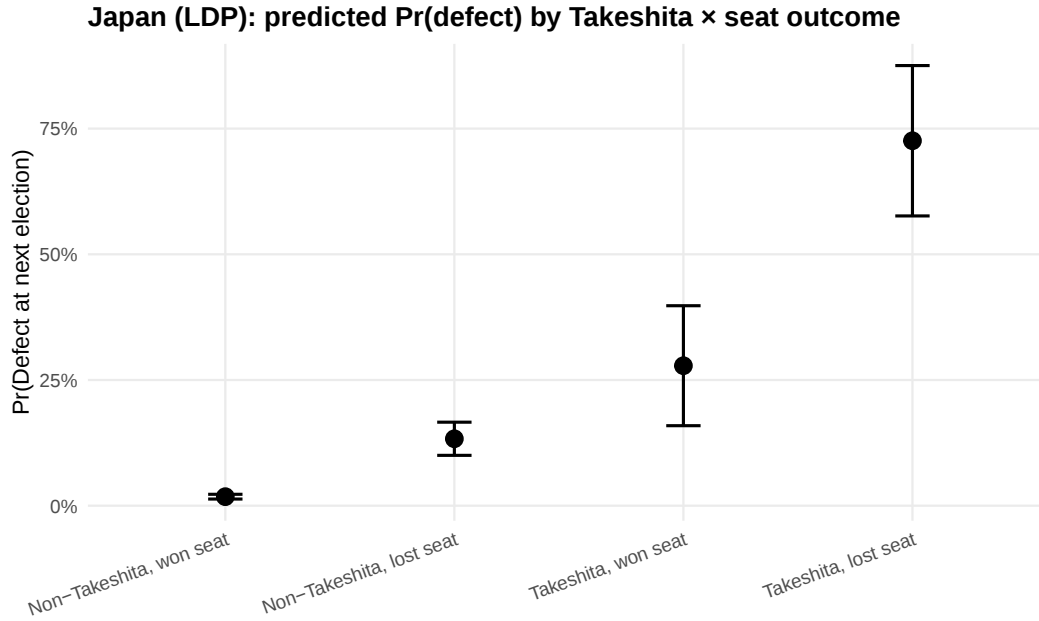


Figure 3: Predicted probability of LDP defection by Takeshita-faction membership and seat outcome, Japan, ≤ 1993 . Predicted probabilities are computed from a logit with year indicator variables, marginalized over the empirical year distribution and the empirical values of vote share, cumulative wins, age, cabinet experience, and dynasty; the conditional-logit coefficients in Appendix Table B2 are the primary estimates. 95% confidence intervals via the delta method.

ship is $\beta = 3.32$ ($p < 0.001$); the coefficient on winning a seat is $\beta = -2.26$ ($p < 0.001$), so losing a seat sharply raises defection risk; the coefficient on vote share is not distinguishable from zero ($\beta = -0.018$, $p = 0.30$). Within the same year, with opposition strength and district structure absorbed by the year stratum, Takeshita-faction members are markedly more likely to leave the LDP than non-Takeshita members at any seat-outcome level. Two readings of that coefficient must be kept apart. Because the Renewal Party was the Takeshita faction's losing side departing together (86.8 percent of the cohort, Table 2), the coefficient partly restates the factional organization of the exit itself: it measures how completely the 1993 exit ran along factional lines, not the effect of an independent treatment. What the specification establishes is that the factional line, fixed years before the split, dominates every performance measure the panel carries. The prior individual-level studies of this split found an electoral connection operating through reform preferences

and career stage (Cox & Rosenbluth, 1995; Reed & Scheiner, 2003), and Reed and Scheiner (2003, p. 480) note that Takeshita membership has served as a proxy for reform support; the panel carries no reform-position measure, so the faction coefficient may bundle factional loyalty with the reform positions concentrated in the Ozawa–Hata wing. The result is compatible with that electoral-connection account. What it rules out is narrower and still consequential: the defectors were not fleeing their own electoral weakness, since own vote share does nothing here. The null also bounds Kohno (1997, p. 136)’s reading of the breakup as the reaction of electorally vulnerable politicians to the reform demand: his evidence, junior members disproportionately following Ozawa in the December 1992 *faction* split (Kohno, 1997, pp. 146–47), describes the sorting stage inside the Takeshita machine, but the members who then left the party matched the stayers on vote share, and Kohno’s own tabulation has Renewal candidates winning at the LDP’s rate in the election that followed (79.7 versus 78.2 percent). Bias-corrected logit (Fernández-Val, 2009; Hahn & Newey, 2004) and Mundlak correlated random effects (Mundlak, 1978) yield substantively identical estimates (Appendix Table B2), confirming that the incidental-parameters bias is small in absolute terms at this sample size.

The Japanese results provide a clean individual-level read on the macroeconomic channel: replacing year strata with direct controls for election-cycle GDP growth and GDP per capita leaves the Takeshita coefficient overwhelmingly significant, and the GDP-growth coefficient is positive (Appendix Table B5). The estimate ties LDP defection risk to high-growth election cycles, not contractions: the 1990 cohort exit followed a cycle averaging 5.4 percent annual growth, though the walkout itself, in June 1993, came just as the post-bubble recession bottomed out. Whatever role aggregate macroeconomic conditions play across the broader population of hegemonic parties (Reuter & Gandhi, 2011), they do not appear to have set the timing of the LDP split; the timing tracks the intraparty power struggle between the Takeshita and anti-Takeshita factions.

8.3 Japan: Intra-LDP District Rank

The SNTV electoral system provides an unusually clean within-district identification design. Multiple LDP candidates competed in the same district under SNTV; within each district-year I rank LDP candidates by vote share and treat that rank as the focal predictor. A conditional logit with year strata absorbs election-level shocks; re-estimating with district-year strata, which conditions the comparison entirely within districts, leaves the gradient intact and, if anything, steeper (Appendix Table B3).

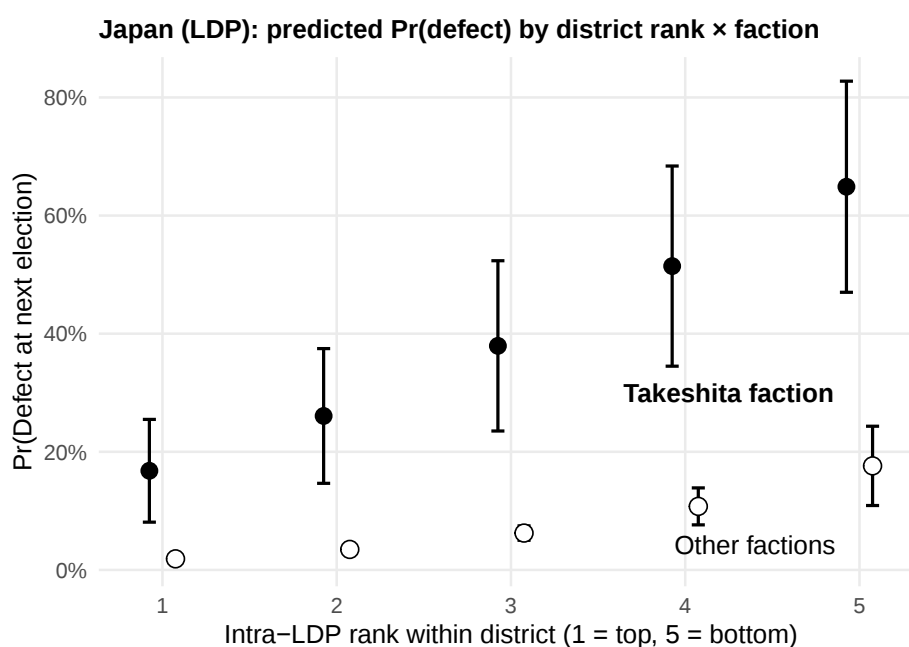


Figure 4: Predicted probability of LDP defection by intra-LDP district rank and Takeshita-faction status, ≤ 1993 . Sample restricted to multi-LDP districts under SNTV. Predicted probabilities are computed from a logit with year indicator variables, marginalized over the empirical year distribution and cumulative wins and evaluated separately by faction status; the conditional-logit coefficients in Appendix Table B3 are the primary estimates. 95% confidence intervals via the delta method.

Figure 4 shows the gradient separately by faction, and the separation is the point. Within either series the predicted rate roughly doubles at each step down the district ladder (averaged over faction status, from 2.5 percent at the top to 18.5 percent at the bottom); but the Takeshita series sits above the other-faction series along its entire length, so a top-ranked Takeshita candidate (16.8 percent) defects at the rate of a bottom-ranked

candidate from any other faction (17.6 percent). The full fall down the district ladder is worth about one faction membership, on the coefficients as on the predictions: four rank steps at $\beta = 0.65$ each ($p < 0.001$) sum to 2.6 on the log-odds scale, next to $\beta = 2.55$ ($p < 0.001$) for Takeshita membership alone. Comparing the last LDP candidate to win a seat with the first to lose one within the same district yields a 12.1 percentage-point gap in raw defection rates (2.6 percent vs. 14.7 percent, across 646 marginal winners and 434 first losers); narrowing to pairs whose winner–loser vote-share gap was under three percentage points still leaves a 7.1-point gap (3.1 percent vs. 10.2 percent, across 351 winners and 264 losers). The last-winner/first-loser contrast holds opposition strength, district boundaries, and election-year shocks constant by construction; the rank regression summarizes the same gradient parametrically.

8.4 Taiwan: Bloc Exits of Sitting Winners

The Taiwanese panel puts the composition question — who leaves a dominant party — in its starkest form. The risk set contains 288 KMT candidate-elections between 1986 and 2001; 262 of them ended with the candidate holding a seat, 26 with the candidate losing one. Thirty-four ended in defection, meaning the candidate’s next consecutive race was run under a non-KMT ballot line, and twenty-four of the thirty-four defected holding the seat they had just won. Figure 5 arranges the thirty-four by the election at which each exit surfaced, and the arrangement is the finding: KMT defection did not trickle out of the party’s electoral margins; it came in blocs timed to the founding of the party’s own break-aways. The first three exits ran the 1992 race outside the party’s nomination — among them Jaw Shaw-kong, whose New KMT Alliance became the New Party in August 1993 — and the New Party fielded the next two by 1995, including Yok Mu-ming, who had led the KMT’s eleven-candidate Taipei slate in 1992. The 2001 tower is the Soong split: nineteen of the thirty-four resurfaced at that single election, fifteen of them sitting legislators — eleven on James Soong’s PFP line, two with the Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU)

that formed around Lee Teng-hui the same year, six as independents. And not one of the thirty-four reappeared on a Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) line. The KMT did not leak elites to its challenger; it calved them into parties of its own making.

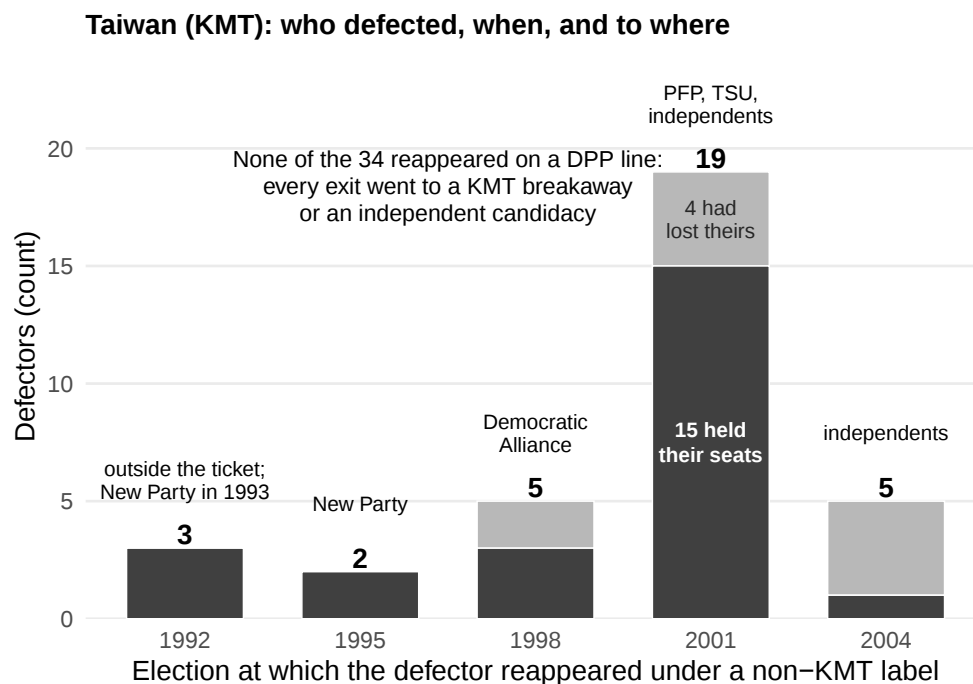


Figure 5: The KMT’s thirty-four defectors, 1986–2001 risk set, by the election at which each reappeared under a non-KMT ballot line. Dark segments count defectors who held their seat at exit (twenty-four of thirty-four); light segments count those who had just lost it (ten). Wave labels give each cohort’s dominant destination: the 1992 exits ran without KMT nomination and founded the New Party in 1993; the 1998 exits joined the short-lived Democratic Alliance; the 2001 tower follows James Soong’s 2000 presidential run and the founding of the PFP and the TSU. No defector reappeared on a DPP line. The seat-outcome logit in Appendix Table B4 provides the parametric summary.

Nor were the leavers the party’s electoral dead weight. Vote share does not predict defection ($\beta = -0.003, p = 0.84$; Appendix Table B4), and among seat-holders the exit rate is flat in within-district standing: nine of the twenty-four seat-holding defectors were their district’s top KMT vote-getter, a 38 percent share that matches the champions’ 35 percent share of the seat-holding risk set, and the champions defected at the party’s average rate (9.8 against 9.2 percent). The 2001 wave took, among others, the party’s Penghu candidate, re-elected in 1998 with 62.8 percent of his county’s vote, and Keelung’s leading vote-getter

at 32.0 percent; both left the label and won their districts again in 2001 without it.

The one strong predictor in the panel is the seat itself. Candidates who had just lost their seats defected at 38.5 percent, against 9.2 percent for those who held them (seat-winning coefficient $\beta = -2.08$, $p < 0.001$; Appendix Table B4). Read casually, that gap says the KMT shed its electoral casualties. Read against the district returns, it says nearly the opposite: in twenty-four of the twenty-six seat losses the risk set contains, the KMT still won the district, so the loser had fallen behind his own co-partisans in the party's SNTV vote division, not before a hostile electorate; and the remaining two, the single-seat offshore islands of Kinmen and Lienchiang in 2001, fell not to the DPP but to the KMT's own earlier breakaways, the New Party and the PFP. Under centralized nominations, seat loss is a verdict rendered inside the party — on nomination and the machine's allocation of votes — and it lands on the intraparty-competition side of the contrast this paper draws, not the voter-signal side, even though it is read off a vote outcome. The identifying comparison is within-district. Taiwan's sample is too small for the continuous rank model used in Japan, but the same logic applies in coarser form: within the same district and election year, the last KMT candidate to hold a seat defected at 5.1 percent and the first to lose one at 40.0 percent, a 34.9 percentage-point contrast among co-partisans facing the same voters and the same district conditions. That contrast nets out district-wide swings by construction, but it is a descriptive two-cell comparison resting on the fifteen KMT first-losers the risk set contains (Appendix C reports the threshold design), so I treat Taiwan as corroborative rather than as an independent leg of the identification. The channel it corroborates, Figure 5 keeps in proportion: ten of the thirty-four exits arrived through the seat-loss door, and even that door opened from inside the party.

As in Japan, the seat-loss pattern survives replacing year strata with direct economic controls (Appendix Table B5): the GDP-growth coefficient is positive and significant, indicating that KMT defections occurred during Taiwan's growth peak rather than its busts. The 1998 wave happened after an election cycle averaging 5.75 percent growth, and the

major New Party and PFP splits occurred during the highest-growth period in the dataset. The Polity score, which captures Taiwan’s democratization from martial law to consolidated democracy, is not significant once seat loss is accounted for: the regime transition itself did not drive individual-level defection decisions.

An online appendix (Appendix C) reports a sharp regression discontinuity (RD) at the seat-winning threshold as an exclusion test of the marginal-exit mechanism. The Japanese intra-LDP estimate is statistically indistinguishable from zero but too imprecise to adjudicate between the exit channels on its own (Appendix C states its limits plainly); the Malaysian and Taiwanese data are too sparse near the threshold to identify an RD effect because dominant parties win by large margins, a sparsity consistent with the underlying mechanism, though I do not lean on it; a density test in fact rejects continuity at the Taiwanese threshold, consistent with centrally managed vote division (Appendix C).

8.5 Economic Conditions

Across all three countries the intraparty competition variables survive the substitution of year strata with direct economic controls (Appendix B). The GDP-growth coefficient is country-divergent: positive in Japan and Taiwan (defection risk concentrated in high-growth cycles), negative in Malaysia (consistent with Reuter and Gandhi (2011)’s cross-national pattern). One natural concern is that intraparty competition might itself be downstream of economic conditions, in which case the macroeconomic channel would still be operating through the variables I attribute to internal politics. As a supplementary check, Appendix Table B6 reports an Imai–Keele–Tingley causal mediation decomposition (Imai et al., 2011) of the growth effect (per percentage point of average cycle growth) into direct and indirect components through observable intraparty variables (seat outcome in Japan and Taiwan, vote share in Malaysia). The indirect channel is statistically indistinguishable from zero in all three countries; because the total growth effect itself is small in absolute terms in Japan and Taiwan, and because the sequential-ignorability assumption

the decomposition requires is strong for a treatment that is not randomized, it is best read as suggestive rather than definitive. For Malaysia, the only case in which medsens supports the binary-outcome / continuous-mediator combination, the indirect effect remains negligible up to $|\rho| \approx 0.1$, a modest robustness threshold. The substantive case rests on three converging pieces of evidence: the within-district rank gradient in Section 8.3, which exploits variation orthogonal to year- and district-level shocks; the process tracing in Section 9, which documents the internal political contests preceding each major split; and the country-divergent sign of the growth coefficient, which is difficult to reconcile with a single macroeconomic mechanism operating uniformly across the three parties. The Malaysian coincidence of defection with lower growth reflects the specific political moments at which Razaleigh (1986) and Muhyiddin (2013–2018) lost their bids for party leadership.

9 Cohort Trajectories and Process Tracing

9.1 Malaysia: Four Episodes of UMNO Bifurcation

The Malaysian case provides four episodes of intraparty bifurcation within a single dominant party across six decades. The candidate panel begins in 1959, so the earliest episode (1951–1955) is treated as complementary process-tracing evidence rather than as within-sample observation; the three later episodes fall within the quantitative sample. In each, the exit followed a lost internal contest, tracing the intraparty-competition mechanism through the political calendar of a single party.

9.1.1 The First Split (1951–1955): Three Streams Out of UMNO

Before independence, three streams within UMNO disagreed over the vehicle to represent Malay interests. By 1955 each had organized into a distinct party: an Islamic stream founded the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS) in 1951; a Nation-

alist stream remained as UMNO; and a Unity stream of aristocrats founded the National Party (PN) in 1954 for a multi-ethnic alternative (Noor, 2004, 2014). The 1955 federal election delivered an asymmetric verdict (the UMNO-led Alliance won fifty-one of fifty-two seats, PAS won one, PN none; (Carnell, 1955)) because the Nationalist stream had captured incumbency advantages and negotiated the Alliance with the Malayan Chinese Association and Indian Congress, while PAS won only the single seat of Krian in Perak (the Kelantan and Terengganu strongholds that would define the party emerged only from 1959 onward), and PN's cross-ethnic appeal was rendered redundant.

9.1.2 The Second Split (1987–1995): The Razaleigh Bloc Exit

By the late 1980s, UMNO had become an internal stage for three distinct streams of patronage networks. The Traditional stream comprised elites with deep roots in pre-independence UMNO and the Malay aristocracy. The Capitalist stream comprised elites who had benefited from the New Economic Policy's state-led development projects. A younger stream comprised graduate-educated Malays with no inherited base in the existing patronage networks. The April 1987 UMNO general assembly produced a contested presidential election between Mahathir, backed by the Capitalist stream, and Razaleigh Hamzah, backed by the Traditional stream. Mahathir won by forty-three votes, and Razaleigh's wing was effectively excluded from senior positions. In February 1988 the High Court, ruling on a challenge brought by Razaleigh-aligned delegates, declared UMNO an unlawful society on technical grounds; Mahathir reconstituted it as UMNO Baru, and Razaleigh's wing declined to rejoin, registering Semangat 46 (Spirit of '46) in 1989 to claim continuity with the original UMNO tradition (Lamry, 1988; Shamsul, 1986).

Semangat 46 entered an electoral coalition with PAS for the 1990 federal election. The combination failed to generate substantial support outside Razaleigh's Kelantan base. PAS won the Kelantan state government but Semangat 46 itself secured only eight federal seats. By the 1995 election, Semangat 46 had failed to expand beyond its original cohort. The

party dissolved in 1996; Razaleigh, Rais Yatim, and Zainal Abidin Zin returned to UMNO. The Capitalist stream's victory over the Traditional stream was complete. Semangat 46 was a textbook bloc exit: electorally strong founders with a geographically concentrated base, organizationally coherent at the moment of departure.

9.1.3 The Third Split (1998–1999): The Anwar / keADILan Exit

The third split originated from the younger graduate-educated stream. Anwar Ibrahim, a former student activist who had risen through UMNO's youth wing under Mahathir's patronage, had been positioned as Mahathir's likely successor as Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis produced an internal dispute over macroeconomic policy, with Anwar favoring IMF-aligned austerity and Mahathir favoring capital controls. By September 1998, Anwar had been dismissed from all government positions, expelled from UMNO, and arrested. His supporters founded the National Justice Party (keADILan) in 1999, which later merged into the People's Justice Party (PKR) in 2003 (Abdul Hamid & Ismail, [2012](#); Pepinsky, [2009](#); Weiss, [2006](#)). As in the Razaleigh case, the exit followed a lost internal contest, here Anwar's expulsion after the policy rupture with Mahathir, rather than any electoral signal from voters.

9.1.4 The Fourth Split (2013–2018): The Bersatu/PAS Wave

The most recent UMNO defection wave produced a hybrid combination: a bloc exit (Muhyiddin Yassin, vote share 66 percent, thirty-five years of tenure) absorbing a wave of marginal exits (vote shares averaging 49.2 percent, fourteen points below stayers); Table 1 reports the two waves side by side.

Semangat 46 defectors were all winning incumbents with vote shares above the stayer average, centered on Razaleigh's Kelantan base. The Bersatu-era defectors, by contrast, had vote shares fourteen points below stayers. The combination of Muhyiddin's leadership credibility and marginal-candidate manpower produced a viable party (Muhyiddin

Table 1: UMNO defection cohorts.

	Stayers	Semangat 46 (1986)	Bersatu/PAS (2013–18)
<i>N</i>	580	8	9
First year (avg)	1986	1980	2008
Tenure (years)	5.6	6.0	8.8
Vote share (%)	63.0	65.7	49.2
Win rate	91.4%	100%	88.9%
Geographic concentration	N/A	Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Perak, Kuala Lumpur	Dispersed

Notes: Two additional Kelantan defections (Kamarudin Jaafar, 1995, to PAS; Ibrahim Ali, 1999, to Independent) fall outside the two named waves and are omitted for cell size; they are included in the 19-defector total in Appendix Table A1.

held the premiership from March 2020 to August 2021 before Bersatu lost it to UMNO's Ismail Sabri); neither component alone would have sufficed.

9.2 Japan: Two Cohorts, Two Mechanisms

The 1990 LDP defection wave (producing the 1993 election results) comprised sixty candidates who left the LDP. Cohort analysis reveals three distinct groups whose internal coherence differs sharply; Table 2 reports the three largest (Renewal, LDP Independents, and Sakigake, in size order), with two additional JNP-bound candidates omitted for cell-size reasons.

The Renewal cohort was 87 percent Takeshita faction, a near-perfect factional bloc exit (Park, 2001). Their vote shares (18.5 percent) were statistically indistinguishable from stayers (19.4 percent), and effectively so within shared districts, where the gap averages a third of a percentage point across the thirty-one districts fielding both. These were the losing side of a factional power struggle, not marginalized politicians: when Kanemaru Shin resigned in 1992 amid scandal, the contest to succeed him split the Takeshita faction, and Ozawa Ichirō and Hata Tsutomu took thirty-eight LDP colleagues into the Renewal

Table 2: 1990 LDP defection cohorts.

	Stayers	Renewal	Sakigake	LDP Indep
<i>N</i>	228	38	9	11
First election (avg)	1976	1979	1985	1975
Tenure (years)	13.5	11.0	4.7	15.3
Age in 1990	56.0	55.2	46.2	53.2
Vote share (%)	19.4	18.5	17.5	19.7
Cabinet experience (%)	43.4	31.6	0.0	63.6
Bureaucrat background (%)	23.7	31.6	11.1	9.1
Hereditary (seshu, %)	25.0	21.1	55.6	9.1
Takeshita faction (%)	13.6	86.8	22.2	27.3

Notes: “Cabinet experience” is cumulative through 1990. Two additional JNP-bound defectors are omitted for cell size; they are included in the 60-defector total in the body text.

Party, thirty-three of them from the Takeshita faction (Kohno, 1997, pp. 137–41).²

The broader political context is sometimes read as making the 1993 split scandal-driven rather than factional: the Recruit scandal (1988) and the Sagawa Kyūbin (佐川急便) scandal (1992), layered over a deadlocked debate on electoral reform, did expose the LDP to acute public criticism. The cohort composition does not match that reading. If voter punishment of a tarnished party were producing the exit, defectors would have diverse factional backgrounds and vote shares below those of stayers, like candidates distancing themselves from a sinking ship. The Renewal defectors concentrated overwhelmingly in one faction and matched stayers on vote share, the composition produced by an intraparty contest loss, not by environmental collapse. The scandals supplied the public-facing pretext; the Kanemaru succession supplied the internal trigger. The voting record agrees. Reed (2003, pp. 7–14) reads 1993 as a “normal” scandal election, dissatisfaction of the kind the LDP had absorbed in 1976, 1983, and 1990, and estimates that the LDP label cost its candidates only about five thousand votes each; had the defectors run under it, the party would likely have kept its majority (Reed, 2003, p. 13), an accounting grounded in the vote analysis of Kabashima (1998). Voters did not evict the LDP; the exit did.

²This count is of House of Representatives members, the unit of the panel; including the party’s House of Councillors members, popular accounts often cite forty-four founding legislators.

The Sakigake cohort was entirely different. Eighty-nine percent entered politics in 1986–1990, the youngest LDP generation (Kabashima & Ishio, 1998); fifty-six percent were hereditary politicians, well above the LDP’s already-high dynastic share and consistent with the inherited incumbency advantage that concentrates in the party (Smith, 2018); and sixty-seven percent had served as Diet secretaries. With zero cabinet experience and only 4.7 years of tenure, these were political dynasty sons whose promotion ladder was blocked by entrenched seniors. Their exit was generational, not factional, the young-reformer profile Otake (1996) documents at length, down to the overrepresentation of second-generation members.

The LDP Independents were the genuinely marginalized: highest tenure (15.3 years), highest career cabinet experience (63.6 percent), but they went it alone rather than joining an organized exit. These were senior politicians with individual grievances rather than cohort dynamics, the marginal-exit pattern in pure form.

9.3 Taiwan: PFP Followers vs. Independent Seniors

The 1998 KMT defection wave produced a similar cohort split between an organized exit vehicle and dispersed individual departures (Table 3).

Table 3: KMT defection destinations (1998 wave).

	PFP (親民黨)	Independent	KMT Stayers (1998)
<i>N</i>	11	6	63
Vote share (%)	8.8	16.9	12.3
Election sequence	1.5	2.3	2.0
Tenure (years)	2.2	4.5	3.0

Notes: All four columns restricted to the 1998 Legislative Yuan election. Two additional 1998 KMT defectors went to the Taiwan Solidarity Union and are omitted for cell size.

PFP joiners were junior relative to the 1998 KMT stayer baseline (sequence 1.5 vs. 2.0, tenure 2.2 vs. 3.0 years) with lower vote shares (8.8 vs. 12.3 percent): followers who joined an organized exit vehicle whose senior leader (James Soong) supplied the organizational

core. Independent defectors were more senior (sequence 2.3, tenure 4.5 years) with higher vote shares (16.9 percent): individual exits by strong politicians with personal grievances.

9.4 Breakaway Party Survival

Tracking party trajectories through subsequent elections reveals a consistent pattern across the three countries.

Table 4: Breakaway party survival.

Party	Type	Peak	Trajectory	Outcome
<i>Japan</i>				
Renewal (新生党)	Bloc (Takeshita)	1993: 55	Folded into the New Frontier Party (NFP); dissolved 1998	Failed
Sakigake	Bloc (junior)	1993: 13	Collapsed after 1996; dissolved 2002	Failed
NFP (新進党)	Merger	1996: 156	Dissolved 1998	Failed
DPJ (民主党)	Sequential rebuilds	2009: 308	52 seats in 1996; governed 2009–12	Succeeded
New Liberal Club (NLC)	Bloc	1976: 17	Declined through the 1980s; reabsorbed into the LDP 1986	Failed
<i>Malaysia</i>				
Semangat 46	Bloc (Razaleigh)	1990: 8	Leaders returned to UMNO	Failed
Bersatu	Hybrid (bloc + marginal)	2018: 13	In government 2020–22; fragmented thereafter	Succeeded
keADILan / PKR	Crisis exit	2018: 47	1 seat in 2004; led Pakatan Harapan (PH) to power 2018	Succeeded
<i>Taiwan</i>				
New Party (新黨)	Bloc	1995: 21	1 seat by 2001; faded	Failed
Democratic Alliance (民主聯盟)	Bloc	1998: 4	Disappeared after one cycle	Failed
PFP (親民黨)	Personality	2001: 46	Declining since	Fading

Notes: “Peak” is the party’s peak lower-house (or Legislative Yuan) seat count, reported as year: seats. Counts are total seats from official records; for the post-1994 Japanese mixed-member and the Taiwanese party-list systems the candidate panels reproduce the single-member-district component (for instance, 221 of the DPJ’s 308 seats in 2009). “Outcome” records whether the party endured as an independent vehicle or coalition partner (Succeeded), dissolved or was reabsorbed (Failed), or persists only in decline (Fading). The DPJ row is a lineage coding: the DPJ was a broad merger that absorbed former Socialists and Sakigake as well as the LDP defectors’ migration through Renewal and the NFP, so its survival is attributable to the 1993 exit only in part; the cleaner single-parent survivor is keADILan/PKR.

The pattern is striking. Pure bloc exits (Renewal, Semangat 46, the New Liberal Club, the New Party, and the Democratic Alliance) all fail unless they find a cleavage constituency through post-exit trial and error. The successful cases (the DPJ lineage on urban reform, Bersatu on Malay identity plus anti-corruption, keADILan/PKR on *reformasi*) are those where the breakaway subsequently connected to a social demand the dominant party could not absorb. But the cleavage connection was not the reason for the exit. Ozawa did not leave the LDP because he detected unrepresented urban voters; Muhyiddin did not leave UMNO because he sensed anti-corruption sentiment; Razaleigh did not leave because he detected unmet demand. They left because they lost intraparty power struggles. The cleavage connection came later for the parties that survived, and for most breakaway parties it never came at all. The logic outlived the panel window: when the Minshin split in 2017, the defense-policy disagreement that divided it had sat latent for years until the leader of a newly formed vehicle politicized it as the price of entry, the cleavage activated by the vehicle rather than the vehicle by the cleavage (Kubo et al., [2022](#)).

That pattern is more than a narrative gloss; it can be measured. If the survivors built a constituency their parent could not occupy while the failures fought it for the same voters, the difference should be visible in *where* the breakaways ran. Table 5 reads that off the candidate panels, on the dimension each electoral system exposes. The pattern, with the exceptions the table itself flags, is that the breakaways that endured sat measurably apart from their parents while those that died sat on top of them; eleven parties measured on three institution-specific scales support a reading, not a test, and the exceptions do theoretical work of their own.

The within-parent contrasts are sharp. In Japan, where SNTV pools rivals in the same districts so that what differs is district *type*, the Takeshita-machine Renewal cohort was barely more urban than the LDP it left and dissolved within a cycle, and the New Frontier Party that absorbed it was no more distinct; only the DPJ lineage, which sat far more urban than the LDP, survived to govern. An independent instrument agrees: the 1996 expert

Table 5: Differentiation from the parent party and breakaway survival.

Breakaway (debut/peak)	Differentiation from parent	Outcome
<i>Japan</i> — urban-density gap of districts vs. the LDP, same election		
Renewal (1993)	+0.11	Failed
Sakigake (1993)	+0.11	Failed
New Frontier Party (1996)	+0.07	Failed
New Liberal Club (1976)	+0.30	Failed [†]
DPJ lineage (1996)	+0.30	Survived
<i>Malaysia</i> — % of seats shared with UMNO / % mixed (urban) seats		
Semangat 46 (1990)	89 / 7	Failed
Pejuang (2022)	79 / 17	Failed
Bersatu (2018)	92 / 6	Survived*
keADILan/PKR (2018)	62 / 26	Survived
<i>Taiwan</i> — % of districts shared with the KMT		
New Party (1998)	100	Failed
People First Party (2001)	98	Fading

Notes: Differentiation is computed from the candidate panels (Section 7) at each breakaway’s debut or peak election. *Japan:* difference in the mean log population density of a candidate’s district relative to the LDP the same year; under SNTV rivals share districts, so the relevant contrast is district *type* (urbanization), not which seats are contested. *Malaysia:* share of the breakaway’s seats also contested by UMNO (head-to-head), and share co-contested by a Chinese-based party (the Democratic Action Party (DAP), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), or Gerakan), a proxy for mixed/urban seats (UMNO itself contests almost none). *Taiwan:* share of the breakaway’s districts also contested by the KMT. [†]Differentiated but absorbable: the LDP could reoccupy the urban-reform ground, so differentiation is necessary, not sufficient. *Bersatu’s base was undifferentiated (it targeted UMNO’s Johor heartland (Wan Saiful Wan Jan, 2018)), and its survival was coalition-borne; it fragmented in 2022. The party set differs from Table 4 at the margins: Pejuang (founded 2020, contesting 2022) postdates the ≤ 2018 analysis window and appears here as an out-of-window illustration, and the Democratic Alliance’s single-cycle life is not measured.

survey places the New Frontier Party at 16.15 on the twenty-point left–right scale to the LDP’s 15.35, to the *right* of the party it left and less than two standard errors away, while the newborn DPJ already sat some nine points from the LDP on citizens’ rights (Kato & Laver, 1998, pp. 245–46). In Malaysia, Semangat 46 and, three decades later, Mahathir’s Pejuang contested UMNO’s own seats (around 80 to 90 percent head-to-head, on UMNO’s Malay-rural ground) and won few or, for Pejuang in 2022, none; keADILan/PKR ran a quarter of its slate in the mixed urban seats UMNO scarcely enters, and endured. In Taiwan, the New

Party and the People First Party stood in essentially every district the KMT did, competing for a single pan-Blue electorate; their politicians, Fell (2014) shows, moved back and forth with the KMT until the splinters were reabsorbed, their return after 2004 helping carry the KMT back to power in 2008. Taiwan’s differentiated ground (Taiwanese nationalism) was already the DPP’s, leaving a KMT breakaway nowhere distinct to stand (Figure 6).

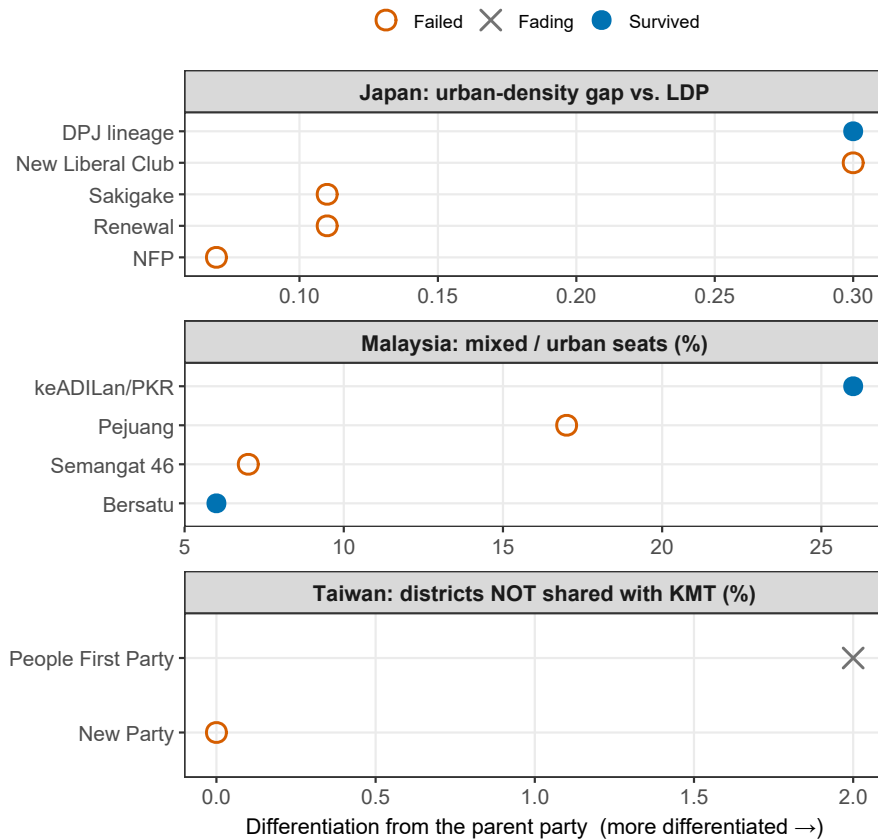


Figure 6: Differentiation from the parent party tracks breakaway survival. Each panel plots one country’s breakaways on the institution-appropriate measure of distance from the parent (Section 7); points further right are more differentiated. Filled blue points are parties that survived, open orange points failed, and the grey cross is fading. Within each case the survivors sit at the differentiated end, with two telling exceptions: Bersatu, whose undifferentiated base (it contested UMNO’s Johor heartland) survived only through the Pakatan Harapan coalition, and the New Liberal Club, which differentiated toward an urban-reform ground the LDP could simply reoccupy.

Two wrinkles sharpen the pattern rather than soften it. Bersatu looks like an exception: it survived to hold the premiership in 2020–22 yet its base was *undifferentiated*, aimed

squarely at UMNO's Johor heartland (Hutchinson, 2018; Wan Saiful Wan Jan, 2018). But its survival was borrowed: from the Pakatan Harapan coalition, whose other members supplied the differentiation it lacked, and from a leadership-and-corruption wedge rather than a constituency of its own. Once that scaffolding broke, it fragmented. The New Liberal Club marks the other limit: it differentiated toward urban reform and still faded, because the LDP could follow it onto that ground and absorb it. Reform ground behaves that way generally: once the Hosokawa coalition enacted the electoral-reform package in early 1994, the issue lost its salience and, with it, its value as a place to stand (Kato & Laver, 1998, p. 239), and Reed (2003, p. 10) draws the demand-side corollary from the NLC's arc, that a party can be "new" only once. The Japanese panel makes the limit of the measure explicit: the surviving DPJ lineage and the failed New Liberal Club sit at the same differentiation value, and what separates them, whether the parent could reoccupy the ground, is a judgment the comparison asserts rather than measures. The judgment has independent support, though: across the four expert surveys spanning 1996 to 2005, the breakaways that failed to distinguish their policy positions from the LDP's, first the New Frontier Party and then the Liberal Party, vanished quickly, while the DPJ held a distinct position through every wave (Kato & Kannon, 2008, pp. 352, 355). Ground the parent never reabsorbs is observable in policy space even where the debut-election measure ties. Taiwan, for its part, supplies no surviving breakaway at all, so its panel illustrates only the reabsorption half of the pattern. Differentiation is thus necessary but not sufficient; survival requires ground the parent cannot reoccupy. The failures, lacking it, did not merely lose; they were drawn home: Semangat 46's leaders returned to UMNO, the Taiwanese splinters to the KMT, Renewal into the dissolving New Frontier Party. The homeward pull is derivable, not incidental: in the spatial rendering of dominance by Dunleavy (2010, pp. 27–29), a minimally differentiated faction exit is an "each-way bet," its leaders placed to keep their voter segment if the parent stands still and to rejoin on advantageous terms if it moves to reabsorb them.

Differentiation is also only one of two conditions a challenger must meet, and the second is the one this paper's measure does not touch. To displace a dominant party, a break-away must not only stand on ground the parent cannot reoccupy; it must be believed capable of governing, the *valence* dimension of competition, on which voters weigh a party's effectiveness separately from its position. Dunleavy's account of dominance turns on exactly this quantity: what protects a dominant party is a two-tier effectiveness ranking that persists largely invariant to policy shifts, so no repositioning by a lower-ranked rival captures the protected core (Dunleavy, 2010, p. 29). The two dimensions are entwined under dominance as a matter of strategy, not only of measurement: in Curini (2018, pp. 45–53)'s account of the canonical pairing, one-party-dominant Japan and First-Republic Italy, a principal challenger that cannot open positional distance shifts its campaigning onto the valence dimension instead, the probity attack replacing the programmatic one. Conjoint estimates from the 2017, 2021, and 2024 elections find the same structure still carrying the LDP: many LDP voters preferred the opposition's policy bundles, and the party's support rested instead on a trust-based valence advantage (Kuriwaki et al., 2025, pp. 439–43). For the argument here the second condition is not a rival but a reason: a bloc exit is the one event that moves valence across the line, since ministers, faction organizations, and governing networks leave together, and the challenger arrives already staffed by people who have run the state. Japan's sequence sorts on the two conditions jointly: the New Frontier Party carried the credibility, two former prime ministers in its ranks, but stood on no distinct ground and failed; the early DPJ held the distinct ground on thin credentials and spent a decade accumulating them; alternation came in 2009, when one vehicle at last held both. The sequel reads the same way in reverse: in office the lineage lost the valence half, "destructively" so in the twenty-year accounting of the UTokyo–Asahi surveys, and the LDP has led the competence ratings ever since, the most common answer after it being not an opposition party but "no such party" (Taniguchi, 2026, pp. 132–33); by the 2021 election the deficit had attached to the label itself, a vignette experiment finding the

electorate's preferred hypothetical opposition to be one staffed from outside the DPJ line (Hata, [2022](#), p. 20). The design here measures the positional condition only, so the joint reading is a consistency the cases display rather than a result the panels establish.

10 Beyond the Three Cases: A Cross-National Probe

Three parties, two of them in countries conventionally classified as democracies, invite an obvious question: is the within-party mechanism a feature of dominant-party rule in general, or an artifact of three East and Southeast Asian cases? A full cross-national test is not yet available (the candidate-level career data this paper exploits exist for only a handful of countries, and constructing them is part of the contribution), but the question admits a probe. del Río ([2022](#)) assembles a cross-national panel of elite defection spanning twelve electoral authoritarian regimes across several decades (1930–2018 at the widest), coding the voluntary movement of ruling-coalition elites into the opposition. I use it to ask whether the structural antecedent at the center of my mechanism leaves a detectable trace beyond the three cases.

Two features of that panel bear on the argument. First, the phenomenon is general. Voluntary elite defection from the ruling coalition appears in eleven of the twelve regimes (Belarus, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, and Zimbabwe), with Singapore the lone exception. Whatever UMNO, the LDP, and the KMT have in common, the breaking-from-within they exhibit is not confined to their region or their decades. That panel counts only *voluntary* moves to the opposition (unlike the outcome used here, which Section 7 also includes the expulsions that cap a lost internal contest), so it is the narrower measure of the two.

Second, the fragmentation result here is del Río's own. del Río ([2022](#)) operationalizes the fragmentation of the ruling bloc as the number of parties composing the ruling coalition and reports that regimes supported by more of them defect more. That measure is

coalition-level: it counts the formal parties in a governing bloc, not the informal factions within a single dominant party (the Takeshita and anti-Takeshita camps inside the LDP, for instance) that my mechanism turns on. Recovering his result here corroborates the same fragmentation logic at the cross-national, coalition level; what the candidate panels add is the within-party level his data cannot reach. With that distinction stated plainly: Figure 7 plots the predicted probability that a ruling coalition experiences an elite defection as a function of this fragmentation, holding the macroeconomic and party-strength covariates at their means. A single-party ruling bloc has a 15 percent predicted probability of defection in a given electoral cross-section (95% CI [5, 31]), rising to 41 percent for a fragmented thirteen-party coalition ([21, 64]); on the probability scale, a one standard-deviation increase in fragmentation is associated with a 5.6-percentage-point rise (Table 6), essentially unchanged at 5.0 points once country fixed effects absorb cross-national differences, though that within-country association is imprecise, its interval spanning zero, given the limited within variation and the seventeen defection events. The pattern is what one would expect if crowded internal fields generate more defection, but it is a coalition-level cross-sectional regularity, not a within-party test.

The two control variables behave as the framework would lead one to expect. Larger legislative majorities are associated with less defection: a one standard-deviation increase in the ruling coalition's seat share lowers the probability by roughly nine percentage points within countries (Table 6), which is precisely the premise on which the puzzle rests: dominant parties are, on the whole, stable, and it is the splits that erupt from within them anyway that demand explanation. Election-cycle growth, for its part, does not predict whether a defection occurs in either specification. This is no rebuke to Reuter and Gandhi (2011): in the very same panel, growth is a robust negative predictor of the defection *rate*, i.e., how much defection a regime experiences ($\beta = -14.0$, $p = 0.01$, in a linear within-country model; Appendix Table D1), even as it is silent on whether any defection occurs at all. Occurrence and rate are two codings of the same panel: occurrence follows Reuter and

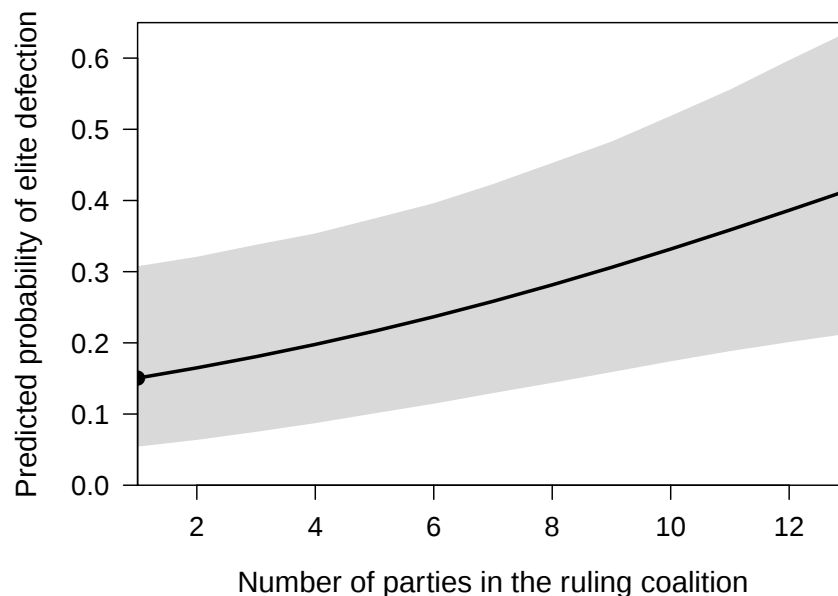


Figure 7: Predicted probability of elite defection by ruling-coalition fragmentation, twelve electoral authoritarian regimes (del Río, 2022). Predicted probabilities are computed from a logit on the cross-section defection indicator (coded following Reuter and Gandhi (2011)), holding election-cycle growth, legislative seat share, and ruling-party age at their means; the marginal effects in Table 6 are reported on the probability scale. 95% confidence intervals via parametric simulation from the estimated coefficient covariance ($N = 72$ election cross-sections, seventeen of them with a defection, across twelve countries).

Gandhi (2011)’s binary, the rate is del Río’s continuous measure. The macroeconomic cycle shapes the intensity of defection; internal-political conditions shape its incidence. Both hold at once, which is the point. (Ruling-party age also carries a positive association with defection incidence, consistent with older parties accumulating more internal factions and more passed-over aspirants; its sign is not stable across the rate and incidence margins, its fixed-effects interval on the probability scale clears zero by simulation while the underlying coefficient reaches only $p < 0.10$ (Appendix Table D1), and I do not lean on it.)

These results do not settle the cross-national question, and they are not meant to. The panel cannot observe what the candidate-level data can (which elite leaves, and after which internal contest), and with seventeen defection cross-sections the within-country estimates are necessarily imprecise. What the probe establishes is more modest and, for

Table 6: Average marginal effects on the probability of elite defection, cross-national panel.

	Cross-section occurrence (pooled logit)	Annual occurrence (country fixed effects)
Coalition fragmentation	+0.056 [+0.014, +0.099]	+0.050 [−0.105, +0.206]
Election-cycle growth	+0.015 [−0.076, +0.137]	+0.017 [−0.024, +0.057]
Legislative seat share	−0.102 [−0.220, +0.027]	−0.091 [−0.148, −0.034]
Ruling-party age	+0.160 [+0.052, +0.245]	+0.106 [+0.005, +0.208]
<i>N</i>	72 cross-sections	322 country-years
Defection events	17	71
Countries	12	11

Notes: Cell entries are average marginal effects on the probability of defection for a one standard-deviation increase in each covariate, with 95% confidence intervals in brackets. Left column: pooled logit on the cross-section defection indicator, country-clustered, with simulation intervals. Right column: average partial effects from a bias-corrected fixed-effects logit on the annual defection indicator (Fernández-Val, 2009), country fixed effects (Singapore, which records no defection, drops from the within-country sample). Underlying coefficient estimates appear in Appendix Table D1. Data: del Río (2022).

the purpose at hand, sufficient: the phenomenon this paper documents is general rather than regional, and the structural condition at the center of the mechanism leaves a detectable mark across a panel of regimes that otherwise have little in common with UMNO, the LDP, or the KMT. The three cases supply the mechanism; the cross-national panel suggests it has room to travel.

11 Discussion

11.1 Theoretical Implications

These findings reframe dominant-party breakdown in three ways. First, exploiting within-party, within-election variation across 4,638 candidate-elections, the strongest predictors of defection are internal party variables (vote share relative to co-partisans, factional affil-

iation, seat loss), and these intraparty variables retain their sign and significance under both election fixed effects and direct economic controls. The candidates who left did not look like politicians anticipating environmental decline; they looked like politicians who had just lost an internal contest.

Second, at the individual level within these three parties, the timing of defection does not move with the macroeconomic cycle in the way Reuter and Gandhi (2011)'s cross-national pattern might lead one to expect for these cases: in Japan and Taiwan the growth coefficient is positive, and the supplementary mediation analysis (Section 8.5) finds the indirect channel through intraparty competition statistically indistinguishable from zero. This does not contradict the cross-national correlation Reuter and Gandhi document, which is consistent with several individual-level channels operating across the broader population of hegemonic parties; indeed, they name a prosperity channel themselves, in which elites anticipate voters' loosening dependence on clientelist provision and defect in good times (Reuter & Gandhi, 2011, p. 91), and the positive Japan and Taiwan coefficients instantiate that named alternative. The cleanest way to hold both findings at once, suggested by the cross-national panel in Section 10, is a division of labor between incidence and intensity, a reconciliation the data permit rather than establish: internal competition governs *whether* a consequential defection occurs, while macroeconomic decline, in the aggregate, scales *how much* defection a regime experiences. Reuter and Gandhi's growth correlation and the within-party calendar I document are then not rivals but answers to two different questions. What the candidate-level panels identify is the channel running through these three parties, which appears to track the internal political calendar of the dominant party more closely than the macroeconomic one. Whether that channel scales up to explain the broader cross-national correlation is a question three cases cannot adjudicate.

Third, the same elite-level mechanism manifests differently across institutional contexts: through nomination vote shares in FPTP Malaysia, factional dynamics in faction-

alized SNTV Japan, and seat allocation in centrally-controlled SNTV Taiwan, providing a measure of external validity. The bloc-versus-marginal distinction is more than a typology of exits: it also marks which exits can become viable parties at all. In these cases, whether a breakaway endured turned on its subsequent attachment to an available social cleavage, the second, downstream stage traced in Section 9 and summarized in Table 4, a connection the surviving parties found after the exit rather than before it.

11.2 Scope Conditions

As discussed in Section 2, the theory's scope condition is the monopoly over office, which electoral authoritarian regimes and dominant-party democracies can each satisfy. The theory may not apply to purely authoritarian regimes without competitive elections, where exit takes non-electoral forms such as coups or purges, or to competitive democracies where viable opposition parties provide ready-made vehicles for defecting elites, so that losing an internal contest is a recoverable setback rather than the costly forced choice it becomes under monopoly. Nor is a parliamentary majority the criterion for dominance or its end: Kato and Laver ([1998](#), p. 247) place the post-1996 LDP, its majority gone, in the company of the Swedish Social Democrats and Ireland's Fianna Fáil, parties whose bargaining position kept them nearly impossible to exclude from government; on the account developed here, dominance ends only when a breakaway survives to stand as an alternative of comparable weight. Comparable in both senses: holding ground the incumbent cannot reoccupy, and credible as a government in the way the incumbent is, the valence half of the criterion that Section 9 could read off the cases but not the measure.

A related scope condition concerns the structure of internal competition. Dominant parties that suppress factional structure entirely, or that institutionalize successive rotation of leadership across factions, may produce fewer bloc exits because the cost asymmetry between winners and losers is reduced. Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) before 2000 managed factional alignments through the *dedazo* succession mechanism that

preserved the losing faction's expectation of future returns, which may help explain why the PRI experienced relatively few bloc exits during its hegemonic period despite the long horizon and absent viable opposition parties. The conspicuous exception is instructive: when the 1987 *dedazo* visibly foreclosed that expectation for the Corriente Democrática, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo exited on the bloc logic theorized here, and their departure preceded the PRI's closest brush with defeat in 1988 (Greene, 2007).

11.3 Limitations

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The most fundamental concerns case selection. The three parties were chosen because each produced a consequential split, so the design carries no party-level variation on the outcome: it identifies which elites defect and when, conditional on a party already under internal strain, not which dominant parties fracture and which hold together. The cross-national probe in Section 10 establishes that the phenomenon is general rather than regional, but it cannot supply the party-level counterfactual either. The closing claim that internal monopoly breeds its own vulnerability is therefore a conjecture the candidate-level evidence motivates but does not, on its own, identify. With that caveat in view: first, the Malaysia quantitative analysis rests on only nineteen defectors, sufficient for descriptive patterns but not for robust multivariate inference. The economic controls analysis for Malaysia is similarly constrained: with only two major defection waves, the negative GDP growth coefficient may reflect the specific political timing of those crises rather than a generalizable economic mechanism.

Second, the Taiwan analysis cannot directly observe intraparty nomination fights or factional dynamics; the 1993 New Party split is under-captured because its leaders strategically ran outside KMT nomination before formally splitting. Third, the economic controls operate at the election level, varying only across elections within each country, a small number of clusters that limits statistical power for the economic variables and cannot capture sub-national variation that might affect individual candidates differently. Fourth, de-

fection concentrates in a handful of year strata (Section 7); candidate-clustered and Firth-penalized re-estimations leave every starred result in place (Appendix B), but the concentration is why the argument rests on the within-district designs and cohort composition rather than on borderline significance levels.

The institutional features that let a party monopolize state power are precisely the features that make internal defeat so costly for those who fail to consolidate. On the reading defended here, UMNO, the LDP, and the KMT did not split because environmental pressure broke them; they split because the institutional dominance that insulated them from external pressure also concentrated the contest for office inside the party, where an internal loser had no vehicle waiting and had to build one or accept marginalization. The dominant party plants the structural conditions for its own splits in the act of being dominant. The strongest dominant parties may be the most structurally vulnerable to fragmentation from within, not the least.

Data Availability Statement

Replication materials for the three candidate-level career panels (data, code, codebook, and statistical output files) reproduce the within-party results in the main text and Appendices A–C and will be deposited in a public repository upon publication. The cross-national probe (Section 10, Appendix D) uses del Río ([2022](#))’s public replication data (Harvard Dataverse, [doi:10.7910/DVN/RHGJ8P](https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/RHGJ8P)) and is reproducible from that source with the scripts included in the package.

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A. Pre-Defection Summary

Table A1 reports pre-defection bivariate comparisons between UMNO defectors and stayers, complementing the within-year regression results in Section 8.1 of the main text.

Table A1: Pre-Defection Characteristics, UMNO Peninsular ≤ 2018 .

	Stayers ($N = 580$)	Defectors ($N = 19$)	Difference
Vote share (%)	63.0	55.5	-7.5
Win rate	0.914	0.842	-0.072
Victory margin (pp)	30.2	19.8	-10.4
Election sequence	2.18	2.53	+0.35
Tenure (years)	5.6	7.4	+1.8

B. Conditional Logit Estimates and Robustness Checks

Tables B1–B4 report coefficient estimates from the within-year specifications discussed in Section 8 of the main text. The primary estimator is conditional logit (`clogit`, Chamberlain 1980) with election year as the stratum: $\sum_t Y_{i,t}$ is a sufficient statistic for the year intercept δ_t , so the conditional likelihood eliminates δ_t as a nuisance parameter and yields a consistent estimator of β at fixed T as $N \rightarrow \infty$. The two robustness columns are deliberately the bias-aware variants for nonlinear panels, not their naive counterparts. The first is a year-fixed-effects logit carrying the analytical incidental-parameters correction of Fernández-Val (2009) and Hahn–Newey (2004), estimated via the `alpaca` R package, *not* the uncorrected dummy-variable MLE, whose slope estimates would be biased. The second is the Mundlak (1978) correlated random-effects formulation, which adds year-level means of the regressors so that the year effect may correlate with the covariates, *not* the independence-assuming random-effects logit. With T per year in the hundreds for each country the incidental-parameters bias is small to begin with, and after correction the three estimators yield nearly identical coefficients in every table, confirming that the conditional-logit estimates are not an artifact of how the year effects are handled. Standard errors in Tables B1–B4 are model-based; Table B7 re-estimates the load-bearing coefficients with robust variance clustered on the repeated candidate, which requires the Efron approximation to the conditional likelihood. Clustering inflates the standard errors by at most a fifth and leaves every starred intraparty coefficient at $p < 0.001$; the one sensitive coefficient is Japan’s cabinet experience, whose borderline significance depends on the tie approximation rather than on clustering. A Firth-penalized year-dummy logit (Firth, 1993) likewise yields a Takeshita coefficient of 3.28 (95% CI [2.57, 4.03]) against the maximum-likelihood 3.34; with thirty-nine of seventy Takeshita members defecting and no empty cells, the coefficient is not a separation artifact. The concentration of defection in a few year strata (Section 7) still means the effective information behind wave-specific covariates is smaller than the nominal N , a caution the text applies wherever those coefficients are interpreted.

Table B1: UMNO defection, Peninsular Malaysia, ≤ 2018 .

	Cond. logit	Bias-corr. FE	Mundlak CRE
Vote share (%)	0.037 (0.063)	0.037 (0.063)	0.036 (0.062)
Won	-0.547 (0.989)	-0.547 (1.008)	-0.576 (1.002)
Victory margin (%)	-0.034 (0.033)	-0.034 (0.033)	-0.035 (0.033)
Election sequence	-0.041 (0.560)	-0.041 (0.568)	-0.051 (0.554)
Tenure (years)	0.017 (0.121)	0.017 (0.123)	0.020 (0.119)
Year structure	Strata	FE (BC)	Means + RE
<i>N</i>	598	598	598

Notes: Logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Sample: UMNO candidates in Peninsular Malaysia with positive vote shares, non-last-election, no name collisions. Conditional logit (Chamberlain 1980) uses year as stratum; alpaca implements Fernández-Val (2009) bias correction; Mundlak CRE adds year means of all regressors. $^{\dagger}p < 0.10$, $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Table B2: LDP defection, ≤ 1993 .

	Cond. logit	Bias-corr. FE	Mundlak CRE
Vote share (%)	-0.018 (0.018)	-0.018 (0.018)	-0.020 (0.018)
Won seat	-2.258*** (0.223)	-2.258*** (0.223)	-2.209*** (0.220)
Cumulative wins	0.056 (0.043)	0.056 (0.043)	0.052 (0.042)
Age	-0.043*** (0.012)	-0.043*** (0.012)	-0.042*** (0.011)
Takeshita faction	3.321*** (0.376)	3.321*** (0.377)	3.309*** (0.376)
Cabinet experience	-0.743* (0.373)	-0.743* (0.372)	-0.734* (0.372)
Dynasty (seshu)	-0.162 (0.257)	-0.162 (0.257)	-0.214 (0.255)
Year structure	Strata	FE (BC)	Means + RE
<i>N</i>	3,751	3,751	3,751

Notes: Sample: LDP candidates with positive vote shares, non-last-election, year ≤ 1993 . Estimators as in Table B1. Five candidate-elections carry a rare JHRED result code (4; none defect); dropping or strictly binarizing them moves these coefficients at the third decimal (replication package, `appB_result_code_sensitivity.csv`). $^{\dagger}p < 0.10$, $^*p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Table B3: Intra-LDP rank model, multi-LDP SNTV districts, ≤ 1993 .

	Cond. logit (year strata)	Cond. logit (district-year strata)
Intra-LDP rank	0.653*** (0.098)	0.745*** (0.138)
Takeshita faction	2.546*** (0.363)	1.989*** (0.462)
Cumulative wins	-0.157*** (0.035)	-0.080 [†] (0.045)
Year structure	Strata (year)	Strata (district $\times$ year)
N	3,457	3,457

Notes: Sample is the strict subset of the Table B2 sample of LDP candidates (≤ 1993) restricted to districts where at least two LDP candidates competed under SNTV in the same year, so that the within-district rank is defined. Cumulative wins reverses sign relative to Table B2: the restricted sample and the inclusion of rank, with which career wins are correlated, change what that control absorbs, so it is not interpreted; under district-year strata it attenuates to marginal significance. The district-year specification conditions the comparison entirely within districts; 150 of its 1,311 strata contain outcome variation and carry the estimate. [†] $p < 0.10$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table B4: KMT defection, ≤ 2001 .

	Cond. logit	Bias-corr. FE	Mundlak CRE
Vote share (%)	-0.003 (0.015)	-0.003 (0.015)	-0.004 (0.016)
Won seat	-2.079*** (0.562)	-2.079*** (0.568)	-2.017*** (0.528)
Year structure	Strata	FE (BC)	Means + RE
N	288	288	288

Notes: Sample: KMT candidates with Chinese-character names, positive vote shares, non-last-election, year ≤ 2001 . Estimators as in Table B1. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table B5: Defection with economic controls replacing year strata.

	Malaysia	Japan	Taiwan
Vote share (%)	−0.017 (0.054)	−0.027 (0.018)	−0.002 (0.015)
Won seat	0.140 (0.977)	−2.214*** (0.217)	−1.825*** (0.507)
Victory margin (%)	−0.000 (0.028)	—	—
Election sequence	−0.107 (0.530)	—	—
Tenure (years)	0.023 (0.113)	—	—
Cumulative wins	—	0.048 (0.041)	—
Age	—	−0.037** (0.011)	—
Takeshita faction	—	3.368*** (0.333)	—
Cabinet experience	—	−0.708† (0.370)	—
Dynasty (seshu)	—	−0.250 (0.252)	—
Avg. cycle growth	−0.747** (0.285)	0.082† (0.044)	0.901** (0.335)
GDP per capita (\$1,000s)	0.001 (0.024)	0.072*** (0.013)	0.332* (0.160)
Resource rents (% GDP)	−0.297* (0.131)	—	—
Polity	—	—	0.160 (0.132)
Year structure	Econ. controls	Econ. controls	Econ. controls
<i>N</i>	567	3,751	288

Notes: Pooled logit replacing the year strata of Tables B1, B2, and B4 with election-cycle economic controls, the “+Econ” specifications discussed in Section 8. Each column is that country’s full within-year specification with the year strata removed and average cycle growth, GDP per capita, and (where relevant) resource rents and Polity added. Coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; GDP per capita is scaled per \$1,000. The Malaysian *N* is 567 rather than 598 because the 1959 cycle predates the growth series, so its thirty-one candidate-elections drop. On the probability scale the robustness comparison is direct: the Takeshita average marginal effect is +30.4 points [18.6, 42.3] under year indicators and +33.6 [22.0, 45.2] under these economic controls; Japan’s won-seat AME is −3.8 points under both; Taiwan’s is −30.6 [−50.3, −10.9] versus −26.1 [−44.4, −7.8]; Malaysia’s vote-share AME is indistinguishable from zero under both. Average cycle growth is negative in Malaysia but positive in Japan and Taiwan, while the intraparty-competition variables (won seat, Takeshita faction) retain sign and significance. † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table B6: Causal mediation decomposition: does economic growth operate through intraparty competition?

<i>Mediator:</i>	Japan (LDP) <i>seat outcome</i>	Malaysia (UMNO) <i>vote share</i>	Taiwan (KMT) <i>seat outcome</i>
ACME (indirect)	−0.001 [−0.003, 0.001]	−0.002 [−0.010, 0.004]	−0.001 [−0.008, 0.001]
ADE (direct)	0.002* [0.000, 0.004]	−0.110 [†] [−0.191, 0.001]	0.005** [0.000, 0.019]
Total effect	0.001 [−0.002, 0.004]	−0.112* [−0.194, −0.001]	0.004* [0.000, 0.013]
Prop. mediated	−0.18	0.016	−0.05

Notes: Imai–Keele–Tingley causal mediation estimates (Imai et al., 2011) with 1,000 quasi-Bayesian Monte Carlo simulations. Treatment: election-cycle GDP growth. Outcome: defection at next election. Effects on the probability scale; 95% quasi-Bayesian confidence intervals in brackets. ACME (Average Causal Mediation Effect) is the indirect effect of growth through intraparty competition; ADE (Average Direct Effect) is the direct effect holding the mediator constant. The proportion mediated is reported as a point estimate only; its quasi-Bayesian interval spans zero widely in every country, so the indirect channel is not statistically distinguishable from zero anywhere. The treatment contrast is one percentage point of average election-cycle growth; with total effects as close to zero as Japan’s and Taiwan’s, the proportion mediated is not informative. [†] $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Table B7: Candidate-clustered re-estimation of the load-bearing coefficients.

		Exact cond. logit β (SE)	Efron approx. β (SE)	Clustered robust SE
Malaysia	Vote share (%)	0.037 (0.063)	0.033 (0.058)	0.062
Japan	Won seat	−2.258 (0.223)	−1.803 (0.181)	0.198
Japan	Takeshita faction	3.321 (0.376)	2.513 (0.277)	0.306
Japan	Cabinet experience	−0.743 (0.373)	−0.459 (0.313)	0.301
Taiwan	Won seat	−2.079 (0.562)	−1.701 (0.419)	0.383
Rank model	Intra-LDP rank	0.653 (0.098)	0.549 (0.087)	0.093
Rank model	Takeshita faction	2.546 (0.363)	1.982 (0.281)	0.288

Notes: Robust variance clustered on the repeated candidate requires the Efron approximation to the conditional likelihood (the exact likelihood does not admit a robust estimator), so the middle column re-reports each coefficient under that approximation; differences from the exact column reflect the handling of tied defections within strata, heaviest in Japan’s 1990 stratum. Every coefficient starred in Tables B1–B4 remains significant at $p < 0.001$ under clustering. Cabinet experience, at $p = 0.046$ under the exact likelihood, is $p = 0.127$ under the approximation with clustering; the change comes from the approximation, not the clustering. Full output: table_B7_clustered.csv in the replication package.

C. Sharp Regression Discontinuity as an Exclusion Test of the Marginal-Exit Mechanism

The within-district rank gradient in Section 8.3 of the main text and the seat-loss coefficient in the parametric models for the LDP and KMT establish that intraparty competition predicts defection. The paper’s two-type framework (Section 5 of the main text) distinguishes *marginal exits*, driven by individual electoral performance, from *bloc exits*, driven by factional leadership. A sharp regression discontinuity (RD) at the seat-winning threshold isolates the marginal-exit channel: if individual performance uniformly drives defection, the RD should detect a discontinuity in defection probability at the threshold; if bloc exits dominate, the discontinuity should be absent because faction leaders take their cohort out regardless of individual vote margins.

The running variable is country-specific because the institutional cutoff is country-specific. In Malaysia under FPTP, I use the standard close-election convention: the threshold is the highest non-UMNO vote share in the district, so margin = UMNO vote share minus that. In Japan and Taiwan under SNTV, individual seat-winning depends on placing in the top M overall, but the theoretically relevant comparison is intraparty: I use the highest losing co-partisan vote share as the threshold (intra-LDP for Japan, intra-KMT for Taiwan), so margin = the candidate’s vote share minus that. Estimation uses local-linear regression with a triangular kernel and the mean-squared-error (MSE) optimal bandwidth selector of Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (CCT) (Calonico et al., [2014](#)), implemented in the `rdrobust` package.

The Japan estimate (Table C1) is statistically indistinguishable from zero. The point estimate (−8.6 percentage points) is directionally consistent with the within-district rank gradient (1.9 percentage points per rank step, Section 8.3 of the main text) and with the seat-loss average marginal effect implied by the Table B2 coefficient (−7.6 percentage points, computed as an average marginal effect (AME) in the replication code), but the

Table C1: Sharp regression discontinuity: testing the marginal-exit hypothesis.

	RD estimate	Robust 95% CI	<i>p</i> -value	Effective <i>N</i>
Japan (LDP, intra-LDP, ≤ 1993)	−0.086	[−0.404, 0.215]	0.550	928
Malaysia (UMNO, close-election, ≤ 2018)	−0.031	[−0.161, 0.113]	0.732	92
Taiwan (KMT, intra-KMT, ≤ 2001)	+0.450***	[0.236, 0.777]	<0.001	84

Notes: Sharp-RD estimates of the effect of winning a seat on the probability of defection at the next election. Running variable in Malaysia: UMNO vote share minus the highest non-UMNO vote share in the district (the close-election convention). Running variable in Japan and Taiwan: candidate's vote share minus the highest co-partisan losing vote share in the district (intraparty convention). Estimation: local linear with triangular kernel; CCT-MSE-optimal bandwidth via *rdrobust*. The Taiwan estimate is an artifact of a 0.9 percentage point bandwidth and only sixteen control observations (see text); it should not be interpreted as a substantive effect. *** $p < 0.001$.

robust 95 percent confidence interval [−40.4, 21.5] comfortably covers zero. The interval is wide, too wide to *confirm* a precise null: even with 928 LDP candidate-elections inside the CCT-optimal bandwidth, a rare binary outcome leaves the estimate unable to distinguish a forty-point drop from a twenty-one-point rise. The honest reading is modest in two directions at once. The point estimate carries the sign the marginal-exit channel predicts, so the RD cannot be claimed as positive evidence for the bloc-exit interpretation; and the interval is too wide to detect the discontinuity the marginal-exit hypothesis requires, so the design cannot separate the two channels at this precision. Two further cautions bound the exercise. Because the 1990 wave was overwhelmingly factional, the marginal-exit component in the pooled LDP sample is small by construction, so even a precise null here would test little; and under SNTV the party itself manages the division of votes across co-partisans, so the intraparty running variable is partly party-controlled. Density tests (Cattaneo et al., 2020; McCrary, 2008) sharpen rather than allay that concern selectively: no discontinuity in the running variable is detectable at the Japanese threshold ($p = 0.16$) or the Malaysian one ($p = 0.70$), but continuity is rejected at the Taiwanese threshold ($p = 0.03$), consistent with the KMT's centralized vote management and one more reason the Taiwanese estimate carries no weight. A smooth density at the Japanese threshold does not retire the concern entirely, since vote division is party-managed even where the density is smooth. The bloc-exit reading of the 1993 split therefore rests on the cohort evidence of Section 9

of the main text, not on this appendix: the 1990 Renewal cohort defectors had vote shares of 18.5 percent, statistically indistinguishable from the 19.4 percent average among LDP stayers (within shared districts the gap averages a third of a percentage point), and the split was overwhelmingly factional (87 percent Takeshita), organized by faction leaders after the post-Kanemaru succession contest rather than by individual members falling below the seat-winning margin. The RD (Figure C1) is reported as a transparency exercise about what a threshold design can and cannot rule out here; it does not detect a marginal-exit discontinuity, but neither can it exclude one.

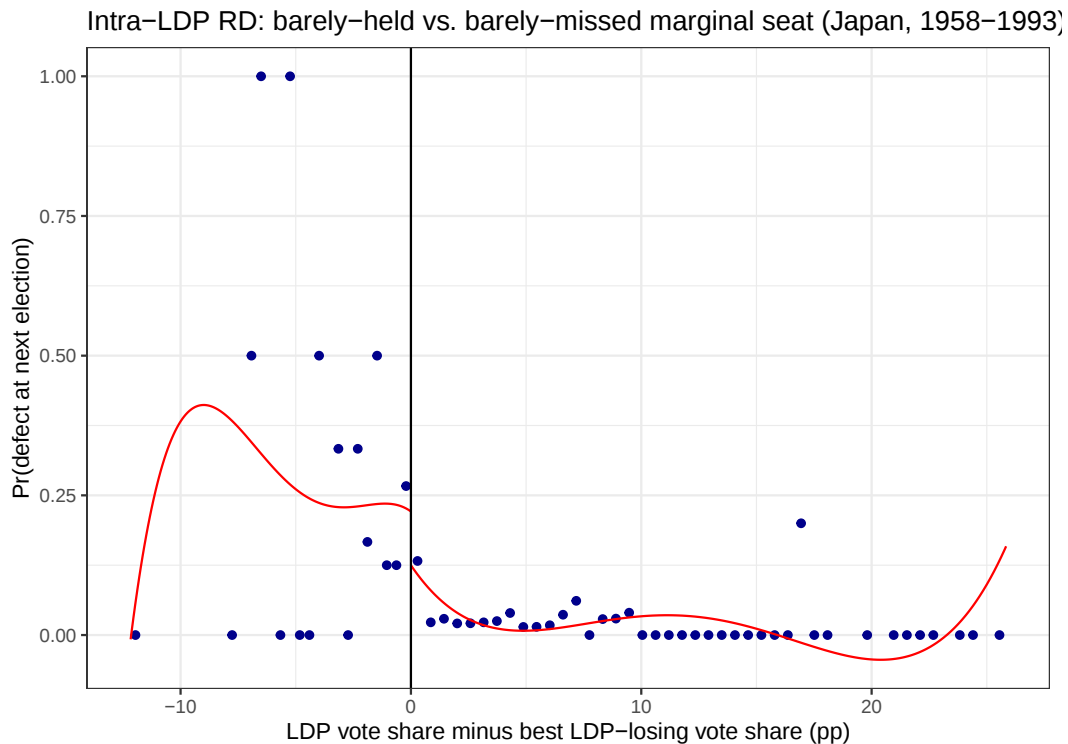


Figure C1: Intra-LDP regression discontinuity at the marginal LDP seat. LDP candidates in SNTV-era districts where at least one LDP candidate lost. Binned-mean defection rates plotted against the candidate’s vote-share margin from the highest losing LDP candidate in the district. Positive margin: the candidate held a seat that some other LDP candidate did not. Solid lines: global polynomial fit on each side of the threshold, shown for visualization; the estimates in Table C1 are local-linear within the CCT bandwidth. No discontinuity is visually apparent at zero; see the text for why the estimate is nonetheless too imprecise to adjudicate between the exit channels.

The Malaysia and Taiwan estimates should be read as evidence that the data infrastruc-

ture does not support an RD test in those countries. Under FPTP, UMNO won Peninsular Malaysian seats by margins of 20 to 40 percentage points across most of the panel period, leaving only ninety-two candidates within the CCT-optimal bandwidth around the seat-winning threshold and only nineteen defectors anywhere in the panel. Under SNTV with KMT dominance, only twenty KMT first-losers exist in the entire pre-2001 sample, and these cluster in a narrow band that produces a 0.9 percentage point bandwidth and a severely imbalanced effective sample; the resulting +45 percentage point point estimate is an artifact of these conditions rather than a substantive finding. The parametric models in Section 8 of the main text use the full sample and produce the substantively interpretable estimates for both countries.

This pattern of infeasibility is itself substantively informative. The institutional setup that gives the Japanese LDP under SNTV the variation needed for an RD test (multi-member districts with multiple LDP candidates per district routinely producing close intraparty races) does not exist in FPTP Malaysia or in KMT-dominated Taiwan, where the dominant party wins by large vote-share margins. Dominant parties accumulate large margins precisely because they monopolize state power, the same condition that drives the intraparty competition mechanism in the first place. Where the RD design is feasible (Japan), it neither detects nor excludes an individual-level discontinuity; where the design is not feasible (Malaysia, Taiwan), the sparsity near the threshold is consistent with the underlying argument, though I do not rest weight on it.

D. Cross-National Coefficient Estimates

Table D1 reports the coefficient estimates underlying the cross-national probe in Section 10 of the main text, where the results are presented on the probability scale (predicted probabilities in Figure 7 and average marginal effects in Table 6). Columns 1 and 2 are the two logit specifications summarized by the marginal effects in main-text Table 6; column 3 is the linear within-country model of the continuous defection rate referenced in the same section.

Table D1: Cross-national elite defection: coefficient estimates.

	Occurrence Pooled logit (cross-section)	Occurrence Bias-corr. FE (annual)	Rate Linear, FE (annual)
Coalition fragmentation	0.121* (0.048)	0.099 (0.135)	0.180 (0.117)
Election-cycle growth	1.890 (10.791)	2.532 (3.608)	−13.959* (5.421)
Legislative seat share	−3.821 (2.350)	−3.028** (1.051)	−4.531* (1.821)
Ruling-party age	0.062** (0.024)	0.037† (0.020)	−0.040* (0.019)
Country effects	None	Fixed	Fixed
<i>N</i>	72	322	319
Defection events	17	71	—

Notes: Logistic and linear regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; these are the estimates underlying the average marginal effects in main-text Table 6. Column 1: logit on the cross-section defection indicator, coded following Reuter and Gandhi (2011) (pooled, country-clustered SEs, intercept not shown). Column 2: annual defection indicator, Fernández-Val (2009) bias-corrected country-fixed-effects logit. Column 3: continuous defection *rate* (del Río, 2022), linear within-country model, election-cycle growth lagged one year, time-clustered SEs. Election-cycle growth enters as a proportion (per-unit scale); coalition fragmentation is a count of parties; legislative seat share is a proportion; party age in years. The logit (log-odds) and linear (rate-point) coefficients are not on a common scale; substantive magnitudes are reported on the probability scale in the main text. † $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.