Patterned and Predictable?
UK Parliamentary Political Careers, 1979-2010

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Background and motivation

- Professionalisation of parliamentary careers
- King (1981)
  - Career politician ‘taken over top posts from those who have had career outside Parliament’
  - Politics facilitation occupation
- Rush (1994)
  - Members serve longer
  - Increasing proportion reach ministerial positions (> number of positions available)
What we know

• Allen (2013) links pre-parliamentary experience and career trajectory
  – Occupation matter: pre-parliamentary Westminster experience associated with earlier age at election, reach higher office, faster
  – 1997 cohort (N= 242); chi-sq test

• Vannoni & John (2014)
  – Educational and occupational background matter; gender does not
  – 1997-2010 cohorts (N= 764); social sequence analysis
Research questions

• Are there observable patterns or types of parliamentary careers?
  – Yes

• Do patterns vary party?
  – A little

• What exogenous factors predict career trajectory?
  – Not occupation; female; age at first election
Data

• Data sources
  – Parliamentary Candidates UK (PCUK)
  – British Constituency Electoral Results
    • Who’s Who biography database (UK)
    • House of Commons Library
    • Butler’s British Political Facts (2014)

• Observe MPs elected from 1979-2010
  – Yearly measure of career ‘state’

• Configurations
  – 4 election cycles under Conservative govt; 3 under Labour and 1 Con/LD Coalition
Measuring careers

• Gay et al. (2010): 900+ roles MPs can occupy during their parliamentary career

• Vannoni & John (2014)
  – 3 point scale: Backbench, Frontbench, Great Offices of State

• Allen (2013)
  – 5 point scale: Backbench; PPS; Under-secretary; (Shadow) Ministers; (Shadow) Cabinet Minister/Chief Whips
### 11 point scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Allen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO</td>
<td>Other Great Offices of State*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HD</td>
<td>Other Heads of Department*</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>Ministers in Cabinet Office*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Ministries of State in HO FO and Financial Secretary*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Other Ministries of State*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UC</td>
<td>Under-Secretary of State in CO*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UP</td>
<td>Under-Secretary of State in HO, FO and HMT*</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UO</td>
<td>Other Under-Secretaries of State*</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>PPS to Under Secretary of State</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BB</td>
<td>Backbenchers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(=* includes shadow equivalents)
Analytic approach

• 1. Social sequence analysis
  – Examines duration and order of careers; treats data as categorical time-series

• Optimal Matching (OM) techniques creates dyadic distance measures between sequences, by comparing the states they are in at each period
  – Each sequence is compared to each other sequence once, and their distance is measured by summing up all the state differences
  – K means clustering using the distance matrix sequence

• 2. Modelling the clusters
  – Multinomial logit model of clusters w/ exogenous predictors
• Roy Galley: BB-BB-BB-BB-BB
• Brooks Newmark: BB-BB-MO-MO-MO-MO
• Tony Blair: BB-BB-BB-BB-BB-HD-HD-HD-HD-GO-GO-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM-PM
How to treat careers of different lengths?

• Because SSA is interested in time in each state, different career lengths pose something of an issue

• Normalisation
  – Standardizing the sequence length: treat each stage as a fraction of the overall career, thus ending up with comparable sequences
  – Stretched sequences have lower state variation...
  – But variation is low anyway: most MPs spend life on BB and 75% of MPs < 3 states
Types of parliamentary careers

1. **Middle managers**: promoted early; steady progression; successful careers
2. **Two termers**: short career, almost exclusively backbench
3. **Atypicals**: late bloomers in terms of promotion; varied career lengths; career cut short by some event
4. **Steady as you go**: long career on the backbench
5. **High flyers**: promoted quickly; reach highest levels of office; shorter careers
## Modelling the clusters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ref= short BB</th>
<th>All (mnl)</th>
<th>Lab (mnl)</th>
<th>Cons (mnl)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>- (1,2)</td>
<td>+ (1,2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oxford</td>
<td>- (1,2,3)</td>
<td>+ (1,2)</td>
<td>- (1,2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age at first election (log)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+ (1,2)</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yrs in local govt (log)</td>
<td>+ (1,2,3)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marginality (log)</td>
<td>- (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occ: business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occ: instr</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occ: manual</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>occ: other</td>
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<tr>
<td>labour</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first year</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Next steps

• Differences between our findings and Allen; V&J
  – Our findings are robust using Allen’s 5-pt scale
  – Is occupation a recent phenomenon?
• How best to deal with truncated cases?
  – Average career?
  – Early career?
• Towards a theory of parliamentary careers
  – Equivalent of ‘ambition theory’ for the UK?
  – Offices exist, but do ‘structures’?