C. Kam and I. Indridason, “The Timing of Cabinet Reshuffles in Five Westminster Parliamentary Systems,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 30 (2005)

**Overview**

Provide a theory of cabinet reshuffles that emphasizes systematic and time-varying causes. Authors argue that PMs employ cabinet reshuffles to retain power in the face of intraparty and electoral challenges to their leadership. Comparative work across Australia, Canada, Ireland, NZ, and UK over 1960-2001.

**Background**

* Despite a sustained media interest, there has been little (to no) study of this topic
* Academics frequently complain that reshuffling undermines cabinet’s managerial capacity, and as such it is not immediately obvious why the PM would ever reshuffle their cabinets (if this were the sole outcome attributable to the phenomenon)
* Historical accounts cause authors to consider reshuffles as strategic devices that PMs use to fend off intraparty rivals and to win elections, rather than as standard operative procedures or purely meritocratic mechanisms designed to recruit and keep talent in the cabinet
* Propose a framework in which cabinet reshuffles are contingent on the PM’s position within the governing party (or coalition) and in the electorate: the more vulnerable the PM to either an internal leadership challenge or electoral defeat, the greater the PM’s incentive will be to reshuffle (the PM’s vulnerability a function of institutional rule and prevailing political circumstances)
* Reshuffles defined as any change in ministerial personnel or responsibilities that affects more than two officeholders and at least two portfolios
* A variety of constraints makes it difficult for PMs to respond to the loss of an individual minister in a limited fashion (the loss of one often results in the moving of many)
* Assumptions in model: (1) PMs are primarily concerned with maintaining power – and to maintain power they must a) win elections and b) fend of intraparty rivals to their leadership; and (2) cabinet ministers have inherently mixed motives with respect to PM and the party – ministers fortunes are tied to their party (to become a cabinet minister you must be electorally successful) while also harbouring private desires (important cabinet posts, premiership, etc)
* Thus, PMs confront adverse selection and moral hazard problems

**Conclusions**

* Prediction is that PMs will reshuffle their cabinets as their intraparty, coalitional, and electoral positions become more precarious
* Three main results bear out this prediction:
  + The hazard of a reshuffle is highest in cabinets where institutional rules limit the PM’s management of the cabinet and place leadership selection under the control of the parliamentary party – therefore, reshuffles more likely in situations where PM’s agency loss to cabinet ministers is theoretically greatest
  + The hazard of a reshuffle rises whenever parliamentary and electoral popularity decline
  + The hazard of a reshuffle rises whenever the popularity gap between the PM’s party and the junior coalition party narrows
* Thus, PMs reshuffle whenever their intraparty, parliamentary, or electoral positions deteriorate and the PMs become identifiable to party members, coalition partners, and voters as political liabilities.
  + These conditions invite leadership challenges, threats of coalition termination, and electoral defeat – and thus they elicit reshuffles