

Why Parties Change: Some New Evidence Using Party Manifestos

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Edmund Burke defined a political party as a organization of people "united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed" (Pomper, 1992: 2). However, parties sometimes change their principles (and also their organization). Why do parties change? Various scholars have sought to explain party change. Lippman (1914) and Panebianco (1988) have looked mainly to external shocks--particularly election defeat--to explain party change. Katz and Mair (1990) and Appleton and Ward (1994) believe that certain changes in the environment have a particular effect on party organization. Wilson (1980, 1989; and Deschouwer, 1992) have focused on the visions and actions of individual leaders as the stimulus to change. Panebianco also expected more sweeping changes in the issue positions and organizational features of parties following a change in the sociological composition of the party's dominant coalition. The topic of party change, which has long attracted the attention of theorists, is also becoming the subject of more systematic empirical investigation, as witnessed by the massive compilation of data on party organizations in twenty countries from 1960 to 1990 edited by Katz and Mair (1992).

In a more modest attempt, Harmel and Janda undertook to collect data on changes in the organization and issue positions of political parties in Britain, Denmark, Germany, and the United States from 1950 to 1990.¹ To prepare for their effort, they formulated a theoretical framework explaining party change as a function of three major factors: (1) environmental shock, (2) leadership change, and (3) change in the dominant coalition (Harmel and Janda, 1994). Harmel, Heo, Tan, and Janda (1994) conducted a preliminary test of that theory using data collected on 210 organizational and policy changes in three British and three German parties from 1950 to 1990. They concluded:

The results of our preliminary empirical analyses have generally supported the view that while external factors (and most especially, poor electoral performances) may act as important stimuli for change, there is also an important role for the social (i.e., sub-party) actor to play in the theory of party change. Our test of electoral performance theory revealed that while a substantial portion of total party change could conceivably be linked to bad electoral performances, the latter falls considerably short of being either a necessary (as originally hypothesized) or sufficient condition for change, with large

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residuals remaining for all parties. Our search for complementary factors led us to posit an important role for change in organizational actors (i.e., leaders and dominant factions) in explaining some of the residuals. And indeed, our data provide evidence for such a role.

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In this paper, we conduct another test of the electoral performance portion of the explanation of party change, one that is entirely different from that done by Harmel et al. We use data from the European party manifesto project to identify times at which parties changed dramatically in their issue positions between adjacent elections. We then match those changes against a classification of elections to determine whether changes in issue positions tend to follow instances of electoral defeat. We find strong evidence that electoral defeat is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for parties to change their principles--or at least how their principles are packaged in election manifestos.

Electoral Performance as a Source of Party Change

In an important article on innovation in party systems, Lowi (1963) quotes from a 1914 book by Walter Lippman. Speaking of the famed "Tammany Hall" machine of the Democratic Party in New York City, Lippman says that it "becomes rigid when it is too successful, and only defeat seems to give it new life" (1914, 26). Unfortunately, Lippman did not expand on his observation. Nor does Lowi, whose thesis is that innovation is the function of the minority party in a party system (p. 571). His thesis is similar to the advertising theme of the Avis car rental company, the number two firm in the market, which used the slogan, "We try harder," to compete against the number one firm (Hertz).

Electoral performance as a party change is different and more in keeping with Lippman's comment. It assumes that defeat is the mother of party change. Obviously, this idea is not new. In 1983, Mair stated that the "revitalization" of party organization can "result from electoral defeat, in so far as the party interprets its losses as the rejection of its politics or its representativeness. There are many cases in the literature of parties seeking to renew their organizational effectiveness in the wake of electoral defeat" (1983, 408). Perhaps most explicitly, Panebianco links party change with

an organizational crisis unleashed by strong environmental pressure. Electoral defeat and deterioration in terms of exchange in the electoral arena are classic types of external challenges which exert very strong pressure on the party (1988, 243).

Panebianco's treatment of party change parallels ours in several ways, as will become clear. One way in which we differ is the focus on electoral defeat as the primary dynamic for change. The theoretical argument is as follows. All organizations are conservative in the sense of avoiding change, but parties are especially conservative, for several reasons. First, parties become identified with issue positions that constrain their political movement. Second, they depend on the support of certain social groups that constrain their social appeals. Third--as Panebianco

explains so well--they are built on delicate power bases, and change threatens organizational cohesion (1988, 38-40). In sum, Schlesinger notes:

To understand parties, we must recognize that they do not perform and adapt as do businesses, bureaus, or interest groups; nor can they be expected to do so, given their peculiar combinations of organizational properties. Parties are perhaps best described as forms of organized trial and error (1984, 390).

Unlike firms, which typically have full-time managers aided by a staff of lower-management supported by secretaries and clerks, most parties depend heavily on part-time leadership and volunteer labor. In this context, the leadership coalitions competing for control of the organization are unlikely to experiment with changing the organization. Their guiding principle is, "If it isn't broken, don't fix it."

When do competing leaders recognize that the party is broken and needs to be fixed? The evidence emerges most clearly after an election. As Schlesinger writes:

A party which does not respond to the electoral market will by definition lose to parties which do, and over the long run in a society where people are free to form new parties, it will find itself supplanted by responsive parties. . . .

Because the market sends clear and unavoidable signals about performance with respect to its particular goals, individuals or units most responsible for market success can readily be identified. ... Influence within the party, therefore, will follow closely individual success and failure in the electoral market (1984, 384).

While individuals' influence within the party may well wax with success and wane with failure, organizational change does not follow so symmetrically. Instead, party change is asymmetrically tied to party failure. Successful parties seldom change a winning formula. This is due not only to their organizational conservatism but also to their lack of desire to maximize the percentage of votes won. Despite Downs' assumption (1957), parties in competitive systems do not try to maximize their electoral winnings, in either seats or votes--for two reasons. First, in keeping with the underlying logic of the "minimum winning coalition," they avoid expanding their base so that the rewards of governing must be shared more widely. Second--and at the national level this may be even more important--governing parties have a stake in keeping the system competitive--in not driving out their opposition. Lack of competition not only eliminates the sport from the game of politics, but it also indicts the governing party for producing an undemocratic system.² Both factors prevent competitive parties from following a "killer instinct" after electoral success and encourage their inherent conservatism.

Case studies of party change

² In Mexico, the dominant PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) clearly avoided maximizing its electoral winnings in the 1960s. According to Philip, the PRI's "main concern was not to defeat the electoral opposition but to keep it in the game" (1988, 103.) There is evidence that it subsidized opposition parties and engineered an electoral reform law guaranteeing opposition parties limited representation in Congress.

In his important analysis of party organization, Panebianco cites several case studies in which electoral defeat stimulated party change. In the case of the French Gaullists, he notes that the party became more institutionalized at the Congress in Lille in 1967, when it adopted a new name, Union des Démocrates pour la République (UDR), and the old Gaullists shared power with a newer generation.

The occasion arose due to an external challenge: the noticeable loss in the Gaullist impetus in the 1965 presidential elections (the two electoral rounds between De Gaulle and Mitterrand) and then in the party's 1967 electoral defeat and loss of many seats. The changing of the guard at Lille led to an important party reorganization" (Panebianco, 1988,155).

In the case of the British Conservative Party, Panebianco links organization change to a series of electoral defeats:

The 1906 electoral débâcle brought about a modification of the dominant coalition (Balfour, the old leader, lost power to Chamberlain); the result was a temporary reorganization which de-institutionalized the party, taking power from the Central Office (then controlled by Balfour) and giving it to the National Union (then controlled by Chamberlain) (p. 250).

The defeat in 1910 brought Bonar Law and new generation of leaders to power, leading to significant organizational restructuring (with Steel-Maitland at the head of the Central Office) (p. 250).

The next most important reform took place in 1948 under the impact of the renewal imposed by the 1945 defeat (pp. 250-251).

The internal movement for organizational reform regained vitality after the 1964 electoral defeat. . . . Up until then the new leader had been chosen through an informal meeting of party notables. Afterwards the leader was *elected* by the parliamentary group, and ballots were used if no candidates obtained an absolute majority in the first round (p. 251).

In 1975, after another electoral defeat, criteria for the election of the leader were once again modified. Two new clauses were introduced: the local party associations had to be consulted before electing a leader, and the parliamentarians gained the right to propose a vote of no confidence for the leader in office (p. 251).

In West Germany, Panebianco owes the organizational expansion and centralization of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 1973 to its loss of government in 1969, and to the confirmation of its loss in the 1972 elections (pp. 258-259). These specific examples of party change stimulated by electoral defeat provide some texture for the empirical analysis of party change, using data from the European Party Manifesto Project.

An Overview of the European Party Manifestos Project

As described in *Ideology, Strategy and Party Change* (Budge, Robertson, and Hearl, 1987), the European Party Manifestos Project grew out of a research group of the European Consortium for Political Research organized in 1979. The organizers said that their objective was "to investigate the ideology and strategy of post-war parties across countries within a common framework, so as to facilitate comparisons and ultimately to support generalizations about the way parties shape their appeals" (p. 17). They based their research on party manifestos or platforms, defined as the "recognizable statement of policy, which has the backing of the leadership as the authoritative definition of party policy for that election" (p. 18). Accordingly, they mounted an unprecedented international project to analyze the postwar election programs of all significant parties in 19 democracies.

The research procedures of the party manifesto project are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 and Appendix B of *Ideology, Strategy and Party Change*. Suffice it to say that individual country investigators had the task of classifying specific statements in the manifestos into one of 54 specific categories grouped into seven headings or "domains" as outlined in Table 1. They state:

The basic object of all coding with the exception of West Germany (where paragraphs were used) was to place each sentence in each of the manifestos/platforms or their equivalents under one (and no more than one) of the categories. Sentences were coded since they form the natural grammatical unit in most languages. However, very long grammatical period were composed into 'quasi-sentences' where the sense changed between colons or commas (p. 24).

Refer to Table 1

To facilitate intercoder reliability and comparability across parties and countries, the researchers opted for counting the *topics* that the manifestos discussed rather than the actual *content* --i.e., the policy positions actually taken in the manifestos. In other words, the study counted

the number of sentences referring to each policy area out of the total number of sentences in the programme. Sentences were counted rather than single words or phrases because we want to catch the stress laid on certain ideas and concerns rather than on slogans . . . (p. 31).

In practice, the researchers computed percentages rather than raw frequencies of sentences in each of the 54 categories, "because we did not think that the constantly increasing length of election programmes--an almost mechanical tendency--should affect analyses of their internal concerns" (p. 31).

The manifesto data are available through the ESRC Data Archive at the University of Essex.³ As distributed in 1992, the data had 1,018 cases: one case for each party platform coded for each election from 1945 to the last election analyzed in the mid-1980s--the most recent being the German election of 1987. Each case consists of a set of percentages for each of the 54 coding categories and a count of the total number of sentences (or paragraphs in the case of Germany) included in the analysis.

One should note that some of the most critical party programs are left out of the manifesto database. The most notable of these is perhaps the SPD's Godesberg Program. In November of 1959, at a party conference in Godesberg, the SPD produced a new party program outlining the most fundamental party changes in SPD history. As Bark and Gress describe it, "The program represented a fundamental shift in philosophical direction for the party, from primary emphasis on Marxism and Marxist solutions for problems of social and economic life, to primary emphasis on recognizing the achievements of liberal capitalism" (Bark and Gress, 1989, v1: 445). Although these changes had originated in the earlier 1952 Dortmund conference, they were not fully articulated and integrated into a formal party document until the Godesberg Conference. (Bark and Gress, 1989, v1: 445) This program is an example of the type of fundamental party change which will be missed in the manifesto database because it was not produced in the platform immediately preceding the election. Despite such omissions, the manifesto project represents one of the most important data sets for the comparative study of political parties and one that should be used to test theories of party change.

³ The data are available in machine readable form with control cards for creating an SPSS file. Documentation for the machine readable data is contained in I. Budge, D.R. Robertson, D.J. Hearl, H.D. Klingemann, and A. Volkens, Principal Investigators, *ECPR Party Manifesto Project* (ESCR Data Archive study number 2139), University of Essex, Colchester, United Kingdom 1992.

Table 1

Using the Manifesto Data to Study Party Change

Since the project was first publicized (Budge and Laver, 1984), data generated from this project have been used by numerous researchers in various ways. The first major book studied similarities and differences of parties within countries (Budge, Robertson, and Hearl, 1987; Strom, 1989). Other researchers have linked what parties promised in their election manifestos to their expenditures when in office (Budge and Hofferbert, 1990; Klingeman and Hofferbert, 1990; Budge and Hofferbert, 1992), or to policy outputs (Kalogeropoulos, 1989; Budge and Laver, 1993). Still others have used the data to predict which parties will join in government coalitions (Budge and Laver, 1992; Strom and Liepart, 1993) and even the decline of party identification (Klingemann and Wattenberg, 1992).

In this study, we use the manifesto data quite differently from previous researchers to study party change between adjacent elections for eight parties: the British Conservative, Labour, and Liberal parties; the German Christian Democrats, Free Democrats, and Social Democrats; and the U.S. Democratic and Republican parties. For each country, we cover the pairs of elections as identified in Table 2:

Table 2: 29 Pairs of Elections in the Study

Total number of party manifestos paired by elections in the study:	
For Britain:	32 (10 pairs for 3 parties all years except 1979-83).
For Germany:	30 (10 pairs for 3 parties in all years)
For the U.S.:	<u>16</u> (8 pairs for 2 parties in all years)

Total = 78 pairs or cases

In each of the 78 cases in our analysis, we compare the profiles of topics discussed in the party manifesto for one election with the profile of topics discussed in the same party's manifesto for the previous election. We compare the profiles in adjacent elections by regressing the percentages of topics discussed in the second election on the prior election and by computing the product-moment correlation to summarize the comparison.⁴ If parties do not change much in their issue positions from one election to the next, then there will be a high correlation between the profile of manifesto topics discussed in adjacent election years. The greater the change in issue positions, the lower the correlation. To illustrate the method, Figure 1 plots the correlation between topics discussed in the election manifestos of the German Social Democratic Party for 1983 and 1987 for 37 coding categories.⁵ The observed correlation of .78 was one of the highest computed for any of our pairs. For example, code 411, which tagged mentions of what the party proposed to advance "Technology and Infrastructure," accounted for 11.8% of mentions in 1983 and 10% in 1987. On the other hand, code 606, which tagged appeals for "National Effort and Social Harmony," accounted for 4.2% of mentions in 1983 but none in 1987. These data suggest that the issue positions of the SPD changed very little between 1983 and 1987, as reflected in the

Britain: 11 election-pairs	Germany: 10 pairs	United States: 8 pairs
1945-50	1949-53	1948-52
1950-51	1953-57	1952-56
1951-55	1957-61	1956-60
1955-59	1961-65	1960-64
1959-64	1965-69	1964-68
1964-66	1969-72	1968-72
1966-70	1972-76	1972-76
1970-741	1976-80	1976-80
1974-1742	1980-83	
19742-79	1983-87	
1979-83*		

*No Liberal Party in 1983; allied with the SDP.

respective election manifestos.

Refer to Figure 1

As shown in Figure 2, the correlations for the 78 comparisons ranged from a low of -.20 to a high of .89. The low of -.20 was between the election manifestos of 1955 and 1959 for the

⁴ The data file distributed with the manifesto project is not configured to support this analysis. The original file regards the 54 percentage categories as variables and the 1,018 party manifestos as the cases. To conduct this analysis the file needs to be transposed (which can be done using the FLIP command in SPSS) so that the 54 percentages become the cases and the party manifestos for each elections become the variables. Then the pr

⁵ Although the coding scheme of the manifesto project contains 54 distinct categories, some parties simply do not discuss topics that fit under some coding categories at all or do not do so in adjacent elections. Topics that are not discussed earn 0 percent in both elections, artificially raising the correlation and thus inflating the "agreement" between platforms. All correlations reported in this paper are based on non-zero percentages in at least one of the years. Thus, the number of cases involved in the correlations varies, usually between 25 and 40.

British Liberal party, and the high of .89 was between the 1960 and 1964 platforms of the U.S. Democratic party.

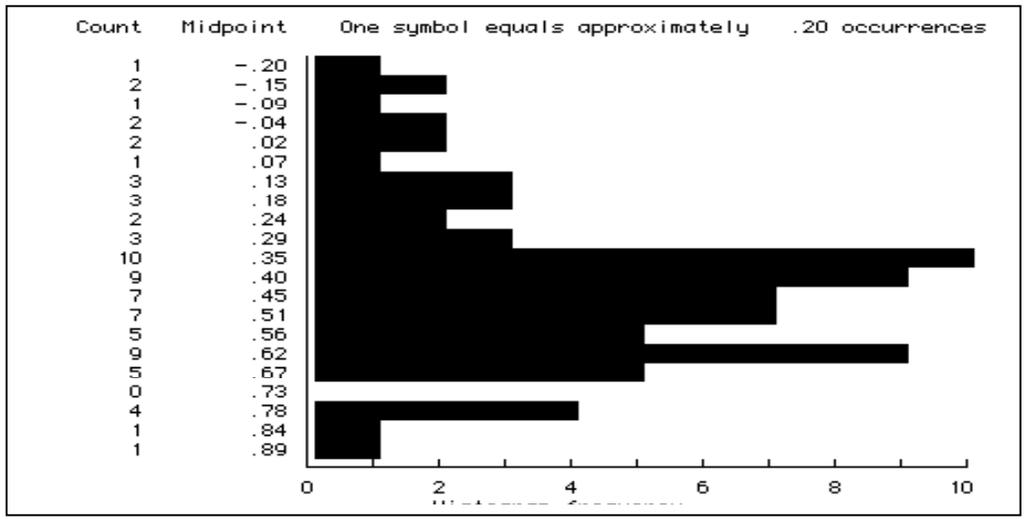


Figure 2:

Histogram of 78 Correlations between Party Platforms in Adjacent

As shown in Table 3, parties differed considerably in repeating the same themes between elections, with a good deal of variation among parties associated with the country. The American parties generally showed more consistency in platform themes between election years, followed by the German parties. The British parties, particularly the British Liberals demonstrated the most volatility.

Table 3: Central Tendency and Variation in Correlations for Party Manifestos, by Party

Summaries of By levels of Variable	CORR PARTY Value	Label	correlation between manifesto codings		
			Mean	Std Dev	Cases
For Entire Population			.4131	.2439	78
PARTY	11	British Conservative	.3609	.1689	11
PARTY	12	British Labour	.3773	.2018	11
PARTY	13	British Liberal	.1290	.2261	10
PARTY	21	German CDU	.4130	.2826	10
PARTY	22	German FDP	.4140	.2454	10
PARTY	23	German SPD	.5160	.1821	10
PARTY	31	US Democratic	.6213	.2120	8
PARTY	32	US Republican	.5513	.1190	8

Given these data, the task now is to try to account for the patterns. Why do parties change their issue positions dramatically between elections? From the particular theoretical perspective taken here, we are primarily interested in learning whether poor electoral performance in one election results in parties dramatically changing their manifesto profiles before contesting the subsequent election.

Classification Scheme for Party Perceptions of Elections

Party	Election	Result	Party	Election	Result
Conservative	1950	Tolerable	FDP	1953	Disappointing
Conservative	1951	Gratifying	FDP	1957	Calamitous
Conservative	1955	Gratifying	FDP	1961	Triumphal
Conservative	1959	Triumphal	FDP	1965	Tolerable
Conservative	1964	Disappointing	FDP	1969	Disappointing
Conservative	1966	Disappointing	FDP	1972	Gratifying
Conservative	1970	Tolerable	FDP	1976	Disappointing
Conservative	19741	Disappointing	FDP	1980	Triumphal
Conservative	19742	Calamitous	FDP	1983	Tolerable
Conservative	1979	Gratifying			
Labour	1951	Disappointing	SPD	1953	Calamitous
Labour	1955	Disappointing	SPD	1957	Disappointing
Labour	1959	Disappointing	SPD	1961	Gratifying
Labour	1964	Gratifying	SPD	1965	Tolerable
Labour	1966	Gratifying	SPD	1969	Gratifying
Labour	1970	Disappointing	SPD	1972	Triumphal
Labour	19741	Tolerable	SPD	1976	Tolerable
Labour	19742	Tolerable	SPD	1980	Disappointing
Labour	1979	Disappointing	SPD	1983	Calamitous
Liberal	1950	Calamitous	Democratic	1952	Disappointing
Liberal	1951	Calamitous	Democratic	1956	Tolerable
Liberal	1955	Disappointing	Democratic	1960	Gratifying
Liberal	1959	Disappointing	Democratic	1964	Triumphal
Liberal	1964	Tolerable	Democratic	1968	Disappointing
Liberal	1966	Tolerable	Democratic	1972	Calamitous
Liberal	1970	Disappointing	Democratic	1976	Gratifying
Liberal	19741	Gratifying	Republican	1952	Triumphal
Liberal	19742	Disappointing	Republican	1956	Gratifying
Liberal	1979	Disappointing	Republican	1960	Disappointing
CDU	1953	Triumphal	Republican	1964	Calamitous
CDU	1957	Triumphal	Republican	1968	Gratifying
CDU	1961	Disappointing	Republican	1972	Triumphal
CDU	1965	Gratifying	Republican	1976	Disappointing
CDU	1969	Disappointing			
CDU	1972	Calamitous			
CDU	1976	Tolerable			
CDU	1980	Tolerable			
CDU	1983	Triumphal			

PARTY	<u>Calamitous</u>	<u>Disappointing</u>	<u>Tolerable</u>	<u>Gratifying</u>	<u>Triumphant</u>	Row Total
British Conservative	1	3	2	3	1	10
British Labour		5	3	2		10
British Liberal	2	4	2	1		9
German CDU	1	2	2	1	3	9
German FDP	1	3	2	1	2	9
German SPD	2	2	2	2	1	9
US Democratic	1	2	1	2	1	7
US Republican	1	2		2	2	7
Column Total	9	23	14	14	10	70
	12.9	32.9	20.0	20.0	14.3	100.0

Using Electoral Performance to Explain Manifesto Change

At the beginning, we assumed that parties were conservative organizations that were unlikely to change unless forced. According to a performance theory of party change, parties may be forced to change when they perform badly in elections. We have classified the elections in our study according to a classification scheme tailored to each party's performance in each election. We can now apply our classification of party performance in the election *following* the promulgation of each new party manifesto. If the party performed well in the election subsequent to its new platform, the theory predicts that the party would *not* change its platform much for the subsequent election. If, however, the party performs very poorly in the election that follows the promulgation of its new platform, the theory predicts that the party *may* dramatically change its platform, but not necessarily that *it will*.. More precisely, the theory states that electoral defeat is a necessary but not a sufficient reason for party change.

Appendix B contains eight graphs that plot the correlations over time between coding categories for party manifestos in adjacent elections, one for each party in the study. Lines are superimposed on the graphs to indicate when the party suffered a disappointing election (thin lines) and a calamitous elections. Examining these graphs, one cannot discern a strong relationship between electoral performance and low correlations of manifesto codings. However, one would expect such a relationship only if electoral performance were a sufficient condition of manifesto change. If the theory states that poor electoral performance is a necessary condition of manifesto change, we must look at the data differently. We need to isolate instances of major manifesto change (i.e., very low correlations between elections) and determine whether they occurred *only* after poor electoral performance. View in this light, the data behave very closely to expectations.

Table X reports all the correlations that fell to

	<u>Lowest correlations</u>		<u>Type of election</u>
Britain			
Conservative	1950-51	.20	<i>gratifying</i>
	1966-70	.11	disappointing
	1974b-79	.18	calamitous
Labour	1970-74a	-.12	disappointing
Liberal	1951-55	-.06	calamitous
	1955-59	-.20	disappointing
	1966-70	.04	tolerable
	1970-74a	-.14	disappointing
	1974b-79	.02	disappointing

Germany

CDU	1953-57	-.03	<i>triumphal</i>
	1957-61	-.13	<i>triumphal</i>
FDP	1953-57	.17	disappointing
	1957-61	.05	calamitous
	1969-72	.11	calamitous
SPD	1953-57	.13	calamitous

United States

Democrats	1968-72	.36	disappointing
	1972-76	.36	calamitous
Republicans	1960-64	.42	disappointing
	1964-68	.37	calamitous