

Party competition over time:  
How voters and intra-party structure constrain  
party policy shifts

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# **1 Party competition over time: Constraints on shifting party policy platforms**

This work is an analysis of party policy change over time. So far, the predominant models of party competition are static. They study each election in isolation thereby assuming, in effect, that parties choose policy platforms from scratch. I argue that integrating the time dimension in theories of party competition allows for a more realistic perspective on party behavior.

Dismissing time effects, I argue, leads to misleading expectations of party behavior and ignores the role of the status quo. Static models of party competition usually aim at predicting which policy positions will be chosen. Based on assumptions on the policy space and theories on party and voter behavior, the models study whether the assumptions result in stable policy configurations (i.e. equilibria). If this is the case, the models are able to make predictions where competitive parties should locate. These predictions, in turn, are tested against empirical data on party policy positions to test the plausibility of the model's assumptions. For the next election, the process starts again delivering new predictions on party policy platforms.

Hence, static models of party competition answer the question where parties' optimal policy positions are. Yet, they do not consider *how* parties actually arrive at these most-preferred stances because implicitly the parties' past is discounted. This simplifying assumption is likely to be false. Parties cannot choose positions independent of their past policy stances. After all, party labels *do* stand for some policy position. Thus, *choosing new positions always implies a shift away from the status quo towards a superior policy position*. In what follows, I study the consequences of this insight and advocate a dynamic perspective on models of party competition.

## **1.1 The choice of party policy positions and party policy shifts**

Tony Blair's "New Labour" is one of the most prominent party policy shifts in the British post-war era. Between 1992 and 1997, the British Labour party changed in several ways including a change of leadership, intra-party decision-making, the party's image, and policy positions. Labour got rid of its "tax and spend" policies presenting an election manifesto which was much more moderate than its predecessor. Stating that "the policies of 1997 cannot be those of 1947 or 1967" (Labour Party 1997), the 1997 election program emphasizes the

renewal and the reforms associated with the party policy position and distinguishes the new proposed policies from the previously pursued ones.

Although Labour won the general election in 1997, Blair's strategy to move away from its previous policy platform also entailed risks. Perhaps most important, it was crucial to convince voters that Labour was serious about its newly proposed policies. Blair was very successful in doing so. Being party leader only since 1994, he was not associated with Labour's past policies so that his pledges for party renewal were credible. Similar pledges by leaders who had previously pursued other policies would have been less credible. Moreover, Blair's charisma helped to convince voters that Labour had changed. But what would have happened if Blair would have been responsible for the policies represented in the 1992 general election? And what if Blair's prestige would have been worse?

The difficulties associated with changing party policy positions become even more apparent when turning to the British Conservatives after the general election in 2005. The Tories had lost the last three elections to Labour (under Blair) and David Cameron (who became party leader after the electoral defeat in 2005) was in a similar situation as Blair in the mid-1990s. The Tories' policy platform did not attract enough voters to replace Labour in government. Cameron therefore aimed at moderating party policies to win the next general election. Yet, he was less successful than Blair. Although Cameron aimed at changing party policies, he was not able to dissociate the party's image from the Thatcher years (Evans 2008). The resulting mixed messages made voters unsure what the party actually stands for and resulted in an election manifesto for the 2010 general election which the Economist calls "the longest betting-slip in history" (The Economist 15 April 2010).

A party's internal structure also affects its ability to shift policy positions. Consider, for example, the situation of Felipe González, leader of the Spanish Social Democrats (PSOE) between 1974 and 1997. After the electoral defeat in 1979, González advocated a new electoral strategy involving more moderate policies to win votes of the electoral center but the party congress rejected his proposal to water down the party's Marxist image (see Share 1999; Maravall 2008). As a consequence, González refused to run for reelection and the party congress finally agreed on reforming internal rules increasing the control of the party leadership over the organization. With the new party rules, González was able to reform party policies and to win the national election in 1982.

The examples show that parties do not choose policy positions from scratch. Rather, choosing new policy platforms always entails a shift away from the present policy position. This shift of perspectives is unproblematic as long as actors always move away from the status quo to reach an optimal outcome. Yet, this simplifying assumption is unlikely to hold. New policy positions need to be advertised and voters have to believe that a party truly represents the proposed policies. Moreover, a party's internal structure may affect the likelihood of moving away from its policy position. The constraints may lead parties to refrain from choosing optimal policy positions. It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the dominant role of the status quo.

### 1.1.1 The dominant role of the status quo

Decision-making research highlights the traps of making rational or “good” decisions. One important reason for “bad” decisions is the so-called *status-quo trap*. When making decisions, individuals compare the pros and cons of various alternatives. Yet, they do not devote the same attention to all options. The current state of the world, the status quo, plays a dominant role and shapes future actions. People tend to stick to the status quo because it appears to be the safer option.<sup>1</sup>

Actors may refrain from making decisions if *costs* are involved. The time it takes to implement changes is perhaps the most prominent example: Actors refrain from taking the costs of comparing the pros and cons of alternative choices if the potential benefits are only marginal. Hence, sticking to the status quo can be rational.

Moving away from the status quo also entails *uncertainty*. The status quo is a “safe bet” whereas alternative options – including those expected to leave a decision-maker better off – entail risks. This is the case because individuals often lack information on the consequences of alternative options. When comparing job offers, for example, the monthly salary is an indicator which is not likely to be affected by uncertainty. Yet, other factors like the flexibility in work time, job satisfaction, or collegiality may be harder to evaluate. These factors are well known for the status quo (i.e. the current job) but less so for alternative job offers. If environmental factors are quite satisfactory in the current position, it is questionable

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<sup>1</sup> In one experiment (reported in Hammond et al. 2006: 121-122), people randomly receive one of two gifts (a Swiss chocolate bar or a mug) of approximately the same value. They are then asked whether they would like to exchange their gift for the other one. Because both items have the same prize, one would expect that around 50% of the participants substitute their gifts. In fact, only 10% do. It is also shown (Hammond et al. 2006: 122) that the status quo's appeal increases with the number of alternative options.

whether one would change positions for the sake of marginal salary improvements but taking the risk of higher uncertainty associated with alternative jobs. In other words, people may prefer a sufficient yet not optimal status quo they know to an alternative that *could* leave them better off.

### 1.1.2 How the status quo affects party policy shifts

This reasoning may be applied to political parties. Reaching optimal policy positions often requires moving away from the status quo so that parties have to consider the costs and the uncertainty when doing so. Suppose that a given (static) model predicts optimal party policy positions. Neglecting the time dimension, the predictions entail that the parties just choose the optimal platforms. Yet, what if “choosing” a policy platform actually means that parties have to *shift* their policy platforms?

The status-quo trap implies that a party may stick to its policy position even if a different policy platform exists that would leave it better off. Such a behavior is especially likely if the difference in the utilities derived from the status quo and the optimal policy position is negligible. A shift promising to increase a party vote share by, say, 0.2% may not lead parties to shift their policy positions. The potential benefits of the policy shift may simply not outweigh its costs (including time, personnel, and financial resources).

In addition, uncertainty on the consequences of alternative policy positions may affect party policy shifts. Static models usually assume that parties know the effects of policy positions with certainty. Yet, parties typically know more about the consequences of their current policy position than on those entailed in alternative policy platforms. For instance, parties know the electoral consequences their current policy platform generates. Although an alternative policy program *could* leave the party better off than the status quo, uncertainty remains whether the forecasts predicting an increase in the party’s vote share really will hold. If the predictions are wrong, parties risk losing traditional voters “by too-blatant appeals to the new target groups” (Wilson 1994: 271) who, in turn, may not perceive a party’s policy change.

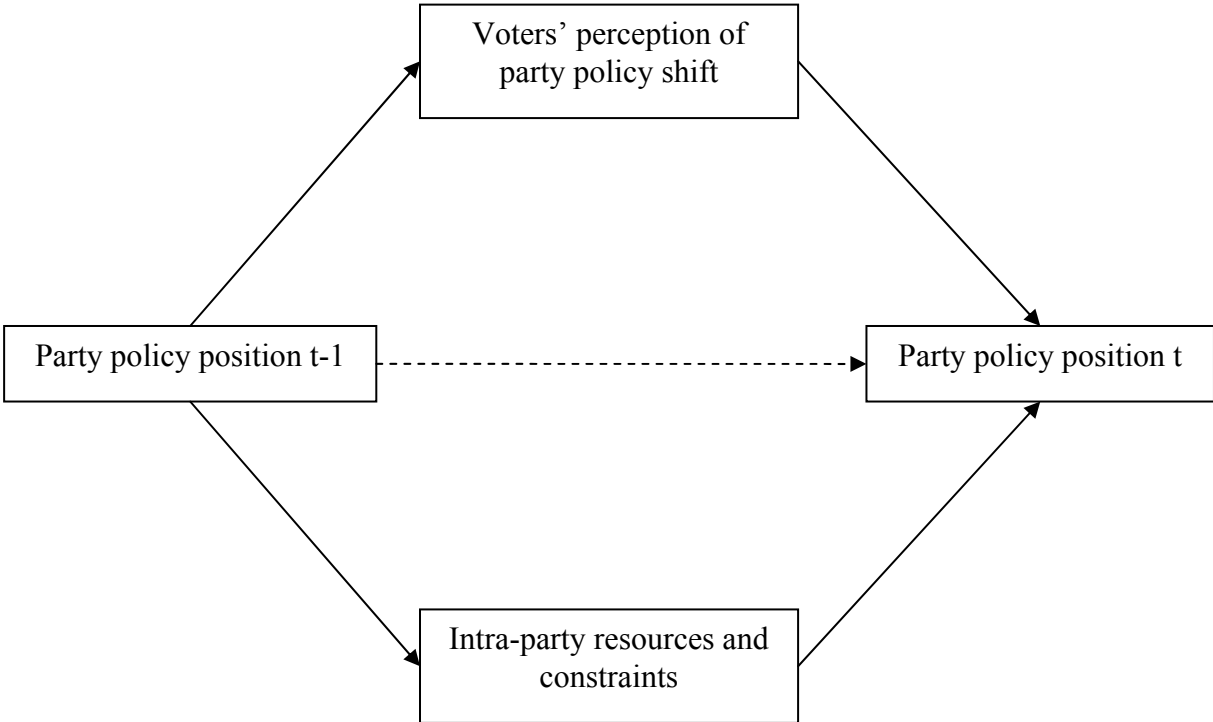
While existing static models of party competition highlight the benefits of choosing optimal policy platforms, I draw attention to the costs implied when moving away from previously pursued policies. I argue that parties weigh the potential benefits and costs associated with such shifts. Specifically, I emphasize costs that systematically vary across

parties and may hence account for differences in party behavior when shifting policy platforms. I also highlight the role of uncertainty involved in party position shifts. Parties typically know more about the consequences of their present policy platform than on those of alternative policy positions. Choosing new policy positions thus increases a party’s uncertainty. Indeed, shifting the policy platform can leave a party worse off than sticking to its currently pursued policies.

1.1.3 Time and its consequences: How voters and intra-party structure constrain party policy shifts

Introducing the time dimension modifies models of party competition. First, moving the policy position away from the status quo involves costs because changing policy platforms requires time, personnel and financial resources. Second, policy shifts entail uncertainty because parties lack information on the consequences entailed in moving away from the status quo. If potential new voters do not perceive a party’s change of policy positions, the shift may leave it worse off than sticking to its policy position.

**Figure 1.1: Constraints on party policy shifts: The role of voters’ perceptions and intra-party structure**



These insights motivate studying party competition from a different perspective. Rather than explaining where parties should locate to maximize their utilities, it is worthwhile to study

how they actually reach optimal positions and which problems they face pursuing this goal. In other words, *what constraints do parties face when shifting their policy positions?*

In what follows, I answer this question emphasizing two factors (see Figure 1.1). First, the parties' uncertainty in making policy shifts stems from the electoral market. Voters differ in their perception of party policy shifts. If potential new voters do not perceive party platform changes, a party may be worse off moving away from the status quo. Second, party policy shifts are constrained by the parties' internal structures. The distribution of power within parties, intra-party decision-making rules, and the role of party members differ across parties. Whereas some parties are more likely to overcome constraints in adapting their policy positions to new situations, other parties suffer from their organizational "baggage" and inflexibility. These differences account for different party shift behavior. I discuss these two factors in more detail.

## 1.2 Voters and their perceptions of party policy shifts

"Oceania was at war with Eurasia and in alliance with Eastasia. [...] Actually, as Winston well knew, it was only four years since Oceania had been at war with Eastasia and in alliance with Eurasia. But that was merely a piece of furtive knowledge which he happened to possess because his memory was not satisfactorily under control. Oceania was at war with Eurasia: therefore Oceania had always been at war with Eurasia." (George Orwell, "1984")

In static models of party competition, political parties take policy positions and voters, in turn, react to the parties' signals casting their ballot for the party maximizing their expected utilities. Which policy positions parties have taken in the past is irrelevant because voters neglect all kinds of information on past party policy platforms. In that sense, voters in models of party competition are similar to Winston Smith, the main character in Orwell's *1984*. Parties change policies (e.g. allies and enemies) and voters soak up the new information completely forgetting about the past. Taken seriously, this assumption amounts to thought-control.

Can we indeed apply Orwell's reasoning to our models of party competition? I argue that we cannot. In Orwell's dystopia, power is based on a totalitarian system in which a single party (INGSOC) controls citizens' lives. There are no elections, freedom of press, rival parties, and therefore, no opposition. Moreover, thoughts and actions deviating from the party line are "thoughtcrimes". Things are different in democratic systems which are in the focus of models of party competition. Voters can opt to gather information or prefer to stay



uninformed. Moreover, they have various sources of information from which they can pick and choose. By doing so, they may trust some parties and distrust others. Regarding party policy shifts, no party controls voters' memory of the past. Hence, the perception of party policy shifts differs across voters and parties.

In what follows, I specify a theoretical model of how voters perceive party policy shifts. Following research on public opinion (Zaller 1992), I argue that the perception of party policy shifts is a two-stage process. First, voters *receive* information on party policy shifts. If the reception fails, voters stick to their previous perception of a party's policy position. Second, voters decide whether to *accept* (i.e. consider credible) newly received information. Whereas the reception of a party policy shift is a cognitive task, the decision whether to accept the shift is a matter of beliefs. Only if voters receive and accept a party's shift message, they *perceive* a party position shift away from the status quo. Yet, if the reception or the acceptance fails, voters stick to the status quo.

Testing the proposed two-stage process is difficult because the existing surveys typically do not ask whether voters receive and accept party shift messages. In what follows, I therefore study the observable implications of the perception process. I hypothesize whether and how covariates affect the reception and the acceptance of party policy shifts and how the hypothesized effects translate into testable predictions for the perception of party policy shifts.

It is the cognitive aspects of receiving political information that I expect to affect the reception of party policy shifts. Here, I study the incentives and the ease of processing relevant information. Specifically, I argue that voters with lower costs for gathering information, that is, more educated and politically aware individuals, are more likely to receive party position shifts. Moreover, voters changing their preferences have more incentives to track party changes to update their political market information. In addition, party- and party-system specific factors affect the voters' likelihood of receiving information. Government parties are more visible than those in opposition so that their ability to shift policy platforms is higher. Moreover, substantive policy changes (such as "New Labour") are more likely to draw voters' attention than minor adjustments of a party's policy platform. Finally, party systems differ and the larger the number of relevant parties, the higher the number of actors sending information and hence, the lower the probability that voters receive party policy shifts.

The acceptance of party policy shifts hinges on factors that affect the voters' evaluation of a party's credibility. In particular, I study the effect of party leader changes and party leader prestige. I argue that changes in the party leadership and high prestige make the acceptance of party policy shifts more likely. Furthermore, I hypothesize that parties are constrained by their past behavior because constantly shifting the policy position reduces a party's credibility. In addition, I postulate that a voter's party identification affects the acceptance of party policy shifts: Identification with a party increases a voter's likelihood of accepting the party policy shift if it is towards his or her personal policy preferences. In contrast, voters who identify with a party are less likely to accept platform changes away from the personal policy position. Moreover, party policy shifts are more likely to get accepted if they are in line with shifts of a voter's policy position. In contrast, voters are less likely to accept party platform changes running counter to shifts in public opinion. Finally, party ideology and the party system generate voter expectations on where parties should locate relative to each other. In the United Kingdom, for instance, Labour is expected to hold a policy position left of the Conservatives. I hypothesize that party policy shifts away from these expectations are less likely to be accepted. In that sense, parties are constrained by the ideological expectations voters attribute to them.

The outlined mechanisms help us understanding the political behavior of voters. Yet, I am primarily interested in the effects of voters' perception on party policy changes. In general, parties benefit from higher reception and acceptance values and are thus more likely to shift their policy platforms. In case the reception or acceptance differ across voters, a party benefits most if voters being worse off by its policy shift do not perceive the party change while potential new voters do receive and accept the party's shift message. I derive hypotheses how the covariates influencing the voters' reception and acceptance of party policy shifts also affect the likelihood that parties change their policy platforms. I test the postulated hypotheses on a sample of party position shifts in ten West European countries.

### 1.3 Intra-party structure

“A leader in the Democratic Party is a boss, in the Republican Party he is a leader.”

Harry S. Truman

“Remember the difference between a boss and a leader; a boss says 'Go!' – a leader says 'Let's go!'”

E. M. Kelly

In addition to the voters' perceptions of party policy changes, parties are also constrained by their respective intra-party structure. Parties are organizations representing members, sometimes from regions with diverse interests, occasionally also driven by intra-party factions. Whether parties are able to shift their policy positions hinges on intra-party factors such as the role of party members in the party's decision-making process.

I postulate a model distinguishing two types of actors within parties: a party elite and the party members on the ground (Katz and Mair 1993).<sup>2</sup> I argue that party members provide resources and manpower helping the organization to change its policy position. In particular, party members provide information on voter preferences and which party policy shifts they accept (or even expect). Moreover, members represent the party on the ground and therefore help advertising party policy shifts. In addition, financial contributions of their members allow parties to run costly campaigns thereby increasing the likelihood of getting a policy shift heard. Thus, from the resources perspective, parties with a substantial mass organization are more able to shift their policy positions.

Yet, the importance of mass membership has been decreasing over time. Not only do parties lose members, it is also the role of members that has changed: The emergence of mass media, capital-intensive campaigning, and professional advisors diminish the advantage of parties with mass organizational strength. Public funding is a crucial factor allowing parties with lower membership figures to pay for TV and radio commercials, pollsters, and capital-intensive election campaigns without drawing on resources derived from membership organizations. Nowadays, public subsidies allow parties without mass organizational resources to catch up with their well organized rivals.

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<sup>2</sup> For the sake of variability, I use the terms “party members”, “party activists” and “rank-and-file” interchangeably.

Parties also differ in their formal decision-making processes. I model intra-party structure as a principal-agent relationship in which party members delegate competences to the party leadership. Party leaders, in turn, are accountable to the party's rank-and-file. In some parties, decision-making processes are hierarchical with centralized and exclusive power given to the party leadership. Other parties opt for a more inclusive and decentralized way of making decisions. Both forms have advantages and drawbacks. Whereas party leaders in more hierarchical parties have discretion to make use of their expertise, they are also more likely to shirk moving away from the members' preferences. In contrast, more inclusive and decentralized decision-making processes decrease the risk of shirking while simultaneously increasing the number of intra-party veto players and hence the party's inflexibility. I therefore hypothesize that more hierarchical parties are more likely to shift their policy platforms.

The members' role within the party also hinges on the resources the party leadership depends on. Financial means are probably the most important resource because they ensure a party's survival. The higher the leaders' dependence on the financial means provided by party members (i.e. membership fees), the more credible the members' "exit" option (Hirschmann 1970). Consequently, party leaders depending on their rank-and-file are not likely to move away from the members' preferences. Conflicts may arise because the two actor types – party elite and members on the ground – differ in their incentives and goals: Party members want to see specific policies enacted whereas party elites primarily aim at winning elections. Hence, I argue that leaders stick to their members' policy preferences if the party income mainly derives from member contributions.

The emergence of public funding reduces the party leaders' dependence on the financial means provided by party members. Therefore, the relative importance of membership fees decreases. Moreover, the amount of public subsidies usually depends on a party's vote share. This, in turn, increases the incentive for vote-seeking behavior. Hence, parties with the opportunity to hunt for votes will adopt party policy positions maximizing the party's vote share. So doing requires permanent adaptation of a party's policy position responding to its rivals' policy shifts and the demands of an increasingly volatile electoral market. I therefore hypothesize that the increasing relevance of public funding makes party policy shifts more likely.

## 1.4 The road ahead: Structure of the dissertation

To study the constraints parties face when shifting policy positions, Chapter 2 briefly reviews the literature on how previous research links political parties and time. In particular, I identify the key actors parties need to take into account – rival parties, voters, and their intra-party structure – and give a brief overview of previous research relating to them. Whenever possible, I highlight the role of time and its consequences on the incentives and constraints parties face when shifting their policy positions. In Chapter 3, I develop a theoretical model of how voters perceive party policy shifts. I postulate a two-stage model in which voters first receive information on party policy platform changes and subsequently decide whether to accept (i.e. consider credible) the information or not. The main results are summarized in three axioms stating how voters perceive party policy shifts (Axiom 1), how the voters' reception and acceptance affect party policy shifts (Axiom 2), and the effects of public opinion shifts on the parties' ability to shift their policy positions (Axiom 3). Chapter 4 breathes life into the theoretical framework stating how covariates affect the voters' likelihood of receiving and accepting party position shifts. With the axioms postulated in Chapter 3, I arrive at several hypotheses of how voter-, party-, and party system-specific factors affect the voters' probability to perceive party policy shifts and how these perceptions affect party policy shifts.

I first test the model at the voter level. Chapter 5 describes the data derived from several British panel election studies and sets up a statistical model to account for the postulated data-generating process. In Chapter 6, I present the empirical results. I start out by analyzing one particularly well known party position shift: “New Labour” in 1997. Concentrating on one party position shift holds party-specific covariates constant thus simplifying the model. In addition, restricting the model to one party shift allows using data of higher quality. Thereafter, I turn to a sample derived from pooling several party position shifts in various elections which allows for variation across parties.

I then turn my attention to political parties. I study how covariates impacting on voters' perceptions of party policy changes affect party policy shifts. Chapter 7 describes the selected cases, the data, and the statistical models to test the hypothesized effects. Chapter 8 presents the empirical results of party policy shifts in ten West European countries between 1945 and 2005.

Subsequently, I study the effect of intra-party factors on party policy shifts. Chapter 9 presents hypotheses of how a party's mass organizational strength, internal decision-making rules, and the relevance of public funding affect party behavior. Chapter 10 describes the sample, data, and the methods used to test the proposed effects. Because the data and the methods are similar to those presented in Chapter 7, I mainly concentrate on describing the data and the measurement of the key covariates. Chapter 11 presents the empirical results.

Chapter 12 summarizes how my results help to improve our understanding of party policy behavior. Furthermore, I outline how the findings (and non-findings) of this work can enrich future research. I highlight results that have not been in the focus of the current analysis but which constitute potentially rewarding topics for future research. In particular, these include research on voters' satisfaction with political institutions, party behavior reacting to "shocks" in the party system, dynamic representation, consequences of party leader changes, research on niche parties, and the role of public funding for ensuring fair party competition. Research in these fields will further extend and deepen our knowledge on voters, parties, and party systems.

## **2 Linking parties and time: Previous research on the effect of rival parties, voters, and party organizations**

Because of their central role in modern democracies (see e.g. Schattschneider 1942: 1), political parties are in the focus of research on voting, policy outputs and outcomes, legislative behavior, government formation, governance, and termination, and the stability of democratic systems. As I show in this chapter, one severe drawback of previous research on parties and party competition is the neglecting of *time*. Rather than looking at parties at discrete points in time, scholars should devote their attention to a dynamic perspective and model party position shifts over time. This dissertation project aims at narrowing this gap by studying party *change*, and more specifically, party *policy* change. Hereby I do not mean comparing snapshots of party history, for instance, comparing modern parties with those of the 1950s. Rather, I define party policy change as a *process* from one party policy platform at time  $t$  to a party platform at time  $t+1$ .

I further restrict myself to the *constraints* of party policy change. I am hence *not* dealing with motivation or incentives for party policy change. As the following discussion will show, recent research acknowledges the importance of a dynamic perspective identifying reasons why parties change over time. Yet, what is still missing is research on *how* parties change policy positions and what constraints they face when doing so. If parties (or party leaders) are constrained in their actions, this is due to other key actors they deal with. I therefore concentrate on the main actors parties face in their environment: Rival parties, the electorate, and their party organizations. I provide an overview of how previous research addresses the parties' interacting with rival parties, voters, and their own organizations. I also provide an overview of how these key groups affect party behavior over time. I show that recent research on party competition has begun to take the time dimension into account. Yet, it is missing in research connecting parties with voters and studies of party organizations.

The chapter proceeds as follows: I briefly define parties to highlight why they interact with and depend on other parties, voters, and their rank-and-file. Next, I present research on static and dynamic models of party competition. Specifically, I study the competitors' role when parties choose policy platforms. Thereafter, I present research linking parties with voters. Because a complete literature review on theories of voting behavior is way beyond the scope of this chapter, I focus on theories highlighting the importance of policy positions for

making vote choices. In addition, I review previous research on the voters' role for party policy changes. I then turn to party organizations presenting research that focuses on the relations between the party elite (including party leaders) and party members. Data and hypotheses derived from previous research help formulating hypotheses of how intra-party factors affect a party's ability to shift its policy position. Finally, I briefly conclude.

## 2.1 Parties and their environment

Defining parties helps to identify the environment they act in and the constraints they face when shifting party policy positions. Before so doing, however, a few remarks are in place: I focus on parties in democratic systems leaving autocratic systems aside. I also refrain from a lengthy discussion what exactly "democratic systems" are. Following Dahl (1971), I plainly state that democracies are characterized by two dimensions, namely (1) public contestation (i.e. competition) for power and (2) participation of all full citizens (especially the right to vote, and to join and form organizations). If both conditions are fulfilled (i.e. if there is competition for power involving all full citizens), a system is democratic. This (minimal) definition is sufficient for the purpose of the present study.

There is no "gold standard" definition of what political parties are. Rather, several definitions exist and each of them has its assets and drawbacks. The main reason is, I suppose, that each of them highlights factors that are relevant for the present research project. For example, studies on parties "from within" use and cite definitions emphasizing that parties are organizations. Researchers studying parties in non-democratic countries use definitions highlighting the parties' will to place representatives (with or without elections) in government positions (see e.g. Janda's definition in Sartori 1976: 62-63). In contrast, research focusing on democratic countries often uses definitions emphasizing elections and competition for power.

In *Party Government*, Schattschneider (1942: 35) defines parties as an "organized attempt to get to power". The definition hence emphasizes that parties strive for power and organize themselves to achieve this goal. In contrast, Schattschneider puts no emphasis on elections, party policies, or ideologies. Burke's famous definition considers different aspects stating that a party is "a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they all agreed" (Burke, cited in Sartori 1976: 9). Burke not only stresses that parties are groups (implicitly in need of rules) but also that parties have (policy) goals on which their members agree. This policy motivation



distinguishes Burke's definition from the "Schumpeterian" one that a party is "a group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power" (Schumpeter 1942: 283).

Schumpeter's emphasis on parties as groups competing for power can also be found in Downs's party definition as a "team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election" (Downs 1957: 25). As in Schumpeter's definition, parties seek for power and contest in elections. Both criteria are also in place in Sartori's minimal definition. In contrast to Schumpeter and Downs, however, Sartori puts (free or nonfree) elections in the focus stating that "[a] party is any political group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections, candidates for public office" (Sartori 1976: 64). And Panebianco – although not offering a proper definition of parties – states that "whatever else parties are and to whatever other solicitations they respond, they are above all organizations" (Panebianco 1988: xi) which leads back to Schattschneider's party as an "organized attempt to get to power".

These definitions from well-known scholars exemplify that there is no "gold standard" defining political parties (see also Sartori 1976: chapter 3). Each of them highlights specific aspects and neglects others. Collectively, however, they help identifying the key actors political parties engage with: First, parties in democratic systems compete with *rival parties*. This emphasis is strongest in the party definitions of Schattschneider, Schumpeter, and Downs. Second and related, parties in democratic systems run in elections and hence aim to persuade *voters*. Next to Schumpeter and Downs (but not Schattschneider), it is Sartori who emphasizes this aspect. Third, parties are organizations thus involving an *internal structure*. Schattschneider and especially Panebianco highlight the role of party organization and power within a party. In addition, Burke's definition stresses the importance of joint opinions and hence connects parties with party *policies*.

In what follows, I review the literature on how parties deal with competitors, voters, and their intra-party structure. So doing, I focus on research connected with party *policy* positions and their shifts over time.

## 2.2 Parties and party competition

Democratic systems are characterized by competition for power and modern democracies employ parties to fulfill this task. Competing for power, a party faces other parties constraining its choices and impacting on its goals.

In the first place, parties are interested in votes. Votes are “instrumental goals” (Strøm and Müller 1999: 9) serving as the “currency” of party competition. A party’s vote share affects its bargaining power and its chances to enter government and to implement its preferred policies. These three factors – policy, office, and votes – constitute a party’s objectives. Which of the goals prevails in case of goal conflicts and whether parties strive for office or policy as an end in itself (see Laver and Schofield 1998: chapter 3) differs across parties (for an overview see Strøm 1990; Müller and Strøm 1999). Yet, all of the models presented below assume that parties strive for sometimes conflicting goals (policy, office, or votes) and choose policy positions that are optimal to fulfill their respective objectives.

In the beginning was Downs (1957). Adapting economic thinking to party competition, Downs argues that parties aim at maximizing votes just as firms aim at maximizing their profit (see also Hotelling 1929: 54-55). In line with his definition of political parties (cited above), parties choose policies as a mean to maximize the benefits.<sup>3</sup> For two parties the result is the well-known “median voter theorem” stating that two parties in a one-dimensional policy space both choose policy positions identical to the median voter’s one (see also Black 1948; Downs 1957: chapter 8).

Scholars illustrate emerging equilibria using terms such as “converge” of party policy positions or “shifts” of parties towards the centre of the policy space. Yet, equilibria are inherently *static*:<sup>4</sup> Parties are in equilibrium if they have no incentive to diverge from their policy position (i.e. the policy position maximizes their utility function). If the equilibrium is unique, all parties hypothetically put to a random policy position always end up at the same equilibrium policy position. Yet, the “convergence” of party policy positions is a pure thought experiment. Researchers are interested in equilibria serving as predictions for their models.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a critique on vote-“maximizing” rather than winning elections see Robertson (1976).

<sup>4</sup> That is not to say that all equilibria are robust. Some rest on very specific assumptions (see e.g. Plott 1967) while others are robust to a number of alternative specifications. In that sense, equilibria differ in their stability. Yet, all equilibria are stable in the sense that – given the current conditions – parties do not alter their policy positions.

<sup>5</sup> Note that Downs himself states that parties are constrained by their past and that party actions have to be consistent with their past behavior (Downs 1957: chapter 7). In that sense, Downs’s model takes a time effect

Downs's *Economic Theory of Democracy* not only settled the principle of parties as rational actors but also motivated additional research extending, criticizing, and modifying specific model assumptions.<sup>6</sup> A comprehensive review is (if feasible) beyond the scope of this review. I hence focus on the main ideas of how scholars model party competition. I first concentrate on static models before I subsequently turn to recent developments of models integrating the time dimension.

### 2.2.1 Parties and static party competition

Summarizing the huge body of literature, I distinguish four crucial elements that models of party competition employ, namely *policy motivation of parties*, differences across parties for *non-policy reasons* (“valence”), *linking the electoral and the legislative arena*, and *stochastic models of vote choice*.

One way to deviate from Downs's model is to drop the assumption that parties are purely vote-maximizing actors. Rather, parties are *policy-seeking* and value office as a means to implement their preferred policies (Wittmann 1983; Chappell and Keech 1986; Wittmann 1990). Because parties are usually assumed to have policy preferences that are not at the centre of the policy space, entering policy motivation usually leads to equilibria with parties located at distinct policy positions closer to the periphery of the policy space (see e.g. Adams et al. 2005: chapters 11 and 12).

The reasons for parties to value policy goals differ. Previous research highlights the role of party activists on whom the party depends to run their campaigns (see e.g. Schofield and Sened 2006: 22-25). Activists are motivated by policies (Aldrich 1983) and party leaders have to take the activists' preferences into account if their support is crucial for the party's success. In addition to the role of party members, a party may be constrained by voters and their expectations on what policies the party should pursue. A party's ideology shapes its “image” and the proposed policies should correspond to it. Sánchez-Cuenca (2008) argues that voters only vote for the closest party if the proposed policies are consistent with the party ideology (see also Downs 1957: chapter 7). Yet, if a party's ideology and the proposed policies are inconsistent, voters refrain from voting for the closest party choosing other parties

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into account. Yet, apart from the fact that parties have to have policy positions that are consistent with their past behavior and their “ideology”, Downs does not explicitly model how party change their policy positions and what constraints they face doing so.

<sup>6</sup> In fact, many articles cite Downs in their very first sentence (see, e.g., Macdonald and Rabinowitz 1998; Groseclose 2001).

which are more credible. In the model that follows, I resort to the role of activists and voter expectations on party policy positions (and shifts).

Models which assume that voters that do not solely base their vote choice on party policies but also take *non-policy factors* into account lead to different predictions of party policy positions than their policy-oriented rivals. Non-policy factors affecting vote choices can be summarized as a party's valence. The concept goes back to Stokes (1963) who differentiates *position* and *valence issues* stating that the latter are "those that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate" (Stokes 1963: 373; see also Adams et al. 2005: Appendix 3.1).<sup>7</sup>

Various theoretical (Adams 1998; Macdonald and Rabinowitz 1998; Groseclose 2001; Schofield 2003; Adams and Merrill 2009; Adams et al. undated) and empirical (Erikson and Romero 1990; Adams et al. 2005; Clark 2009) contributions study the effect of non-policy factors including the concept of party identification (Campbell et al. 1960), candidate images, and the voters' sociodemographic traits (such as race, gender, and class). If the voters' evaluation of parties differs, parties can make use of better evaluations to adjust their party policy positions. Depending on the parties' utility functions (and their policy-seeking behavior), parties with higher valence values are predicted to represent more centrist (see e.g. Groseclose 2001) or more extreme (see e.g. Adams 1998; Adams and Merrill 2009) policy positions. In any case, the larger a party's valence value, the higher its utility. As I show in my theoretical model (see Chapter 4), a similar argument can be used in a dynamic model studying party position *shifts*: The larger the share of voters with party identification and the higher a party leader's prestige, the higher is a party's ability to shift its policy platform.

The parties' choices of party policy positions may also hinge on factors that are outside the electoral arena. Specifically, parties do not only aim at maximizing their vote share but also consider *post-electoral legislative bargaining* and the probability to enter coalition governments (see also Downs 1957: chapter 9; Strøm 1990; Strøm and Müller 1999). As Schofield and Sened (2006: 32) argue, participation in government is most likely if a party is at the core position (Plott 1967). I argue below that government parties not only

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<sup>7</sup> Although mostly referring to Stokes (1963), subsequent research is less precise on what exactly valence issues entail. Schofield and Sened (2006) simply define valence as "the weight given to judgment, rather than to preference" (Schofield and Sened 2006: 15). Groseclose (2001) subsumes several factors using the valence label including incumbency, campaign funds, name recognition, or the party leader's charisma and intelligence (Groseclose 2001: 862).

enjoy the (private) benefits of holding public office but also have higher abilities to shift their policy positions.

Finally, models of party competition include probabilistic rather than deterministic voting. Parties are either not fully informed about the voters' preferences (Roemer 1994) or voters place their votes stochastically, that is, they do not always vote for the closest party (Chappell and Keech 1986; Erikson and Romero 1990; Lin et al. 1999). Most of the research on *probabilistic voting* aims at answering the question whether equilibria exist and, if so, where parties locate. Including an error term in vote choices makes the parties' predictions on benefits derived from specific policy positions more difficult. As such, models assuming probabilistic voting are more realistic than their deterministic counterparts. This is especially important for the literature on information and vote choice discussed below.

Research over the last 60 years made great efforts to set up models of party competition. Varying in their assumptions, the goal was to model party behavior in order to obtain good predictors for real-world party policy positions. Yet, all of the models presented so far are static aiming at finding (Nash) equilibria which serve as predictions for party policy positions. Recently, scholars pay more attention to the dynamics of party competition. This is what I turn to next.

### 2.2.2 A dynamic perspective on party competition

Introducing the time dimension in models of party competition allows for studying actions that are shaped and constrained by the past. This idea is closely linked with "path dependence". Following Levi (1997: 28), path dependence entails that "once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high". Hence, decisions of the past shape actors' present choices and sticking to past decisions becomes more likely, the more often and longer they are used (Pierson 2000). As a result, norms, institutions and choices may prevail although they are known to be inefficient or irrational.<sup>8</sup>

Linking the time dimension with the behavior of political parties, Walgrave and Nuytemans (2009) use Jones and Baumgartner's (2005) notion of "friction" to show that party policy platforms are characterized by resistance to change. Because of the costs involved

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<sup>8</sup> A well-known example of path dependence is the design of computer and typewriter keyboards. The dominance of QWERTY keyboards prevents the evolution of alternative designs. Although these are said to be more efficient and ergonomic, their implementation is hindered by costs (training etc.) involved when deviating from the current standard.

moving away from the status quo, parties tend to stick to their previous policy platforms and do not make adjustments of their policies. Similarly, Budge (1994) argues that “[g]reat costs are incurred in writing programmes, so another document cannot easily be put together immediately afterwards” (Budge 1994: 450). In other words, parties are constrained by their past policy positions and the choice of present policy platforms heavily depends on the policies they represented in the past.

Recent research incorporated time effects in models of party competition testing theories on party policy change with the help of simulations. Although mostly lacking empirical backing, simulations are particularly suitable to study new phenomena because they allow for answering “what if” questions (Laver and Shepsle 1996: 5-8). As with experiments, researchers are able to manipulate specific factors while holding others constant. This approach is particularly adequate when scholars study the effect of new elements in established models as, for instance, the inclusion of the time dimension in models of party competition. From the early 1990s onwards, scholars applied simulation models to study the behavior of parties that adapt their policy positions over time (Kollman et al. 1992; Miller and Stadler 1998; de Marchi 1999; Kollman et al. 2003; Laver 2005; Bendor et al. 2006; Smirnov and Fowler 2007; Fowler and Laver 2008). Bendor and colleagues (2006), for example, assume that incumbent parties satisfice (i.e. stick to their policy position) while losers search for a platform outperforming the incumbent. Laver (2005) offers four party types with distinct strategies how to adapt policy platforms. Parties may aim at satisfying their present party supporters’ preferences, hunt for votes, adapt policy positions to rival parties, or stick to their policy positions. Various scholars have proposed more algorithms to model party behavior (Fowler and Laver 2008).

All the above are theoretical models. More empirical oriented research studies the incentives of parties to shift policy positions. Rival parties (Adams and Merrill 2006; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009b), election results (Janda et al. 1995; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009a; Somer-Topcu 2009b; 2009c), and shifts in public opinion (Stimson et al. 1995; Stimson 1999; Adams et al. 2004; Adams, Haupt et al. 2009; Ezrow et al. 2009; Somer-Topcu 2009b) make parties adapt their policy platforms. Tavits (2007) argues that parties are more likely to shift their position on “pragmatic issues” while changing policies on “principled issues” is more difficult. In addition, Adams and colleagues (Adams, Clark et al. 2006; see also Ezrow 2010) argue that “niche” parties differ from mainstream parties and that the latter are more likely to respond to shifts in public opinion. Similarly, intra-party factors like

factional dominance, leadership changes, and organizational patterns affect party position shifts (Harmel and Janda 1994; Harmel et al. 1995; Evans 2008; Walgrave and Nuytemans 2009; Budge et al. forthcoming).

Note that most of the factors mentioned here focus on the parties' *incentives* to shift their policy platforms. Hence, parties adapt new policy positions to follow shifts in public opinion, to increase their vote share (after electoral defeat), or because of a change in the dominant faction within a party. Yet, previous research does not focus on the *constraints* parties face when shifting policy positions. Notable exceptions are Walgrave and Nuytemans's (2009) study on organizational factors influencing party policy shifts (see the discussion below) and Wickham-Jones's study (2005) on the British Labour party transformation between 1979 and 1997. Wickham-Jones highlights the role of credibility and argues that parties performing policy changes run risk to lose credibility with voters (see also Laver 1997: 115-116). Downs (1957: 109) makes a similar argument stating that "[i]f a party frequently adopts new policies inconsistent with its old ones, voters will suspect that it cannot be trusted to carry out any long-range policies at all" (Downs 1957: 109). If so, the parties' credibility hinges on the voters' acceptance of party policy shifts. Constraints on party behavior over time hence do not only arise from intra-party factors but also from the electoral arena.

### 2.3 Parties and voters

In modern democracies, elections are the key mechanisms linking parties and voters. Rather than directly deciding on policy issues, voters delegate competences to politicians, parties, parliaments, and members of government (Lupia and McCubbins 2000; Mitchell 2000; Strøm 2000; 2003). The delegates are held accountable by elections so that voters can "throw the rascals out" (Riker 1982) if their actions do not conform to the voters' preferences. Parties are key actors in this delegation relationship (Müller 2000). Beside other functions, they provide "brand names" (Aldrich 1995; Snyder and Ting 2002) thus simplifying the patterns of electoral accountability. Their survival and power hinges on voters' support. Even if votes are only "instrumental goals" (Strøm and Müller 1999: 9), parties are interested in votes to increase their chances implementing preferred policies or entering office.

How voters make their vote choices is a question that has been at the heart of studies on political behavior and party competition. A comprehensive review of whether socio-structural factors, party identification (Campbell et al. 1960), or retro- and prospective voting

(Fiorina 1981) play a role is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, I want to highlight that policy preferences play a crucial role (see e.g. van der Eijk et al. 1999: 164-165).

Downs (1957) applies a *proximity model of voting* arguing that voters vote for parties which are closest to their personal preferences. Although the proximity model of voting is still dominant among models of voting behavior, modifications and rival theoretical models have emerged. Grofman's (1985) *discounting model*, for example, refines the proximity model stating that voters compare the status quo, parties' policy positions, and the parties' ability (the discount factor) to shift policies away from the status quo. Voters then evaluate the discounted policy shift with their personal policy preferences. If discounting is in place, parties take more extreme policy positions than predicted by the proximity model (Adams et al. 2005: 24-25).

According to proponents of the *directional theory of voting* (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Macdonald et al. 1998; 2001), voters base their vote choices on the different "sides" of the policy space. On a one-dimensional policy space, left voters prefer parties with left policy positions to those with right policy platforms. In addition, voters favor parties that explicitly signify their policy stands, that is, voters prefer extreme parties over moderate ones.<sup>9</sup> Left voters may therefore prefer the Communists over the Social Democrats even if the latter are closer to their policy preferences. Finally, recent research integrates the different approaches in a unified theory of voting (Iversen 1994; Merrill and Grofman 1999; but see also Warwick 2004).

Despite of their differences, all voting models argue that voters base their vote choices on comparisons of their personal preferences and the parties' policy platforms. Yet, there are differences in the ways how party policy positions are measured: While some scholars use the voters' individual perceptions of party policy positions (Westholm 1997; Merrill and Grofman 1999; Warwick 2004), others rely on the mean perceived party policy position to obtain unique party positions across voters (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Macdonald et al. 1998). Yet, it is problematic to assume that voters base their choices on information which they do not have as it is available only at the aggregate level (Merrill and Grofman 1999).

Individually perceived party policy positions better reflect the information used by voters for making their decisions. Yet, voter perceptions of party policy positions differ.

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<sup>9</sup> To prevent parties from taking policy positions which are far off from the center of the policy space, Rabinowitz and McDonald (1989: 108) introduce a "region of acceptability". Beyond its boundary, parties and candidates get penalized for their extremist policy views.



Research on public opinion partly explains this variation by taking the voters' information into account. More informed voters are more likely to correctly place party policy positions. Moreover, the perception of party policy positions also hinges on a party's credibility. While information deals with cognitive elements, a party's credibility is crucial to make voters to believe the proposed policies. Systematic differences in the perception of party policy positions may also affect the perception of party policy shifts. For that reason, I briefly review research on the role of the voters' information and the credibility of political parties.

### 2.3.1 Voting and the role of information

Schumpeter's (1942: 262) statement that "the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field" nicely makes the point that assuming completely informed voters is inappropriate. As a consequence, it is unlikely that all voters perceive party policy positions equally because (correctly) locating candidates requires costly information. Even if parties and candidates make clear statements what they stand for, voters have to invest resources (e.g. time) to get informed about their policy platforms. The less information voters have, the higher the "perceptual uncertainty" (Enelow and Hinich 1984: 122-125) of the candidates' policy platforms. Because voters "prefer the devil they know more about to the devil they know less about" (Alvarez 1997: 109), increasing uncertainty on a candidate's policy platform decreases the probability that a voter votes for the respective candidate.

Various scholars (Bartels 1986; Alvarez and Franklin 1994; Alvarez 1997; Alvarez and Brehm 2002) have studied the voters' uncertainty of candidate platforms. Referring to Downs (1957: 209-210), the authors argue that voters have different "information costs" in gathering information. More educated voters, for example, have lower costs understanding political messages. Consequently, they are more likely to place candidate and party policy platforms accurately. Another crucial factor is the voters' political knowledge. Political awareness "refers to the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics *and* understands what he or she has encountered" (Zaller 1992: 21; emphasis in the original). The more informed voters are, the lower their uncertainty on candidate and party policy platforms. This is in line with Zaller's (1992) research on *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Zaller argues that individuals are more likely to receive political messages if their level of cognitive engagement (i.e. their political awareness) is high (Zaller 1992: 42). Less informed

individuals are less likely to be exposed or to understand political messages so that their uncertainty on party and candidate platforms is higher.

Although the role of information is crucial for locating party policy positions, there is almost no research on how voters perceive party policy *shifts*. Only a recent study by Adams and colleagues (2009) shows that, on average, voters do *not* perceive party position shifts. This lack of research is surprising because the non-perception of party policy shifts has severe consequences for the voters' vote choices. Based on biased information of outdated party policy positions, voters may make suboptimal vote choices and have wrong expectations of the parties' behavior in parliament (and government). Consequently, they may be less satisfied with their vote choice, the performance of political actors, and the political system. Proposing a model how voters perceive party policy shifts, the present dissertation discusses these consequences in greater detail.

### 2.3.2 Voting and the role of party “credibility”

Placing parties on policy dimensions is also a matter of beliefs. Most of the previous research has not taken this factor into account. Rather, scholars of party competition implicitly assume that voters are not skeptical when parties present their policy platforms. In that sense, voters are mostly assumed to believe the party policy pledges.

Only a few studies argue that voters may in fact be more skeptical. Sánchez-Cuenca (2008) shows that voters do not necessarily vote for the party closest to their policy preferences. If they doubt that a party's proposed policy platform is consistent with its ideological stance, voters refrain from voting for it (see also Downs 1957: chapter 7). Skeptical voters may hence make parties to take policy positions closer to their respective ideologies thus creating a centrifugal trend. Similarly, Zaller (1992) and Alvarez and Brehm (2002) argue that predispositions shape how individuals cope with political information. If newly received information is not in line with the dominant predispositions, individuals resist to accept it (Zaller 1992: 44) and are less coherent in answering survey questions (Alvarez and Brehm 2002: 57-58). Applied to party policy positions, voters linking a party and its ideology are less likely to accept policy platforms that are too far away from its ideologically “expected” position so that voters perceive parties as being located closer to their ideologically “expected” position (see also Rahn 1993). Regarding party policy *shifts*, it may be argued that voters doubt candidates' or parties' policy shifts (Enelow and Hinich 1984: 115-117). Platform changes induce uncertainty as it is not clear whether voters believe the

shift or not. If not, candidates lose credibility with the voters. Again, more systematic research on how parties suffer from and can counteract losing credibility when shifting policy platforms is missing. This research project aims at narrowing this gap.

## 2.4 Parties and their organizations

A party's internal structure shapes the way how party leaders and members interact. The distribution of power within the party both in ways of formal rules and "actual" dependences affect the behavior of party leaders and the decisions of whether or not to shift a party's policy platform. One way to account for the varying internal structures of political parties is to classify different party types. The most common distinction separates the classic cadre or elite party from Duverger's (1954) mass party and Kirchheimer's (1966; Krouwel 1999; 2003) catch-all party. Newer party types entail Panebianco's (1988) electoral-professional party, Katz and Mair's (1995) cartel party, and Carty's (2004) franchise party. Each party type implies a specific type of intra-party structure that, in turn, shapes the relationship between party members and elite.

### 2.4.1 The role and power of party members

Formal rules are one way to describe a party's internal structure. Intra-party decision-making processes include the formal rules of selecting (and dismissing) party leaders and parliamentary candidates, passing election programs, and making key decisions (such as whether or not to take part in coalition government). Party organizations entail principal-agent relationships in which a party's rank-and-file delegates competences to the party elite. The more hierarchical a party's organization, the higher is the leader's ability to act. Yet, limited control mechanisms involve the risk that party leaders move away from the members' preferences. Hence, as in all delegation relationships there is a tradeoff between the agent's discretion and the risk of shirking (for an overview see Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Epstein and O'Halloran 1994; 2006).

Parties differ in the way they deal with this tradeoff: Some parties have very centralized decision-making processes and powerful leaders while others rely on direct control mechanisms and a higher inclusion of the party's rank-and-file. Because of its importance for intra-party decision-making (Schattschneider 1942: 64; Crotty 1968: 260; Ranney 1981: 103; Gallagher and Marsh 1988: 1-4), most research on party organizations studies the selection of candidates and party elites to measure the distribution of power within

parties.<sup>10</sup> Parties differ according to the centralization of the selection rules with decisions being made at the national, regional, or local levels. Moreover, the inclusiveness of the selection process varies: Whereas US American parties partly rely on primaries open to non-members, the European counterparts mostly rely on intra-party selections. In its most exclusive form, a party's leader decides on the selection of parliamentary candidates (Rahat and Hazan 2001; Hazan and Voerman 2006; Rahat 2007).

Formal decision-making rules affect the role of party members. Simply put, the more inclusive and decentralized a party's decision-making process, the more power party members have. Including a party's rank-and-file in decision-making processes has several advantages. It provides a selective benefit to reward the members for their efforts. Granting party members influence on personnel or policy decisions may be necessary because parties produce public goods from which voters benefit irrespective of their participation in parties (Schlesinger 1984). Providing selective benefits may hence help keeping and motivating party activists (Strøm 1990: 576-579). The inclusion furthermore leads members to articulate dissatisfaction rather than taking the "exit" option (Hirschmann 1970). Therefore, incorporating party members is a strategy to react to or prevent membership losses (Scarrow 1996) which have affected most West European parties in recent years (Mair and van Biezen 2001).

However, the inclusion of party members also has drawbacks. As Kitschelt (1994a; 1994b: chapter 5) argues, (Social Democratic) parties are less likely to react to new challenges if their leaders are constrained by their respective party organizations. In contrast, autonomous leaders are more successful in reacting to challenges coming from the electoral market. Hence, the inclusion of party members increases the members' satisfaction but simultaneously increases the number of intra-party veto players (Tsebelis 2002) and may hence lead to inflexibility.

Studies on intra-party decision-making processes find that parties become more inclusive over time (Bille 2001; Hopkin 2001) and that various institutional factors such as federalism and the electoral system affect the selection rules of party elites (see e.g. Lundell 2004; Thorlakson 2009). Turning to the consequences, intra-party decision-making rules are likely to affect the composition of parliamentary groups and their behavior in parliament (see e.g. Obler 1973; 1974; Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Norris 1997). Only a few studies look at

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<sup>10</sup> For the weaknesses associated with formal decision-making rules see Katz (2001) and Shaw (2002).

the consequences of the distribution of intra-party power on party policy changes. Bille (1997) and Harmel and colleagues (Harmel and Janda 1994; Harmel et al. 1995) study the effect of leadership changes and turnovers of dominant factions within parties. Yet, the authors focus on changing *preferences* and do not take the formal decision-making rules into account (for notable exceptions see Share 1999; Maravall 2008).

Research on party organizations and intra-party decision-making processes is still fragmentary. This is mainly due to the lack of data and the low number of cases. As a consequence, scholars attribute differences in the decision-making processes to the parties' membership figures or institutional factors (such as the electoral system) without specifying and testing the mechanisms that link the phenomena. Hence, previous research on intra-party decision making first and foremost provides descriptive in-depth insights into intra-party decision-making processes.

#### 2.4.2 Sources of income

Apart from formal rules, the distribution of power within parties also hinges on the provision of financial means: Party leaders depend on actors providing the party's financial backbone and should therefore take their preferences into account. Even if the financiers cannot formally dismiss the party elite, withdrawing their resources from the party can put the party leadership at risk. This is the argument of the resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978).

Political parties mainly rely on three sources of income: Membership fees, donations (from patrons and interest groups), and public funding.<sup>11</sup> Mass parties typically draw mainly on the members' contributions (Duverger 1954; see also Scarrow 1996: chapter 2; Ware 1996: 298-299). Other parties heavily rely on funding of political patrons (as, e.g., Silvio Berlusconi) or contributions coming from interest groups such as labor unions, employer associations, and companies. This "plutocratic" financing (Nassmacher 2001a: 22-26)<sup>12</sup> makes parties dependent on the donators' preferences. Finally, parties also draw on public money. Because public subsidies are linked to a party's vote share, they increase the incentives for a vote-seeking party behavior (van Biezen 2003; 2004; 2008).

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<sup>11</sup> In addition, parties can also rely on salaries of their office holders, candidates contributing to campaigns, and investment incomes and sales. Yet, I argue that the lion's share of party income stems from membership fees, donations, and public subsidies (see Ware 1996: 298-303)

<sup>12</sup> Nassmacher refers the term "plutocratic financing" to Gullan Gidlund (see also Gidlund and Koole 2001).

The relevance of the main sources of party income varies over time. In the West European context, membership fees and donations were predominant until the 1960s. With decreasing membership figures, the role of members' donations diminished. From a normative perspective, contributions coming from patrons and interest groups put the parties' image and credibility at risk because the donors might expect something in return (Wiberg 1991a: 9). In fact, the fear that corruption could undermine parties which, in turn, are needed in modern democracies is a major justification for the adoption of public funding: If modern democracies build on political parties, they should also be willing to support them (Ware 1996: 302; Nassmacher 2001a: 16). Nowadays, in most countries public subsidies provide the lion's share of party income (Pierre et al. 2000).

The decreasing role of membership fees accompanied by the increasing significance of public subsidies has severe consequences for party behavior. If the party leaders' behavior aims at satisfying the preferences of the actors providing financial resources, their attention turns away from the party's rank-and-file (Strøm 1990: 579-581; Strøm and Müller 1999: 19-21). As a consequence, the members' "exit" option is no longer a credible threat because party leaders can substitute their losses of membership fees by other means. In turn, decreasing membership figures force party leaders to concentrate on alternative sources of income. Apart from donors, party leaders are most likely to allocate financial resources by drawing on public money. Because the amount of public funding usually hinges on a party's vote share, incentives coming from the electoral market (rather than the party members' preferences) are becoming the key factor steering party behavior.

The consequences of public funding for party behavior are best illustrated by the literature on cartel parties (see e.g. Katz and Mair 1995; Detterbeck 2005; Bolleyer 2008; Katz and Mair 2009). As Katz and Mair (1995) argue, public subsidies are a key indicator for the growing interpenetration of parties and the state. As a consequence, long-established links between political parties and their represented societal segment loose importance (van Biezen 2003: 40) and parties increasingly turn their attention to the electoral arena. As a consequence, parties become more "coalitionable" and less partisan (Mair 2008: 216). The fact that they face voters who are also becoming less partisan and more likely to vote for different parties enforces this trend (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Mair et al. 2004).

In sum, monetary incentives and the increasing number of floating voters (associated with the drop in voters with party identification) make parties react to electoral market

signals. Testing the expected (but undesired) consequences of public funding is part of this dissertation project.

## 2.5 Summary

In what follows, I argue that party competition involves a time component. Parties do not simply choose party policy positions from scratch. Rather, choosing a policy position always implies a shift away from the former one. Hence, choosing party platforms is a *process* that cannot be captured in static models of party competition treating each election in isolation.

Introducing the time dimension in models of party competition leads to two questions: First, what are the incentives for parties to change policy platforms? And second, what are the constraints when so doing? As this brief literature review reveals, scholars devote more attention to the first question. In line with static models, recent research on the dynamics of party competition focuses on factors (such as rival party (policy) behavior, electoral defeats, and shifts in public opinion) that make parties to shift their policy platforms. Yet, there is far less research on the constraints parties face when adapting their policy positions over time.

Drawing on various party definitions, I identify three major groups of actors with which parties interact: rival parties, voters, and their own organization. Rival parties are the competitors a party has to cope with. The policy platforms competitors take and the vote shares they hold provide incentives for party policy change. In contrast, the constraints when doing so are most likely to come from the voters' willingness and ability to perceive party policy shifts. I present research emphasizing the importance of the voters' information for locating party policy positions. Moreover, voters differ in their evaluation of a party's credibility. In what follows, I use similar arguments for the voters' perception of party position shifts and the consequences for party policy behavior (Chapters 3 and 4) and test these expectations at the voter (Chapters 5 and 6) and the party level (Chapters 7 and 8).

A party's internal structure also constrains its ability to shift the policy platform. I have reviewed previous research on the distribution of power within parties distinguishing formal decision-making rules and the actual dependence on actors who provide the financial resources. I show that the various types of intra-party structure affect the role and the power of party members. In the second part of this dissertation, I outline (Chapter 9) and test (Chapters 10 and 11) the expected consequences on party policy shifts.

### **3 The reception and acceptance of party policy shifts**

In this chapter, I outline the first part of my theoretical framework. Specifically, I present a vote choice model assuming that voters vote for the party closest to their policy preferences. Rather than studying elections in isolation, I introduce the time dimension so that parties shift their policy positions. Yet, voters may not always notice parties' policy shifts. Drawing on work by Zaller (1992), I argue that the perception of party position shifts is a two-stage process: For party policy shifts to be effective, parties have to broadcast their new policy goals and voters have to pay attention. In other words, voters have to *receive* policy shifts of parties (reception criterion). If the transmission fails, voters continue to rely on the party's previous policy stands. Second, voters may not *accept* an announced policy position (acceptance criterion). While the reception of information is a cognitive process, the acceptance of party policy shifts depends much on the trustworthiness of parties and their leaders. The crucial point is whether voters believe in the political message sent to them.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I present the theoretical model how voters receive and accept party position shifts. Next, I discuss the consequences of this model for voters and their vote choices. Do voters still vote for the party closest to their policy preferences or do the reception and acceptance criteria affect their vote choices? Subsequently, I turn to the party level asking how the voters' reception and acceptance affect party behavior. To illustrate the features of the model, I first present a slightly simplified version discussing one party shifting its policy position holding the policy positions of rival parties and the voters' preferences constant.

I then proceed by relaxing the assumptions allowing rival parties and voters to change their policy preferences. Although the model gets more complex, I show that the underlying logic still holds: The voters' reception and acceptance of party policy shifts constrain parties in their policy platform choices. In general, parties benefit from higher reception and acceptance of party policy shifts. Individual parties benefit most if voters perceive party policy shifts towards their personal preferences while voters being worse off under these policies do not perceive the policy shift. Regarding voter position shifts, parties react to shifts in public opinion if the shifts move away from the party's policy position. I summarize the consequences of the voters' reception and acceptance of party position shifts in three axioms. Finally, I conclude.

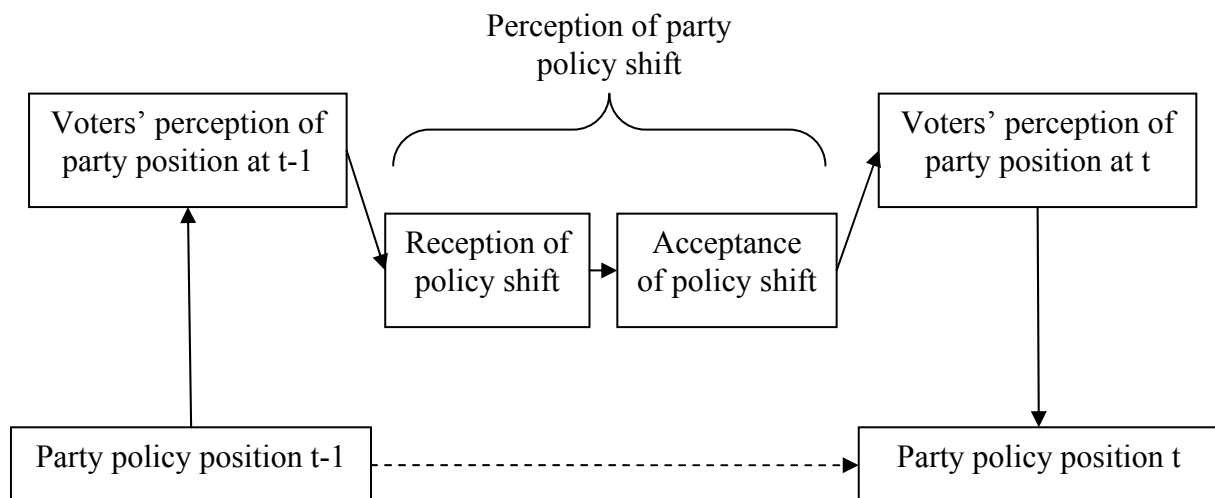


### 3.1 The voters' perception of party position shifts

In what follows, I present a model of how voters perceive party position shifts. Rather than looking at single elections, I propose a model taking the time dimension into account. As shown in Chapter 2, research on public opinion (see e.g. Zaller 1992; Alvarez 1997) highlights the importance of information and predispositions when forming opinion on political issues. For example, political awareness and party identification shape the way voters think about foreign affairs, defense policies, the evaluation of the economic situation, or social issues like abortion.

John R. Zaller (1992) proposes a model how voters form opinion statements. In his Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model, Zaller argues that opinion statements “are the outcome of a process in which people *receive* new information, decide whether to *accept* it, and then *sample* at the moment of answering questions” (Zaller 1992: 51, emphasis in original). The model states that people differ in their exposure and comprehension of political messages. The higher their cognitive engagement (or political awareness), the more likely they *receive* information on a political issue. Yet, the received political information does not directly transfer to the formation of a political opinion. Rather, individuals evaluate the received information and resist to information contradicting their predispositions. In other words, people may or may not *accept* political messages. Finally, Zaller argues that individuals express their opinions “at the top of the head”. The more recently a consideration has been called to mind, the more likely people “remember” it and take it into account answering survey questions.

**Figure 3.1: Voters' perception of party policy shifts**



I apply Zaller's model to the perception of party policy shifts (see Figure 3.1). I argue that parties shifting their policy platforms may face voters who do not *receive* the shift message. If voters are not engaged in party politics or face other difficulties to receive the shift message, voters do not receive a party's policy shift and therefore stick to their previously perceived policy position. Moreover, voters may not *accept* a proposed party policy shift. If voters doubt that a party represents the proposed policies, they resist to the received information thus sticking to the previously perceived policy position. Yet, I refrain from modeling the sampling process. For the specific case of party policy shifts, sampling of various considerations is unlikely to occur because parties advertise their policy positions in the politicized environment of election campaigns. Hence, the parties' new platforms are much more likely to be at the voters' "top of the head" than the party policies represented in the last election.

I connect Zaller's model with a spatial model of voting. The model is very simple assuming a one-dimensional policy space. Although policy spaces may sometimes be more complex, the restriction to a single policy dimension has its advantages. First, it reduces the complexity of the model. As can be seen below, introducing the time dimension in a one-dimensional spatial model already has its difficulties. Keeping the model one-dimensional allows keeping the spatial aspects of the model as simple as possible while simultaneously introducing the new elements of reception and acceptance. Another reason for a one-dimensional policy space is provided by the actors involved. Although elites, parties, and party leaders may think along several policy dimensions, the complexity of party competition usually boils down to one dimension for voters in the electoral market (Pierce 1999: 30): Mass communication requires simplification and all participants aim at reducing complexity. I argue that it is unlikely to assume that voters evaluate parties on several clearly distinguishable and important policy dimensions. But even if voters would like to talk about politics in a more complex way, the public discussion on policies concentrates on one-dimensional left-right comparisons. For example, parties present themselves as the "New Left", for example, and the media constantly talks about "left", "center", and "right" parties and policies. Moreover, social scientists use the left-right dimension asking questions on the voters' and the parties' placement on a left-right axis. Hence, although the political space may be more complex, parties and voters interact on one dimension. News media reporting typically reinforces such complexity reductions.

### 3.1.1 Developing the model: The reception and acceptance of party position shifts

Let us assume that voters are policy-seeking actors deriving benefits from party choices based on the distance between their personal policy preferences and the party's policy platform. For voter  $i$  and party  $j$ , we may define a utility function based on the quadratic distance<sup>13</sup> of the two policy positions given by

$$U_{ij}(p_j) = -(v_i - p_j)^2 + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where  $v_i$  and  $p_j$  are the voter's and the party's policy position, respectively and  $\varepsilon_{ij}$  denotes a random error component. If there is just one voter, party  $j$ 's utility is maximized if the two policy positions are identical. Assume that a party's policy position is different from the voter's ideal position (i.e.  $p_j \neq v_i$ ). I label party  $j$ 's position at  $t-1$  with  $p_{j(t-1)}$ . How can party  $j$  increase voter  $i$ 's utility? The simple answer is: by shifting its policy position from  $p_{j(t-1)}$ , its position at  $t-1$ , to voter  $i$ 's ideal position  $v_i$ . However, this implies two assumptions. First, the party's former policy choices do not impact on voter  $i$ 's perception of the new policy position. There is no path dependency or, put differently, the old policy position  $p_{j(t-1)}$  is no longer relevant for voter  $i$  to locate party  $j$ . Second, all voters form common perceptions of party  $j$ 's policy position. Yet, empirical evidence suggests that voters differ in their ability to estimate party policy positions (see e.g. Alvarez 1997). In what follows, I refrain from both assumptions presenting a model of how voters perceive party policy shifts.

### 3.1.2 The reception criterion

Do voters (in our case: voter  $i$ ) receive the policy shift? Let  $p_{jt}$  denote party  $j$ 's "intended" new position (i.e. the "official" new policy position as shown in, for example, the party's manifesto). The reception process can be modeled as

$$rp_{ijt} = r_{ijt} \cdot p_{jt} + (1 - r_{ijt}) \cdot pp_{ij(t-1)} \quad (2)$$

where  $rp_{ijt}$  is voter  $i$ 's reception of party  $j$ 's new policy position at time  $t$ ,  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$  is voter  $i$ 's *perception* of party  $j$ 's policy position at  $t-1$ , and  $r_{ijt}$  is the probability that voter  $i$  receives

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<sup>13</sup> Using quadratic utility functions is the most common way to measure distances between two points (Enelow and Hinich 1984: 15; Merrill and Grofman 1999; Adams et al. 2005). Alternative norms (like the city block metric or the uniform norm) exist but research on which distance perceptions individuals use is an under-researched area (see Humphreys and Laver 2010). Note, however, that the most common distance perceptions are identical in a one-dimensional policy space.

party  $j$ 's policy shift from  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$  to  $p_{jt}$ . In other words,  $r_{ijt}$  is equal to one if voter  $i$  receives the new message and equal to zero if the message goes unheard.

If voter  $i$  estimates his utility for party  $j$  based on the received policy position (and not on the party  $j$ 's intended position), the utility function  $U_{ij}$  can be written as

$$U_{ijt}(rp_{ijt}) = -(v_i - rp_{ijt})^2 + \varepsilon_{ijt}. \quad (3)$$

In contrast to equation (1), the policy distance in equation (3) depends on the *individually* received party policy position at time  $t$ . This creates problems for parties dealing with voters who vary in their ability and willingness to receive party position shifts.

### 3.1.3 The acceptance criterion

Turning to the second factor, I argue that voters may receive party position shifts but they do not necessarily *accept* this new announcement as credible (see also Enelow and Hinich 1984: 117-120). For example, a party may claim to invest money for environment protection but voters may not believe this policy announcement if the party previously supported the construction of coal power stations. Of course, voters have to receive this policy shift before being able to evaluate its credibility.

In the model presented above, the acceptance can be added using  $a_{ijt}$ , the probability that voter  $i$  accepts party  $j$ 's policy shift from perceived position  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$  to  $p_{jt}$ . If  $a_{ijt}$  is large, voter  $i$  accepts the policy shift given its reception. If, in contrast,  $a_{ijt}$  is small, voter  $i$  does not accept party  $j$ 's announcement and locates party  $j$  at its perceived position at  $t-1$ .

In more formal terms, the accepted party position is given by

$$pp_{ijt} = a_{ijt} \cdot rp_{ijt} + (1 - a_{ijt}) \cdot pp_{ij(t-1)} \quad (4)$$

and hence with equation (2)

$$pp_{ijt} = a_{ijt} \cdot [r_{ijt} \cdot p_{jt} + (1 - r_{ijt}) \cdot pp_{ij(t-1)}] + (1 - a_{ijt}) \cdot pp_{ij(t-1)}. \quad (5)$$

which simplifies to

$$pp_{ijt} = r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \cdot (p_{jt} - pp_{ij(t-1)}) + pp_{ij(t-1)}. \quad (6)$$

Equation (6) displays the relation between voter  $i$ 's perceptions of party  $j$ 's policy position at time  $t-1$  and  $t$ . If party  $j$  does not shift its policy position away from voter  $i$ 's perceived

position  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$ , the two perceived positions are identical. In this case, the reception and acceptance of party policy shifts are redundant. If, however, party  $j$  moves away from the position initially observed by voter  $i$ , the perception of this party policy shift hinges on its reception  $r_{ijt}$  and acceptance  $a_{ijt}$ . Only if both factors are equal to 1, voter  $i$ 's perception of party  $j$ 's policy position is identical to the party's intended policy position  $p_{jt}$ .

From equation (6), we can derive

Axiom 1:

Voters' perception of party position shifts is a two-stage process of (i) receiving and (ii) accepting a party's policy shifts. Voters who do not receive or accept a party's shift message continue to locate the party at its previously perceived policy position.

### 3.2 Voters' reception and acceptance and vote choices

I argue that parties face voters with varying abilities and willingness to receive and to accept announced policy position shifts. As a result, the party's intended policy position  $p_{jt}$  is not necessarily equal to the voters' perceived position of party  $j$  at time  $t$ . Voters base their vote choice on available information (i.e. on the perceived and accepted policy position) instead of the party's intended policy position. Hence, voter  $i$ 's utility for voting for party  $j$  is given by

$$U_{ijt}(pp_{ijt}) = -(v_i - pp_{ijt})^2 + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (7)$$

To study the effect of party position shifts on voter  $i$ 's utility of party  $j$  (and hence, voter  $i$ 's vote choice), compare the utility of the perceived party positions at  $t-1$  and  $t$ . Using the equations (6) and (7), some math reveals that

$$\begin{aligned} U_{ijt}(pp_{ijt}) &= -(v_i - pp_{ijt})^2 + \varepsilon_{ijt} \\ &= -(v_i - (r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \cdot (p_{jt} - pp_{ij(t-1)})) + pp_{ij(t-1)})^2 + \varepsilon_{ijt} \\ &= -(v_i - pp_{ij(t-1)})^2 + r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \cdot (p_{jt} - pp_{ij(t-1)}) \cdot [(v_i - pp_{ij(t-1)}) + (v_i - pp_{ijt})] + \varepsilon_{ijt} \\ &= U_{ijt}(pp_{ij(t-1)}) + r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \cdot (p_{jt} - pp_{ij(t-1)}) \cdot [(v_i - pp_{ij(t-1)}) + (v_i - pp_{ijt})] \end{aligned} \quad (8)$$

The second addend of the right-hand equation contains information about when voters are indifferent between the two perceived party positions at  $t-1$  and time  $t$ . The utilities derived from the perceived party positions are equal if

1. voter  $i$ 's reception  $r_{ijt}$  of party  $j$ 's policy shift equals zero,
2. voter  $i$ 's acceptance  $a_{ijt}$  of party  $j$ 's policy shift equals zero,
3. party  $j$  chooses a policy platform  $p_{jt}$  similar to voter  $i$ 's perception at  $t-1$ , or if
4. the two perceptions are equidistant mirror images left and right of voter  $i$ 's policy position  $v_i$ .

For which of these conditions is voter  $i$ 's vote choice based on biased information? And when do party policy shifts lead to “inappropriate” vote choices in the sense that voters do not vote for the party maximizing their utility? Turning to the first question, only condition 3 is unproblematic: If party  $j$ 's policy position at time  $t$  equals voter  $i$ 's perception  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$ , voter  $i$ 's utility is unbiased in the sense that voter  $i$ 's utility is based on party  $j$ 's official policy position. For all other cases, however, not perceiving party  $j$ 's policy shift leads to biased expectations because party  $j$ 's official policy position does not correspond to voter  $i$ 's expectation. The reasons are manifold. Voter  $i$  may not receive (condition 1) or accept (condition 2) party  $j$ 's policy shift. As a consequence, the perception of party  $j$ 's policy position does not change although party  $j$  moves its policy position away from  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$ . Alternatively, voter  $i$  may perceive a policy shift from  $t-1$  to  $t$  but constraints on the voter's reception or acceptance lead to a biased perceived policy position  $pp_{ijt}$  not identical with the party's official policy position  $p_{jt}$ . As a consequence, voter  $i$  perceives party  $j$ 's policy positions at  $t-1$  and  $t$  as equidistant although party  $j$ 's official position  $p_{jt}$  does not match with voter  $i$ 's perception (condition 4).

The misperceived party policy position has severe consequences for the accountability of parties vis-à-vis voters. Party platforms differing from the corresponding voter perceptions create dissent on a party's mandate (Manin et al. 1999; Stokes 1999) thus complicating the evaluation of party policies. Clearly, voters are still able to “throw the rascals out” (Riker 1982) if parties do not fulfill the voters' expectations. Yet, the parties may have outlined their policy plans beforehand but voters may just not have perceived this message. Hence, party policy shifts not perceived by voters may have negative consequences such as (1) dissatisfaction with the vote choice, (2) low popularity scores of government, parties, and politicians, (3) decreasing satisfaction and trust in political parties and, as a consequence, party democracy, and (4) high turnover rates in government and parliament.

Moreover, misperceived party policy shifts also affect vote choices. Voters not perceiving changes in party policy platforms may vote for parties not maximizing their utility. Assume for a moment a very simple party environment: All parties except party  $j$  stick to their policy platforms held at  $t-1$ . Furthermore, assume that voter  $i$ 's perception of party  $j$ 's policy platform at  $t-1$  was correct so that  $p_{j(t-1)}$  equals  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$ . If party  $j$  turns away from voter  $i$ 's policy preferences, not perceiving the policy shift is most severe if voter  $i$  voted for party  $j$  at  $t-1$ . Assuming that at  $t-1$  party  $j$  was the best policy option for voter  $i$ , not perceiving the policy shift away from the personal preferences may lead voter  $i$  to continue voting for party  $j$  although competing parties may offer policy platforms closer to the voter's preferences. In other words, voter  $i$  continues to vote for party  $j$  although better options may exist. In a similar manner, not perceiving shifts towards voter  $i$ 's policy preferences may also affect vote choice if voter  $i$  did not vote for party  $j$  at  $t-1$ . In this case, party  $j$  responds to the policy preferences of voter  $i$  and shifts its policy platform closer to the voter's policy preferences. If voter  $i$  does not perceive this policy shift, the vote choice is still based on information of party  $j$ 's policy platform at  $t-1$ . In the worst case, voter  $i$  does not maximize his utility by voting for an inappropriate party with policy preferences further away from the voter's policy preference  $v_i$ .

In sum, not perceiving party policy shifts has severe consequences for voters. Because party policy positions and the corresponding voter perceptions do not match, the link connecting voters and parties is weakened. In such situations voters are inclined to think that parties have not observed their mandate as the parties' record in parliament and government does not correspond to the voters' initial expectations. Thus, the perception of party policy shifts is crucial for optimal vote choices on policy grounds. Not perceiving party policy shifts may lead voters to vote for parties which no longer represent their best policy choice. All these issues would merit further attention. Yet, this dissertation concentrates on parties and their reactions to the voters' reception and acceptance of party policy shifts. I hence leave the implications of the (mis-)perception of party policy shifts for voter attitudes and their systematic effects for future research.

### 3.3 Party reactions to the voters' reception and acceptance

So far, I concentrated on voters and the consequences the perception of party policy shifts on vote choices and the evaluation of individual parties and system effects. I now turn to political parties and their reactions to the voters' reception and acceptance of party policy shifts. I ask in what way parties are constrained by voters being uninformed or critical towards the policy

shifts of their parties. Under which circumstances are parties most likely to shift their policy positions? And when do they refrain from doing so?

I argue that parties are mainly maximizing their expected vote share. In politics, votes are the currency for bargaining power in parliament, government participation, and the distribution of offices among cabinet parties. In other words, office and policy chances of parties base on their electoral strength. Therefore, parties first and foremost aim to win as many votes as possible. As we will see later on, policy motivations enter into the model in two different ways: First, I argue that voters form policy “images” of party positions and these expectations on where parties should locate relative to their competitors affect the parties’ policy behavior (see Chapter 4). Second, party members are primarily interested in policy goals. While party leaders may be driven by their ambition for cabinet office or other perks of office, the party’s rank and file is primarily interested in policy gains resulting from governmental and parliamentary decision-making. Party leaders have to take into account the policy concerns of their voters and members (see Chapter 9). However, in my model party leaders do not value “policy as an end in itself” (Laver and Schofield 1998: 45).

When do parties shift their policy platforms? Provided that parties aim at maximizing their vote share, in a time perspective this means that they try to (i) keep their present voters and (ii) attract new ones who did not vote for the party in the last election. On policy grounds, parties attract new voters by shifting their policy positions closer to the voters’ policy preferences. If voters do not receive or accept a party’s policy shift, they continue to locate the party at the perceived position at  $t-1$ . Hence, a party policy shifts brings no benefit at all. On the contrary, shifting the party’s platform is costly. Just as changes in institutions and rules, moves away from the policy status quo involve costs. This is partly due to organizational constraints (Walgrave and Nuytemans 2009: 193). Election programs and deviations from past positions need approval by party conventions or other intra-party decision-making bodies. For this process, time for deliberation and decision-making is required. In other words, parties suffer from transaction costs (Kreps 1990: 743; Lupia and Strøm 2008: 60) when shifting policy positions. Of course, these decision-making costs differ across parties: The parties’ size, the number of intra-party factions and official party bodies, and the decision rules for making such policy shifts determine to what extent parties are able to change their policy positions. Put differently, the combination of the number and preferences of intra-party “veto players” (Tsebelis 2002) and the decision rules determine the degree of policy stability. These factors alone may not be sufficient to explain stability or



changes of party policy positions. Party leaders may also depend on the good will of the party's rank-and-file as providers of voluntary labor and finance (see Chapter 9). Notwithstanding these inter-party differences, all parties suffer from some costs when shifting policy positions. I use a simple cost-benefit argument stating that parties only shift their policy positions if the benefits (i.e. the vote gains) outweigh the costs involved. In other words, parties only move away from the status quo if potential new voters are expected to perceive party policy shifts.

For a better understanding, I next present a simplified version of the model studying one party while holding its competitors' and the voters' policy positions constant. Subsequently, I relax these assumptions providing a more general model.

### 3.3.1 Holding competitors' and voters' positions constant

To keep the argument as simple as possible, assume that all parties except for party  $j$  keep their policy positions constant. Further, assume for a moment that all voters do not shift their policy positions over time. All else being equal, party  $j$ 's decision to shift its policy platform hinges on the question whether a shift increases the party's vote share in the next general election. Table 3.1 classifies four voter groups necessary to distinguish when making this decision.

First, it is necessary to distinguish between party  $j$ 's voters at  $t-1$  and the remaining electorate. Because the voters' and the competitors' policy preferences are held constant, the first group involves the voters party  $j$  keeps when sticking to its policy position. The latter group contains the share of the electorate which party  $j$  can attract by shifting its policy position. Now think of any desired policy position  $p_{jt}$  being different from voter  $i$ 's perception of party  $j$ 's platform  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$  at time  $t-1$ . We can identify two groups of voters: those for which the party's new policy position is closer to the personal preferences and those who gain a higher utility from party  $j$ 's perceived position at  $t-1$ .

Table 3.1 combines the two categories creating four voter groups. Those voters who voted for party  $j$  in the previous election may be divided in two groups distinguishing whether party  $j$  shifts its policy position towards (group 1) or away from (group 2) the voters' preferences. If voters and competing parties stick to their previous policy positions, voters belonging to group 1 are *safe voters*: They voted for party  $j$  before and party  $j$ 's policy shift is favorable to its pre-shift position. In contrast, the party policy shift leaves voters in group 2

worse off so that voters belonging to this group are *potential vote losses* for party j. As *potential new voters*, we can further identify those voters who did not vote for party j in the last election but for which the party policy shift puts party j’s policy position closer to the personal preferences (group 3). Finally, group 4 covers voters who did not vote for party j in the last election and who are worse off by its policy shift compared to the previous party policy position. Because the party shifts its policy position further away from these voters’ preferences, I label this group *unattractive voters*.

**Table 3.1: Voters and potential voters of party j (holding competitors’ policy positions constant)**

	<b>Party policy shift towards voters’ policy preferences</b>	<b>Party policy shift away from voters’ policy preferences</b>
<b>Party j’s voters at t-1</b>	<u>Group 1:</u> Safe voters	<u>Group 2:</u> Potential vote losses
<b>Voters not voting for party j at t-1</b>	<u>Group 3:</u> Potential new voters	<u>Group 4:</u> Unattractive voters

With voters and competing parties sticking to their policy preferences, party j’s strategy is straightforward: It aims at winning new voters while keeping old ones. Concerning the former, potential new voters belong to group 3. Therefore, party j has to make sure that these voters perceive its policy shift. In the simplified version with constant policy preferences of competing parties and voters, group 4 is unattractive for party j. They did not vote for party j before and will not change their decision given the direction of party j’s policy shift. In contrast, party j can count on those voters in group 1 because these voted for party j before and they benefit from the party’s policy shift. Hence, party j can concentrate on the potential vote losses in group 2. The situation is best, of course, if voters in group 2 *do not* perceive the party shift away from their policy preferences.

When does party j shift its policy position? Using the simplified setting presented in Table 3.1, it keeps the “safe voters” in group 1 and never reaches those in group 4. The two target groups are therefore the voters in the groups 2 and 3. Because parties only shift policy positions if shifts are expected to increase their vote share, a necessary condition for vote gains is that voters in the target group (group 3) perceive the their policy shift. Hence, the parties’ abilities in general increase with the voters’ increasing reception and acceptance. Ideally, parties also want voters in group 2 who do not perceive the shift away from the own preferences. In this case, party j may profit from winning new votes in group 3 while avoiding vote losses in group 2. Such a scenario is indeed possible if reception and acceptance vary

across voters. In that case, the parties' abilities for position shifts only increase with the voters' reception and acceptance in group 3. Specifically, parties benefit from voters with higher degrees of reception and acceptance *if* the party shifts its policy position towards their policy preferences. Next, I disentangle the perception effects.

### 3.3.1.1 Party reactions to varying reception across voters

I stick to the simplified version presented in Table 3.1 assuming that voters and competing parties have fixed policy positions and that party  $j$  is the sole actor moving its policy platform. Further, I concentrate on the voters' reception of party  $j$ 's policy shift. Let therefore the acceptance of party policy shifts only vary across groups. In other words, the acceptance  $a_{ijt}$  is the same for voters within the four voter groups displayed in Table 3.1. In formulas,

$$a_{jlt} = a_{ijt} \text{ for all } i \in \text{group } l \quad (9)$$

Further, assuming that the perceived party policy position  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$  of party  $j$  at time  $t-1$  is identical in group  $l$

$$pp_{jl(t-1)} = pp_{ij(t-1)} \text{ for all } i \in \text{group } l, \quad (10)$$

the mean perceived policy position of party  $j$  in group  $l$  is given by

$$\begin{aligned} pp_{jlt} &= \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} pp_{ijt} = \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \cdot (p_{jt} - pp_{ij(t-1)}) + pp_{ij(t-1)} \\ &= \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} (r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \cdot p_{jt}) - \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} (r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \cdot pp_{ij(t-1)}) + \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} (pp_{ij(t-1)}) \\ &= a_{jlt} \cdot p_{jt} \cdot \frac{1}{n_l} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} (r_{ijt}) - a_{jlt} \cdot pp_{jl(t-1)} \cdot \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} (r_{ijt}) + pp_{jl(t-1)} \\ &= a_{jlt} \cdot p_{jt} \cdot r_{jlt} - a_{jlt} \cdot pp_{jl(t-1)} \cdot r_{jlt} + pp_{jl(t-1)} \\ &= r_{jlt} \cdot a_{jlt} \cdot (p_{jt} - pp_{jl(t-1)}) + pp_{jl(t-1)} \end{aligned} \quad (11)$$

with

$$r_{jlt} = \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} r_{ijt} \quad (12)$$

Equation (11) shows that party  $j$ 's mean perceived position of voters in group  $l$  depends on the mean reception  $r_{jlt}$  and acceptance  $a_{jlt}$ . Keeping the acceptance constant, the higher the mean reception  $r_{jlt}$ , the more voters perceive party  $j$ 's policy shift. Referring to the different groups in Table 3.1, party  $j$  focuses on the target groups 2 and 3. Party  $j$  is likely to keeping its voters and winning new ones simultaneously if  $r_{j2t}$  is small and  $r_{j3t}$  is large. In other words, party  $j$  benefits most if its previous voters do not receive the shift moving away from their personal preferences while potential new voters do receive party  $j$ 's shift message.

If the reception does not vary across voters, the reception  $r_{jt}$  of party policy shifts is a necessary condition for parties to shift their policy positions: Party  $j$  only shifts its policy position if shifts result in an increase of its vote share. Potential new voters in group 3 only receive the party policy shift if the reception  $r_{jt}$  is high. Because the reception is constant for all voters  $i$ , party  $j$  cannot hope for unaware voters in group 2. Hence, it is only able to shift its policy position if the electorate in general is able to receive the shift message. If the reception is low, party  $j$  sticks to its policy position.

### 3.3.1.2 Party reactions to varying acceptance across voters

In a similar manner, we can study the effect of the voters' acceptance on the perception of party policy shifts. As above, I assume that the perceived party position  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$  at time  $t-1$  only varies across groups but is constant within the four groups in Table 3.1. But now we are interested in the effect of the voters' acceptance  $a_{ijt}$  of party  $j$ 's policy shift. Therefore, I set the reception  $r_{ijt}$  to be the same for all voters within group  $l$ . A calculation similar to equation (11) reveals that

$$\begin{aligned}
pp_{jlt} &= \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} pp_{ijt} = \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \cdot (p_{jt} - pp_{ij(t-1)}) + pp_{ij(t-1)} \\
&= \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} (r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \cdot p_{jt}) - \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} (r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \cdot pp_{ij(t-1)}) + \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} (pp_{ij(t-1)}) \\
&= r_{jlt} \cdot p_{jt} \cdot \frac{1}{n_l} \cdot \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} (a_{ijt}) - r_{jlt} \cdot pp_{jl(t-1)} \cdot \frac{1}{n_l} \sum_{i=1}^{n_l} (a_{ijt}) + pp_{jl(t-1)} \\
&= r_{jlt} \cdot p_{jt} \cdot a_{jlt} - r_{jlt} \cdot pp_{jl(t-1)} \cdot a_{jlt} + pp_{jl(t-1)} \\
&= r_{jlt} \cdot a_{jlt} \cdot (p_{jt} - pp_{jl(t-1)}) + pp_{jl(t-1)} \tag{13}
\end{aligned}$$

As can be seen from equation (13) the result is similar to equation (11). Holding the reception constant across groups studying the acceptance of policy shifts hence reveals the same implications as for the reception of party policy shifts. Recall that party  $j$  is mainly interested in the potential vote losses (group 2) and potential gains of new voters (group 3). Party  $j$  is most likely to shift its policy position if potential new voters (group 3) accept the party's policy shift towards their position while voters disadvantaged by the shift (group 2) do not accept it. Therefore, party  $j$  is most likely to shift its policy platform if  $a_{j2t}$  is small and  $a_{j3t}$  is large. The larger the difference between both groups, the more likely the policy shift.

In case the acceptance does not differ across voters (and therefore, across voter groups), the acceptance of party policy shifts of party  $j$  is given by  $a_{jt}$ . Again, the acceptance of party policy shifts is a necessary condition for party  $j$  to shift its position so that party  $j$  only shifts its policy position if its acceptance is high.

For the perception of party policy shifts, we can thus summarize

Axiom 2:

The parties' abilities to shift their policy platforms increase with the voters' reception and acceptance of party position shifts.

If the reception and acceptance varies across voters, parties benefit most if voters perceive party policy shifts towards their personal preferences while voters being worse off under the new policies do not perceive the policy shift. The larger the share of voters benefiting from a party's platform change, the more the party wants the voters to perceive its policy shift.

### 3.3.2 A dynamic model: party position shifts of all parties

So far, I assumed that party  $j$  is the only actor shifting policy positions. The competing parties stick to their respective policy position. How does the model change when we relax this assumption allowing all parties to shift their policy position? As one might expect, the situation gets less comfortable for party  $j$ : So far, party  $j$  enjoyed the mover advantage and could therefore act in a relatively simple competitive environment. As illustrated in Table 3.1, party  $j$  could count on a share of safe voters (group 1) who voted for party  $j$  before and who benefited from the party's policy shift. Group 4 consisted of unattractive voters, that means voters who casted a ballot for another party and for whom the policy shift puts the party's platform further away from the own preferences. Party  $j$  could therefore concentrate on two

target groups: Party voters who are disadvantaged by the party’s policy shift and those potential new voters who would benefit from party j’s position shift.

The implications change once competing parties start to shift. Although the characterization of the groups 2 (potential vote losses) and 3 (potential vote gains) still holds, there are no longer safe voters (group 1) or voters unappealing for party j (group 4). Rather, party j has to consider all four voter groups. The new situation is shown in Table 3.2. As can be seen, party j is worried about potential losses from all voters in the previous election. The situation is known for the voters in group 2 because party j *abandons* those voters by shifting away from their personal policy preferences. But the so-far safe voters are also at risk because competing parties may attract these voters by shifting in their direction. Although party j shifts its policy position towards these voters’ preferences, the voters belonging to this group may nevertheless become *disloyal* to party j by voting for one of the competing parties.

The situation is also more complex for potential new voters of party j. So far, party j concentrated on voters who might be attracted by the party policy shift and group 3 remains the *target* for party j even when other parties also shift their positions. Yet, under the new conditions even group 4 is no longer unattractive for party j. Although it shifts away from these voters (who voted for another party before), they nevertheless may vote for party j in the next election. That might occur when their previous party shifts its policy position away from these voters’ preferences (i.e. these voters belong to group 2 of another party  $j' \neq j$ ). Because all political parties abandon these voters, I label this voter group *orphan voters*. Although these voters are potential new voters for party j, their vote choice leaves them worse off compared to the previous election.

**Table 3.2: Voters and potential voters of party j (shifting competitors)**

	<b>Party policy shift towards voters’ policy preferences</b>	<b>Party policy shift away from voters’ policy preferences</b>
<b>Party j’s voters at t-1</b>	<u>Group 1:</u> Potential vote losses (disloyal)	<u>Group 2:</u> Potential vote losses (abandoned)
<b>Voters not voting for party j at t-1</b>	<u>Group 3:</u> Potential new voters (target)	<u>Group 4:</u> Potential new voters (orphans)

How does this new situation affect party policy shifts? Although the competitive environment is more complex when rival parties also shift their policy positions, party j still has an incentive to emphasize policy shifts towards the voters’ preferences (groups 1 and 3) while

masking its shifts away from the preferences of other voters (groups 2 and 4). Using the notation introduced above, party  $j$  profits most if  $r_{j1t}$  and  $r_{j3t}$  are large while  $r_{j2t}$  and  $r_{j4t}$  are small. The same holds for the acceptance parameters  $a_{jlt}$ . Although the choice may be more complex when rival parties shift as well, the general idea remains the same: Parties benefit from voters receiving and accepting policy shifts towards their policy preferences. To the same extent, parties want voters being worse off by the platform shift not to perceive the position change. In other words, parties only benefit from the voters' reception and acceptance if the policy shift is towards their policy preferences. The larger the share of voters benefiting from a party's position shift, the more the party wants the electorate to receive and to accept its platform change.

If the reception and acceptance does not differ across voters and voter groups, higher reception and acceptance give parties the capacity to shift their policy positions. In other words, the parties' leeway for policy shifts is larger. Although the competitive environment may not allow party  $j$  to increase its vote share, position shifts may help by minimizing vote losses.<sup>14</sup> Hence, Axiom 2 still holds.

### 3.3.3 Voter position shifts and their effects on party position shifts

I now turn to the effect of voter position shifts and their effects on party position shifts. So far, I assumed that voters stick to their policy positions. I now relax this assumption studying the implications of voter position shifts on the parties' incentives to shift their policy platforms.

Consider again the situation of party  $j$ . We can subdivide party  $j$ 's electorate in the previous election  $t-1$  into voters shifting towards the party's perceived position  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$  and those moving away from it. To hold previous voters who are shifting towards party  $j$ 's policy position, no policy shifts are necessary. If voters who voted for party  $j$  in the previous election shift away from the perceived party policy position  $pp_{ij(t-1)}$ , party  $j$  has an incentive to follow these voter shifts to hold the voters. Given the vote-maximization prior, whether to hold voters who are shifting towards the party's position or to follow previous voters who are moving away from the party's perceived position hence depends on the *size* of the respective groups. If the number of party voters shifting away from the party's perceived position exceeds the number of voters shifting towards the party's policy platform, party  $j$  has an incentive to shift its policy position following its voters' position shift.

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<sup>14</sup> This situation could not occur in the simplified version holding the rival parties' policy positions constant. With competing parties shifting their policy positions, party  $j$  may find itself in a situation where vote losses are inevitable. Nevertheless, policy shifts may help to minimize these losses.

In a similar vein, we can distinguish voter position shifts of the remaining electorate. Party *j*'s strategy for winning new voters also depends on the direction of voter policy shifts. Hence, we may subdivide the remaining electorate (i.e. those voters who did not cast a ballot for party *j* at *t-1*) in those voters shifting their policy positions closer to the party's perceived policy position and those shifting away from it. While party *j* has no incentive to shift to convince the former, party position shifts are in place to hunt for potential voters whose preferences move away from the party's platform. A strategy for winning new voters again depends on the relative size of the relevant groups. If a majority of voters shifts towards party *j*'s platform, party policy shifts are not necessary. If, in contrast, the majority of voters shift away from the party position, party *j* may aim at following the voters' position shifts.

For the ease of interpretation, I follow Adams and colleagues (2004) distinguishing "benign" and "harmful" shifts in public opinion. Harmful public opinion shifts are characterized by shifts of the mean voter away from a party's policy position. Benign shifts, in contrast, are in the direction of the party's policy position (Adams et al. 2004: 598). Using this notation for the two voter groups discussed above, we can tabulate harmful and benign shifts for party *j*'s voters (at *t-1*) and potential future voters. The combinations and the resulting incentives for party policy shifts are shown in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3: Voter position shifts and incentives for party policy change**

	<b>Benign shift of party voters at t-1</b>	<b>Harmful shift of party voters at t-1</b>
<b>Benign shift of potential voters at t-1</b>	No incentive for party position shift	For party voters (t-1): High perception For remaining voters: Low perception
<b>Harmful shift of potential voters at t-1</b>	For party voters (t-1): Low perception For remaining voters: High perception	If both groups shift in same direction: High perception of all voters If not: ambiguous

Depending on the direction of position shifts of former party voters and potential new voters, parties are more or less interested in the perception of their policy position shifts. If both voter groups shift towards party *j*'s perceived policy position, party *j* has no incentive to shifts its policy position. Consequently, the voters' reception and acceptance should not affect the



party's behavior. The situation is different if potential new voters shift towards party j's policy position while its former voters move away from the party's perceived policy position at t-1. In this case, party j faces two (contradicting) incentives. To hold its voters, party j should follow the harmful public opinion shift. Yet, at the same time, party j should stay put to attract potential new voters who shifted towards its policy position. For the perception of party policy shifts, the consequences are two-fold: First, party j is interested in the perception of its policy shift by its former voters who the party is trailing. At the same time, party j is not interested in the perception of its position shifts by potential new voters attracted by its policy position at t-1. Hence, party j's policy shifts are most likely if the perception of party voters is high while potential voters are not likely to perceive the party's position shift.

The party's strategic challenges are in many ways similar if party j's voters shift towards its policy platform while potential new voters shift their policy positions away from it. Party j wants its potential new voters to perceive its party policy shift following them. At the same time, the present voters should not perceive shifts away from the party policy platform. Hence, party position shifts are most likely if the perception of party j's shift is low for party voters at t-1 while being high for potential new voters moving away from party j's perceived platform. Finally, it may occur that both party j's voters at t-1 and potential new voters move away from the party's perceived party position at t-1. In this case, party j has a large incentive to follow these harmful public opinion shifts. In case party voters and potential new voters shift in the same direction, party j benefits from the perception of a policy shift following both voter groups. In other words, party position shifts are most likely if the perception is high among both groups. The situation is different if both groups move away from the party's policy position but in different directions. To take an example, think of the majority of party j's voters placed left of their perceived policy position of party j. Furthermore, the majority of potential new voters hold policy preferences right of their perceived policy position of party j. If party j's present voters shift to the left while potential new voters shift to the right, both groups move away from party j's policy position. It is an open question what party j's incentives are in an unlikely situation like this.<sup>15</sup> Without further assumptions (e.g. on the size of the two groups) forming expectations is rather difficult. Party j could follow its party voters at t-1 counting on the low reception of potential new voters. Similarly, party j could hunt for new voters on the right relying on the low perception of party

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<sup>15</sup> In my sample of ten West European countries (see Chapter 7), public opinion shifts of both groups moving away from a party's platform in different directions only occur in 6 out of 196 cases.

voters who shifted to the left. It is also reasonable to argue that party  $j$  reacts to the contradicting incentives by staying put. Hence, I do not formulate a specific expectation.

In sum, voter position shifts affect the parties' incentives for party policy shifts. Voter shifts towards the parties' perceived position (i.e. benign public opinion shifts) decrease the incentives for moving away from the platform. In contrast, harmful shifts in public opinion shifting away from the parties' perceived policy positions increase the incentives for party policy shifts. Concerning the perception of party policy shifts, parties benefit from (1) voters shifting towards the party's policy position not perceiving party shifts away from it and (2) voters moving away from the party's policy position perceiving the party's shift following them. Distinguishing these two groups for former party voters and potential new voters (see Table 3.3), parties face different incentives for platform changes. Summarizing the arguments presented above, I postulate

Axiom 3:

Party policy shifts are most likely if the perception of voters shifting towards the party's perceived platform is low while the voters moving away from the party's position receive and accept the party shift trailing their own opinion shift.

### 3.4 Summary

This chapter presented the theoretical model which provides the basis for the analyses presented in the Chapters 6 and 8. While standard spatial models treat elections in isolation, I argue that focusing on the challenges of relocation over time reveals important insights into the dynamics of party systems. I emphasize that voters have to receive and accept parties' shift messages so that party policy shifts are much more complicated than established spatial models suggest.

Following Zaller (1992), I argue that the perception of party policy shifts is a two-stage process. First, voters have to receive the party's policy shift. If voters are not aware of the parties' actions or if parties do not broadcast the shifts of their policy platforms, voters do not perceive the party position shifts and hence base their vote choice on outdated perceptions of policy platforms. Second, voters receiving the party policy shifts are not forced to accept (i.e. consider credible) the proposed policy positions. While the reception of party shifts is a cognitive process, the acceptance step is a political one related to trust and other feelings

towards parties and their leaders. Put differently, voters have to believe in the party's policy turn.

I present a simple spatial model defining voter utility functions as the negative of the squared distances between voter positions and the voters' individual perceptions of party policy positions. To keep the model as simple as possible, I assume a one-dimensional policy space. Furthermore, I argue that parties are first and foremost interested in maximizing their vote share. Hence, parties shift their policy platforms only if this shift from the status quo leaves the party better off. However, because party policy shifts involve costs, parties refrain from implementing them if they do not expect a net benefit. In that sense, voters not receiving or accepting party position shifts constrain party policy options.

I postulate two axioms on the effect of reception and acceptance on voters (Axiom 1) and political parties (Axiom 2). Furthermore, I present the effects of public opinion shifts on the parties' incentives and their ability for party position shifts (Axiom 3). Axiom 1 states that the perception of party policy shifts is a two-stage process of (1) receiving and (2) accepting the party's new policy position. If one of the two steps fails, then voters stick to their previously perceived policy position of the respective party. I hint at potential consequences of non-perception on the trust in institutions, elites, and political parties as well as its meaning for the delegation of powers in democratic regimes. Yet, my main interest lies in the parties' reactions to the challenges of voters' reception and acceptance. Axiom 2 states the expectations for the reception and the acceptance of party policy shifts. It postulates that parties benefit from higher reception and acceptance of their policy shifts. If the reception and acceptance varies across voters, parties may furthermore profit from varying reception and acceptance in the electorate. Parties benefit most if voters receive and accept party policy shifts towards their personal preferences while those being worse off by the policy shift ignore or reject the move away from their personal preferences. In this case, the positive effect of the voters' perception only holds for voters being better off by the party's policy shift.

Finally, I study the effects of public opinion shifts on the incentives for party position shifts. Distinguishing benign (i.e. shifts towards) and harmful (i.e. shifts away from the party's policy position) voter shifts, I argue that parties have incentives to shift their platform in the latter but not in the former case. Parties benefit most if voters perceive party shifts following voter position shifts. At the same time, parties also benefit from low reception and acceptance of their policy shifts by voters who, in turn, shift towards the party's pre-shift position. Effects of the reception and acceptance of party policy shifts hence hinge on the

parties' incentives for policy shifts indicated by changing preferences of present and potential new voters.

The next chapter is dedicated to the covariates affecting the reception and acceptance of party position shifts. So far, the reception and acceptance of party policy shifts are rather abstract and not measurable as such. I argue that specific covariates increase or decrease the probability of receiving and accepting the parties' policy shifts. I formulate hypotheses how these covariates affect the voters' perception of party policy shifts and the parties' reactions. The subsequent empirical chapters test these expectations at the voter (Chapter 6) and the party level (Chapter8).

## **4 Causes and consequences of voters' reception and acceptance**

This chapter breathes life into the previously introduced model of party policy shifts. So far, I discussed two constructs which are neither directly observable nor measurable. For that reason, I posited axioms rather than hypotheses. They explicate expectations of how voters receive and accept party policy shifts and how these perceptions affect the parties' abilities to shift policy platforms. This chapter adds more flesh to these bones discussing factors expected to affect the voters' reception and acceptance. These covariates provide "observable implications" of the theory stated above (King et al. 1994): I assume that these covariates impact on the reception and acceptance of party policy shifts and that I can test their overall effect on the voters' *perception* of party policy shifts. Moreover, the covariates affecting voters' perception of party policy shifts also affect the parties' abilities to shift their policy positions. The main goal of this chapter hence is to derive testable predictions for voters and parties.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I start with presenting covariates expected to affect *the voters' reception of party policy shifts*. As mentioned earlier, the reception of party policy shifts is a cognitive process. Hence, the covariates need to include factors measuring the voters' *ability* to receive party policy shifts and factors measuring the complexity of the political market. Drawing on the axioms presented in the previous chapter, I derive hypotheses about how these factors impact on voters' reception and the parties' reactions to it.<sup>16</sup> I then present covariates affecting the *acceptance of party policy shifts*. In contrast to their reception, acceptance of party position shifts is a political matter. Hence, factors measuring the parties' persuasiveness and the voters' willingness to believe in parties' messages play a role here. I state hypotheses on the effect for voters' acceptance of party policy shifts and the consequences for parties when changing their policy platforms. Finally, I summarize my expectations.

### **4.1 Impacts on the reception of party position shifts**

In total, I identify six factors that affect the reception of party policy shifts. Three of them are voter-specific. First, I argue that voters' *political awareness* affects the reception of party

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<sup>16</sup> For simplicity, I use the capital letters V for voter-specific and P for party-specific hypotheses.

policy shifts. The argument is taken from Zaller (1992). It states that the reception of political messages is more likely if the respondent's political awareness is high. Second and related, I use a similar argument stating that the voters' *level of education* affects the reception of shifts in the party policy platform. Third, I argue that *voter position shifts* lead voters to update their information on party platforms. Voters shifting their policy positions update the information about the appropriate party choice. Hence, the reception should be more likely if voters move away from prior policy positions.

In addition, party- and party system-specific factors affect voters' reception of party policy shifts. I differentiate between different levels of *media exposure*. While some parties enjoy a higher level of media coverage, other parties do not. Simply put, I argue that increased media attention makes the reception of party policy shifts more likely. Furthermore, the *complexity of the political market* affects the voters' reception of party position shifts. Two-party systems are less complex than multi-party systems with more "relevant" parties. All else equal, the higher the complexity of the party system, the less likely voters are to receive parties' shift messages. Finally, I argue that the *magnitude of the party policy shifts* affects their reception. Incremental changes are less likely to be perceived. In contrast, large policy position shifts cause a stir in the public improving the chances of the policy shift's reception. Next, I present all these arguments in greater detail and formulate hypotheses for the voters' reception and how the parties in turn react to the voters' behavior.

#### 4.1.1 Political awareness

Zaller defines political awareness as "the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics *and* understands what he or she has encountered" (Zaller 1992: 21, emphasis in the original). In other words, political awareness captures whether voters are informed and comprehend political information. Hence, awareness captures more than pure interest. Following Zaller, political awareness increases the probability that respondents receive political messages. In Zaller's own words, the reception axiom states that "the greater a person's level of cognitive engagement with an issue, the more likely he or she is to be exposed to and comprehend – in a word, to receive – political messages concerning this issue" (Zaller 1992: 42). I argue that his argument is also applicable to party position shifts. Parties shifting their policy position spread political messages and political awareness increases the probability that voters receive these messages.

For voters, the implications of political awareness are straightforward: The higher their political awareness, the higher the likelihood of receiving party policy shifts. All else being equal, higher reception increases the probability of perceiving party policy shifts. Hence, I formulate

Hypothesis V1:

The higher the voter's political awareness, the more likely is the perception of party policy shifts.

Evaluating the effect of political awareness for political parties is slightly more complex. I argue that the reception of party policy shifts is a necessary condition for voters to perceive party policy shifts. Without perception of policy shifts, parties would shift their policy platform without being heard. But because shifts involve costs, parties refrain from shifting their platforms without a chance of attracting new voters. This leads to

Hypothesis P1a:

The higher voters' mean political awareness, the more likely are shifts of parties' policy positions.

In fact, Axiom 2 states that parties benefit most from voters receiving party policy shifts towards their personal policy preferences. Yet, the situation is even better if voters do *not* receive the party's policy shift away from their preferences. The larger the share of voters benefiting from the party's policy shift, the higher is the party's incentive that voters perceive its platform change. Attracting voters, parties should therefore build on aware voters if the policy shift is towards the majority of the voters' preferences. In contrast, political awareness does not motivate parties to shift their policy positions moving away from the majority of the voters' preferences. Hence, the slightly more detailed hypothesis reads as follows:

Hypothesis P1b:

The higher the voters' mean political awareness, the more likely parties shift their policy positions *if* the party shifts its platform towards the majority of the voters' policy preferences. In contrast, political awareness does not motivate party position shifts away from the majority of the voters' preferences.

### 4.1.2 Education

Similar to political awareness, I argue that voters' level of education affects the reception of policy shifts. The argument is connected to costs of information considerations going back to Downs (1957: 208-210; see also Alvarez and Brehm 2002: 33). Downs argues that obtaining information entails costs. He distinguishes two kinds of information costs: transferable and non-transferable information costs. While voters may transfer some of the information costs to elites or mass media, other costs are non-transferable: Selecting data sources, updating information, and using information to make a decision are payable by the voters themselves. Information costs are, however, not distributed equally in a democratic society (Alvarez and Brehm 2002: 33). Voters with higher costs of obtaining information are less likely to acquire it. Hence, voters with higher information costs face higher uncertainty. Voter uncertainty and information costs have been subject to various studies of public opinion and electoral behavior (Bartels 1986; Alvarez and Franklin 1994; Alvarez 1997; Alvarez and Brehm 2002). Studying the uncertainty of voters in placing presidential candidates, for example, Alvarez (1997: 94) argues that voters with higher information costs are more uncertain about the candidates' policy positions. I make a similar argument here: Voters with higher information costs are more uncertain about parties' behavior. Hence, they are less likely to receive information about party policy shifts.

Information costs may be measured in different ways. Most commonly, researchers use data on voters' political awareness and education. As the former was discussed before, I can concentrate on the level of education as an indicator for varying information costs. In line with previous research, I argue that more highly educated individuals have a greater ability to acquire information so that their information costs are lower. Therefore, education should increase the probability of receiving party policy shifts. As a consequence, the perception of party policy shifts increases. Hence, I state

#### Hypothesis V2:

The higher a voter's level of education, the more likely is the perception of party policy shifts.

Turning to the effect of voters' education on the policy shifts of political parties, we can make the same general argument as for political awareness: Party position shifts involve costs and parties only take this burden if the benefits (i.e. the increase in vote share) outweigh the costs. For voters to react to party position shifts, their reception is a necessary condition. Hence,



parties are more likely to shift their policy positions if potential new voters receive the party's shift. This leads to

Hypothesis P2a:

The higher voters' mean level of education, the more likely it is that parties shift their policy positions.

Axiom 2 allows for a more fine-grained version of Hypothesis P2a. Specifically, parties benefit most if voters receive party policy shifts towards their personal policy preferences while voters being worse off by the party's policy shift do not receive the platform shift. Higher education levels therefore increase the party's ability to shift its policy platform if the shift is towards the voter's policy preferences. The larger the share of voters being better off with the party's policy shift, the more the party benefits from highly educated voters. Hence, the voters' mean level of education should depend on the direction of the party position shift vis-à-vis the voters' policy positions. As for political awareness, I formulate a modified

Hypothesis P2b:

The higher the voters' mean level of education, the more likely it is that parties shift their policy positions *if* the party shifts its platform towards the majority of the voters' policy preferences. In contrast, the level of education does not motivate party position shifts moving away from the majority of the voters' preferences.

#### 4.1.3 Updating information following voter position shifts

Voters' policy position shifts also impact on the perception of party platform changes. I argue that voters have a higher need for updating their information on party positions once they alter their personal policy preferences. The reason is that voters changing their personal policy preferences have to consider whether their previous vote choice is still appropriate. As a consequence, voter policy shifts increase their probability of receiving a party's shift message.

According to the model presented so far, updating information on political parties is not necessary for all voter groups. Assuming a one-dimensional policy space, voters with policy preferences left of (or right of) all major parties in a given system further shifting to the left (to the right) have no incentive for renewing their information on party policy positions. Based on policy grounds, their only reasonable vote choice was the leftmost (rightmost) party so that respective voters do not benefit from updating their information. Hence, voters with

extreme preferences shifting their positions further to the respective boundaries of the policy space should face no incentive to update available information on political parties.<sup>17</sup> Yet, this argument does not consider that voters with extreme preferences further shifting to the respective boundary are voters which are not well represented by the existing party alternatives. Although one (extreme) party is closest to their policy position, the distance towards the closest party is rather large. Because “no candidate is sufficiently attractive to merit [the voter’s] support” (Adams et al. 2005: 120), these voters are likely to “abstain due to alienation” (Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Enelow and Hinich 1984: 90; Adams, Dow et al. 2006). Hence, extreme voters also face incentives to update their information on party position shifts to be able to evaluate the policy distance to the closest party. Instead of deciding *which* party to vote for after shifting their personal policy preferences, these voters choose *whether* to vote at all.

Hence, voters shifting their policy positions update their information on political parties and are thus more likely to receive party policy shifts. Holding the acceptance of party policy shifts constant, I summarize:

Hypothesis V3:

The larger a voter’s shift in policy positions, the more likely is the perception of party policy shifts.

Axiom 3 identifies the parties’ incentives to shift their policy positions as reactions to voter position shifts. A party benefits from a low perception of voters shifting their policy preferences towards its policy position. Simultaneously, it benefits from the reception of its shift by voters performing harmful public opinion shifts. Hence, the voters’ updating leads parties to shift their policy positions if public opinion moves away from its prior position. The larger the share of voters moving away from the party’s policy position, the higher the party’s incentive for voters to update their information on policy platforms. Hence, I formulate

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<sup>17</sup> The situation is different for extreme voters shifting their policy positions towards the centre and for voters already located at the centre of the policy space: They can choose between several parties and shifting the policy positions may lead to a new evaluation of the policy distances. Hence, shifting the policy position to the left or the right requires an information update of the new environment.

### Hypothesis P3:

The larger the shifts in public opinion *moving away* from the party's platform, the more likely it is that the party shifts its policy positions. In contrast, large public opinion shifts towards the party's platform make it to refrain from party position shifts.

#### 4.1.4 Media exposure

On average, voters do not actively search for party information by collecting party platforms or other party documents. It is safe to assume that most voters rely on what they can extract from media reporting. I argue that parties' visibility in the public sphere positively affects voters' probability of receiving party policy shifts. Some parties are more likely to be on the media agenda than others. Of course, a party may be in the media's focus because its leading figures are involved in political scandals or because intra-party dissent is made public. But even this kind of exposure to media attention with no or only indirect connections to the party's policies is more likely to hit "relevant" or "important" parties rather than small ones and those without any say in politics. With regard to more policy-related issues, newspapers, TV and radio stations are also more likely to cover news stories and to conduct interviews with leading politicians rather than irrelevant outsiders.

How to measure the "relevance" of political parties for the media? The size of parties may serve as a proxy. Large parties have more weight in politics than small parties because they have more seats in parliament and may, moreover, cover more experts in various policy areas. In addition, size is a good proxy for a "fair" allocation of media attention: Newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations may have incentives to allocate their time and space to various parties and split their resources according to the parties' relative importance. In addition to party size, a party's policy positions vis-à-vis its competitors is relevant. If media reports aim at capturing "public opinion", the media is more likely to report mainstream opinions than preferences of radical parties on the left or the right of the political spectrum.

Both the parties' size and their policy positions vis-à-vis their competitors are connected to the probability that parties enter government (coalitions). The argument is immediately apparent for two-party systems where the party winning the plurality of votes usually also enters a single-party majority government (Lijphart 1999; Powell 2000). But the same argument also applies for minority situations in parliament. For coalitions to form, a party's size (Lupia and Strøm 2008) matters as well as its ideological position vis-à-vis its

competitors (Axelrod 1970; de Swaan 1973). In their path-breaking book on *Making and breaking governments*, Laver and Shepsle argue that so-called “strong parties” are likely to participate in cabinets (Laver and Shepsle 1996: 73). Because strong parties are also likely to be large and centrist (Laver and Shepsle 1996: ch. 5), parties are more likely to participate in (coalition) cabinets if their seat share in parliament is high and if they hold a centrist policy position. Hence, I argue that it is useful to study government parties as a proxy for media attention to political parties.

But even more important, parties in government have more policy influence than opposition parties and are, hence, more likely to be a target of media attention.<sup>18</sup> Using a case study of Ross Perot’s bid in the 1992 US presidential campaign, Zaller and Hunt argue that media attention is a necessary condition for electoral success (Zaller and Hunt 1994; 1995). Moreover, there is research studying the news media’s dependence on information provided by government officials (Bennett 1990; Zaller and Chiu 1996). The basic idea is that journalists depend on “official” sources within government. The more diverging the opinions in government, the more variance shows in news reports. However, the American findings do not travel easily across the Atlantic. Bennett as well as Zaller and Chiu use the term “government” in a wide definition including legislative actors while I am interested in the government-opposition divide using “government” in its narrower sense of “being in office”. Moreover, the studies are restricted to a specific policy field, namely foreign affairs. Finally, the situation is different in parliamentary systems with governments depending on the majority in parliament and more cohesive parties.

Empirical research on European parties is only anecdotic. Transferring Bennett’s argument to parliamentary systems, Scheafer and Wolfsfeld (2009: 149) state that “anyone familiar with coalition politics knows that some of the fiercest arguments can be found *within* a governing coalition. This is important because some of these oppositional voices are ministers with political power who have better access to the news media than leaders from the opposition” (emphasis in the original). However, they provide no evidence supporting this claim. Similarly, Jenkins (1999: 432) states that “the literature suggests that major parties can expect to receive the majority of attention in the news media, with incumbents possibly benefiting from a greater share of coverage because of an office-holding advantage” but, again, as the word “possibly” indicates there are no empirical sources to back up the

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<sup>18</sup> Note that I am primarily interested in media attention and not in the content of media reports. Since I am currently discussing effects for the reception of policy shifts, the contents of the media exposure is irrelevant.

argument. In the only relevant empirical study I am aware of (Koopmans 2007), the author finds that the Europeanization of public debates favors government and executive actors compared to legislative and party actors. While heads of states and governments and cabinet ministers are overrepresented in the public sphere, legislative actors are less visible. At least for the European level, we may hence conclude that media attention is biased towards government actors.

If government actors are more visible than opposition parties, the likelihood of receiving their party policy shifts is higher. Holding the acceptance functions constant, Axiom 1 states that a higher reception increases the likelihood of perceiving the parties' platform changes. This leads to

Hypothesis V4:

Voters are the more likely to perceive party policy shifts of parties in government than shifts of opposition parties.

Turning to the effects of the parties' governmental status on party position shifts, government parties benefit from higher media attention. In contrast to the factors discussed earlier, however, governmental status is a party-specific variable and hence its effect on voters' reception does not vary across voters. As a consequence, parties cannot hope for winning those voters who receive party policy shifts towards their personal preferences while at the same time counting on the ignorance of voters from whom the party moves away (see Axiom 2). Rather, parties will shift policy positions if the vote gains outweigh the vote losses. Because a higher reception increases a party's ability to shift its policy position, I postulate

Hypothesis P4:

Government parties have a higher ability to shift their policy positions than opposition parties.

#### 4.1.5 The complexity of the political market

The reception of party position shifts also hinges on the complexity of the political market. Casting a ballot, voters choose from the menu of available alternatives. A decision between two alternatives may be difficult in some cases but is even more challenging with an increasing number of (vote) choices. Moreover, decisions get more complex if new alternatives enter from time to time while others disappear. I argue that complexity of the political market negatively affects the probability of voters receiving party policy shifts.

A change in the menu of political parties suggests that a political market is complex. The situation is most challenging to voters if political parties enter and leave the political market in rapid succession. Moreover, parties changing their “brand names” (Aldrich 1995) make it increasingly difficult for voters to follow their behavior. Hence, I expect that changing party alternatives increase the complexity of the political market and reduce the likelihood of receiving parties’ policy shifts. But whereas party systems are rather fluid in Eastern Europe, their West European counterparts are rather stable: Parties seldom change their names and the composition of parliaments is fairly stable. The stability of West European party systems led Lipset and Rokkan (1967) to conclude that the party systems are “frozen”. Although new parties and party families entered West European parliaments since the 1960s (see Kitschelt 1989), these changes are rather evolutionary. Because my sample only contains West European countries, I refrain from using changes in party names and the creation and death of parties as factors indicating the complexity of the political market.

But although the suppliers of policies have not changed substantially over time, party systems differ according to the number of actors involved. Clearly, political markets are easiest to understand if only two parties compete for votes. Voters are faced with clear-cut alternatives, one in government and one in opposition, and (except for those who abstain) either vote for the former or the latter. The more parties, the more difficult it gets to receive party policy shifts. The higher the number of “relevant” parties, the lower the likelihood that voters are able to perceive the parties’ position shifts. The number of major parties may be calculated using a classical measure like the effective number of relevant parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) or variants thereof (Dumont and Caulier 2005). Sartori (1976: 121-125) combines arguments on the parties’ size with their ideological position counting parties as “relevant” if they have the potential to enter government (coalition potential) or the power to influence the tactics of party competition (blackmail potential).

Irrespective how we count “major” or “relevant” parties, the higher the number, the more complex the political market and hence the more difficult it is for voters to receive party policy shifts of individual parties. Again, holding acceptance of party policy shifts constant, voters’ reception (and hence perception) of party policy shifts is lower in complex political markets. I postulate

Hypothesis V5:

The larger the number of political actors, the less likely is the perception of party policy shifts.

The number of rival parties also affects the likelihood of observing party policy shifts. The more complex the political market, the less likely are voters to receive individual party's policy shifts. As stated in Axiom 2, low reception precludes party policy shifts. Hence, the following hypothesis is deduced:

Hypothesis P5:

Parties are more likely to shift their policy positions if the number of competitors is low.

#### 4.1.6 Magnitude of party position shifts

As a final factor influencing voters' reception, I discuss the magnitude of party position shifts. I argue that major or "historic" policy shifts are more likely to be received than minor or incremental adjustments. This intuitive argument is at least valid in the world of science: Political scientists are much more interested in punctuated changes of policy platforms than in minor adjustments. Given that significant platform changes may have tremendous repercussions for party systems and government participation and options, this bias is not surprising. To take an example, much scientific attention was paid to the moderating policy shift of the German Social Democrats in 1959 (Miller 1974; Klotzbach 1996). The basic program agreed on in Bad Godesberg differs in many respects from its predecessor. Perhaps most important, the SPD transformed into a catch-all party and explicitly accepted the necessity of a market economy. This moderating shift paved the way for winning new (moderate) voters and finally led the way to government in 1966. Perhaps even more prominent, "New Labour" attracted much attention of party researchers (see, e.g., Seyd 1998; Heath et al. 2001; Shaw 2002; Wickham-Jones 2005). Between 1992 and 1997, the British Labour Party moderated its policy platform in several ways. These policy changes were accompanied by a new party image and a new language distinguishing these reforms of "New Labour" from the former period. Because of the relevance of the 1997 "New Labour" policy shift for the British political landscape, I discuss voters' reception and acceptance of party position shifts explicitly focusing on the Labour Party 1997 in Chapter 6.

I argue that the effect of punctuated party policy shifts does not only arouse the interest of scholars. Rather, voters are also more likely to receive drastic and "loud" shift messages rather than incremental and "quiet" ones. In addition, large policy shifts are also more likely to attract the attention of the media. Hence, the significance of the party's policy shift is likely to affect its reception. All else being equal, the voters' probability to receive

(and hence, to perceive) party policy shifts increases with the magnitude of the shift. Put differently:

Hypothesis V6:

The larger party policy shifts, the more likely it is that voters perceive them.<sup>19</sup>

## 4.2 Impacts on the acceptance of party position shifts

Reception of party policy shifts is a cognitive process. Thus, the covariates affecting the reception focus on the ability of voters to perceive policy shifts. In contrast, the acceptance of party policy shifts depends on voters believing in the parties' commitment to their claims. Specifically, I discuss six factors affecting the acceptance of party policy shifts. The first two focus on party leaders. In line with previous research, I argue that policy and personnel changes often go hand in hand. New personnel may have different visions and goals than their predecessors. Moreover, new leaders do not suffer from decisions they made in the past committing them to specific paths. In other words, *new party leaders* may have the incentives and the ability to do things differently. I argue that voters are more likely to accept changes in the parties' platforms if the party leadership is not tied to the past. In addition, I argue that *party leaders' prestige* affects the acceptance of party policy shifts. Simply put, if voters like the party elites, they are more willing to accept their proposed policy goals.

I also discuss the role of *parties' past behavior*. Voters' acceptance of party policy positions depends on position shifts in the past. Parties constantly changing their position endanger voter support for further policy shifts. Because voters cannot rely on the persistence of the party's policy claims, large policy shift in the past constrain parties: only minor adjustments are possible in the near future. As a fourth factor, I introduce voters' *party identification*. Whether a voter believes in party policy shifts depends on the feeling towards the political parties. Voters feeling attached to a specific party are in general more likely to accept its pledges. However, acceptance also hinges on the direction of the party position shift vis-à-vis the voters: For party shifts towards a voter's preferences, being identified with that party increases the acceptance of the shift. Because shifts away from the voters' preferences

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<sup>19</sup> Naturally, the magnitude of party policy shifts can only affect the voters' reception and not the parties' shifting options. I therefore refrain to postulate a party-specific hypothesis P6. It may only be stated that parties refrain from "smooth" policy shifts rather aiming at less frequent large policy changes (see Walgrave and Nuytemans 2009). To be consistent with the voter-specific hypotheses, however, I continue with hypothesis P7 (instead of P6).



do not conform to the image of “their” party, identifiers are in contrast less likely to accept these.

Furthermore, I study the effect of *voter position shifts* on the acceptance of party position shifts. In contrast to the effect of voter position shifts on reception, the direction of the voters’ shifts is crucial: I argue that voters are more likely to accept a party’s policy shift in line with shifts of the personal preferences and parties follow public opinion shifts moving away from their policy platforms. Finally, I study the effect of “expected” policy positions on the acceptance of party policy shifts. I argue that voters expect parties to hold specific policy positions on the left-right axis. Social Democratic parties should, for example, always pursue policies left of Liberal or Conservative parties. Once party position shifts deviate from these expectations, voters are less likely to accept the moves. In that sense, parties are constrained by their ideology and refrain from shifts deviating from “expected” policy areas. Next, I discuss these factors in greater detail.

#### 4.2.1 Changes in party leadership

The argument that party position shifts follow leadership changes is not new. For organizations in general, Gilmore (Gilmore 1988: 10-11) states that “[l]eadership transitions represent a ‘natural entry point’ [...] for change” because “[t]he transition is an occasion to rethink the commitment to the present agenda, to reflect on roads not taken in the past, and to review future choices [...] Many significant changes – in policy, people, organizational structure, procedures – are more easily introduced simultaneously with a leadership change”. Harmel and colleagues (Harmel and Janda 1994; Harmel et al. 1995) transfer this general theory to political parties. They state that party leader changes and party position shifts go hand in hand. Newly elected party leaders are often expected to accomplish modifications compared to their predecessors. I argue that voters are more likely to accept changes of party policy positions once the party leadership changes. In contrast, long-term party leaders will have a hard time “selling” shifts in the face of their previous policies. As Downs puts it: “Because individual men become identified with certain policies it is often necessary for a party to shift its leadership before it can shift its platform” (Downs 1957: 111).

Turning to the model presented above, changes in leadership affect the acceptance function for party position shifts. If a party changes its leader, voters are more likely to accept (i.e. consider credible) policy position changes. Holding the reception function constant,

increasing the acceptance means that the probability of voters' perception of party policy shifts increases. Hence, I postulate

Hypothesis V7:

Voters' perception of party policy shifts increases after changes in the party leadership.

For political parties, the effect of party leader changes is straightforward: If the party leadership changes, voters are more likely to perceive party position shifts. A higher acceptance allows parties to shift their policy positions because potential new voters perceive the party's policy shift (Axiom 2). This leads to:

Hypothesis P7:

Parties are more likely to shift their policy positions if the party leadership changed.

#### 4.2.2 Prestige of political leaders

The idea that voters are also interested in non-policy factors goes back to Donald Stokes. In his well-known review of Downs's *Economic Theory of Democracy*, Stokes develops the idea that some issues may not be placed on policy dimensions. Stokes argues that there are "valence issues" involving the linking of the parties "with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate" (Stokes 1963: 373). All voters dislike corruption and economic crises. Choosing between different parties means judging which party is best in fighting crime, keeping inflation low, and bringing people back to work. In contrast to policy issues, all parties and voters take the same "position" on valence issues but voters distinguish which party or candidate is best to achieve these goals. Following Stokes, numerous studies focused on the theoretical and empirical consequences of valence effects for voting and party competition (see e.g. Groseclose 2001; Schofield 2003; Schofield and Sened 2006; Stone and Simas 2007; Adams and Merrill 2009; Clark 2009; Abney et al. undated; Adams et al. undated). There is empirical evidence that voters take valence issues seriously and that a party's "image" affects its electoral results (Stone and Simas 2007; Clark 2009; Abney et al. undated). For parties, higher valence scores allow to choose superior policy positions, usually located closer to the electoral centre (Groseclose 2001; Schofield 2003; Schofield and Sened 2006).

I argue that valence issues affect the acceptance of party policy shifts. The higher a party's competence with regard to valence issues, the more voters believe in its competence and ability to "get things done". A positive party image hence leads to higher acceptance of party action on policy grounds. Instead of using media reports to measure valence (see Clark 2009; Abney et al. undated), I rely on voter-specific evaluations of party leaders. Simply put, I argue that the higher the party leader's prestige, the more likely voters are to accept the announced party policy platform. Holding the reception of party position shifts constant, the larger the acceptance, the higher the probability of perceiving policy shifts. This leads to

Hypothesis V8:

The higher the party leader's prestige, the more likely is the perception of party policy shifts.

Regarding the consequences for political parties, we know from Axiom 2 that the acceptance of party position shifts is a necessary condition for party position shifts. Because high valence increases the probability of acceptance, skilful, sympathetic and charismatic leaders should face fewer difficulties "selling" their party's policy position to potential new voters.

Hypothesis P8a:

The higher a party leader's mean evaluation, the more likely it is that a party shifts its policy position.

Because the party leader's prestige is a voter-specific factor, we can also derive a more fine-grained expectation: Following Axiom 2, a party's ability to shift policy positions increases if voters benefiting from the party shift perceive the party's change of policy positions while voters being worse off do not perceive the position shift. As a consequence, we can refine Hypothesis 8a restricting the positive effect of a party leader's evaluation on party position shifts to cases where a majority of voters benefits from the platform change. Hence, I formulate a modified

Hypothesis P8b:

The higher a party leader's mean evaluation, the more likely it is that a party shifts its policy positions *if* the party shifts its platform towards the majority of the voters' policy preferences.

### 4.2.3 Party past behavior

Voters also take the parties' past behavior into account. The idea that decisions made in the past constrain actors in the present is well known as "path dependence" (for an overview see Peters 2005). Margaret Levi argues that path dependence means that "once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high" (Levi 1997: 28). Pierson connects the notion of path dependence with increasing returns so that "the costs of exit – of switching to some previously plausible alternative – rise" (Pierson 2000: 252). Exploring examples from government, Peters (2005: 72) notes that "a particular programme addressing a policy problem may not be the best in the abstract but once it has been shown to produce some positive results it will dominate other solutions that may, in principle, be superior but which will require movement from an existing and seemingly functional programme". And for party policy programs, Budge makes the point that a "party having authoritatively endorsed a programme as the correct one for society, can hardly produce another the week afterwards" (Budge 1994: 450). In that sense, parties are indeed constrained by policy choices of the past. Reconsidering "New Labour" in 1997, how would voters have reacted if Blair would have withdrawn "New Labour" reintroducing "Old Labour" in 2001? Clearly, a voter observing permanent party shifting may have doubts whether yet another shift has anything to say about the future. In other words, ongoing policy shifts convey the impression that a party is not sure what it wants consequently and voters will doubt its credibility.

In the terms of the model introduced in the previous chapter, large past party policy shifts reduce voters' acceptance for further shifts of the party platform. If a party only made minor adjustments in their policy programs, voters are more likely to accept a major shift. Hence, I postulate

#### Hypothesis V9:

The smaller a party's policy shifts in the past, the more likely are voters to perceive its platform change.

When voters do not accept party position shifts, parties refrain from pursuing them. Hence, parties are constrained by their past policy shifts and stay put if they recently made major adjustments of their party platform. This expectation is in line with "frictional change" of institutions in general (Baumgartner and Jones 1993) and its application to political parties (Walgrave and Nuytemans 2009). In that view, party policy positions are "punctuated equilibria" (Krasner 1984) staying relatively stable after reforms are introduced. In the words

of the model introduced above, voters are less likely to accept party policy shifts if there have already been major position changes in the party's recent history. Because the voters' acceptance is necessary for parties to adapt their policy positions (Axiom 2), we can formulate

Hypothesis P9:

Parties are more likely to shift their policy positions if their position shifts in the recent past were small.

#### 4.2.4 Party identification

The idea that voters identify with specific parties is based on the "Michigan model" of voting (Campbell et al. 1960). Due to their socialization, voters differ in their (long-term) perception of parties. Partisanship "represents long-term, affective, psychological identification with one's preferred party" (Adams et al. 2005: 248) and these feelings towards parties influence vote choices.

Although the actual effect of party identification on vote choice is subject to discussions (for an overview see Adams et al. 2005: Appendix 2.2), party identification is one of the major findings in public opinion research. The idea that voters do not only consider "factual data" (like party positions) but also use information shortcuts such as party identification is also emphasized by research in social cognition. Studying the effects of political information and information shortcuts, Rahn (1993) distinguishes two strategies of how voters make decisions: the "theory-driven" mode emphasizes prior beliefs and draws attention to information in line with a subject's beliefs while discounting information contradicting the conception of the world. In other words, beliefs bias the information process and favor confirmative over contradicting news. In contrast, the "data-driven" mode suggests that voters are able to process information in a neutral way without being taken hostage by stereotypes like biased party images. In experiments using information on party labels as a treatment, the author shows that (1) in the absence of party labels, individuals use the candidates' messages as information sources but that (2) voters prefer the heuristic processing (i.e. party labels) over policy information, once these information shortcuts are available (Rahn 1993: 491-492). Overall, then, party identification leads voters to use biased information in line with their beliefs.

How can these findings be used in the present model? I adapt Rahn's findings arguing that party identification has a positive impact on the perception of policy shifts if these shifts

are in line with a voter's beliefs. If the shift conforms to a voter's expectations, that is, if the party shifts towards his or her policy position, party identification has a positive effect on the acceptance of party policy shifts. In contrast, if the party policy shift contradicts the expectations of voters with party identification (i.e. if the party moves away from their preferences), voters discount information that contradicts their beliefs and are therefore less likely to accept the platform shift. Holding the reception of party policy shifts constant, party identification hence positively (negatively) affects the perception of party policy shifts if the party platform shifts towards (moves away from) the voter's policy preferences. This leads to

Hypothesis V10:

Party identification positively affects the perception of party policy shifts towards the voter's personal preferences. For party shifts moving away from the voter's preferences, identifying with the party decreases the likelihood of perceiving the party position shift.

Although the effect of party identification on the perception of party policy shifts is quite complex at the individual level, the implications for the aggregate level are rather straightforward. According to Axiom 2, parties are most likely to shift their policy positions if voters accept (i.e. consider credible) party policy shifts towards their personal preferences while rejecting those moving away from the voters' personal preferences. Voters identifying with a party fulfill both conditions: They are less likely to perceive policy shifts away from their individual preferences and more likely to accept such shifts towards these preferences. Hence, parties benefit from voters identified with them no matter which direction their policy shift has. In sum, I hypothesize

Hypothesis P10:

Parties are more likely to shift their policy positions if their share of voters with party identification is large.

#### 4.2.5 Public opinion shifts

Changing voter preferences also affect the acceptance of party policy shifts. The idea that parties react to voter position shifts leans on research by James Stimson and colleagues (Stimson et al. 1995; Stimson 1999). For democratic regimes, we would like to see that public policy responds to changing preferences in the electorate. That is what Stimson and collaborators label "dynamic representation" (Stimson et al. 1995). Political parties are the

main actors linking the voters' preferences with the policy output in modern democracies (see e.g. Schattschneider 1942). Changing preferences in the electorate should lead parties to respond to the changing demands by adapting their policy platforms. In fact, previous research has shown that parties do respond to these incentives (Adams et al. 2004; Adams, Haupt et al. 2009) although they may listen and respond to different subconstituencies (Ezrow et al. 2009).

At the micro-level, the concept of “dynamic representation” suggests that voters expect a party to follow their respective individual policy shifts: A voter shifting to the right (left) expects parties to respond by shifting to the right (left) and is therefore more likely to accept party policy shifts in line with his position shift. Parties shifting in the opposite direction may find their shift rejected. Holding the reception function constant, the perception of party policy shifts increases if parties respond to voter positions shifts. This leads to

Hypothesis V11:

Voters are more likely to perceive party policy shifts which are in the same direction as shifts in the voters' personal preferences.

Because party position shifts in line with public opinion shifts increase voters' acceptance (and hence the perception) of party policy shifts, parties follow voter position shifts *if* these preferences move away from their party platforms. The larger the share of voters moving away from a party's platform, the more likely a party follows this shift in public opinion. In contrast, parties are not likely to respond to public opinion shifts that move towards the party's policy position. This leads to

Hypothesis P11:

Parties follow public opinion shifts if these shifts move voters away from their position. In contrast, parties do not respond to public opinion shifts towards their policy position.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Note that Hypotheses P3 and P11 differ: For the reception of party policy shifts (Hypothesis P3), parties are expected to shift their policy positions if public opinion shifts move away from the parties' pre-shift policy positions. Yet, there is no direction involved in the parties' policy shifts. In that sense, Hypothesis P11 is a refinement stating that parties react to changing voter preferences by shifting *in the same direction* as the majority of the voters. Hypothesis P11 matches with Adams and colleagues' “Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Hypothesis” (Adams et al. 2004: 593) and the empirical results presented below may also be interpreted as a replication analysis using different data sources and a slightly different sample.

#### 4.2.6 Party ideology

Thus far I have argued that party leaders are solely interested in votes. In that sense, they are free to choose policy positions on the left-right axis. Yet, omitting ideological factors is rather implausible. Therefore, I argue that party leaders are constrained in their vote-maximizing ambitions by voters with specific expectations or beliefs about where parties *should* place themselves relative to each other. Simply put, we expect that Social Democratic parties choose platforms left of Liberal or Conservative parties. In its simplest form, these rank-orders of expected party positions entail the three varieties of parties: left-, centre, and right-wing. Such “expectations” are widely used in academic writings, newspapers, and political discussions *without* considering the actual party policy stands as indicated in party manifestos or parliamentary speeches. In other words, *without* knowing where a Social Democratic party would place itself on a particular policy issue on the left-right axis, we *expect* its policy position to be left of Liberal or Conservative parties, etc. Although such “expectations” are widely used without deeper theoretical thought or justification, I spend some time explaining how I derive my expectations on party policy positions.

The left-right axis is used to describe party systems assigning (ordinal) policy positions to the major parties in the system. To take an example, Damgaard (2000: 233) describes the Danish party system distinguishing five major groupings.

“First, there is a group of relatively small left-wing parties. [...] Second, there is the Social Democratic Party [...] Third, there is a group of relatively small centre parties. [...] Fourth, the two old moderate centre-right parties, the Liberals and the Conservative People’s Party [...] Finally, a right-wing Independent Party was represented in the early 1960s. At the remarkable 1973-election a new Progress Party obtained surprisingly strong support of what was called a protest party.” (Damgaard 2000: 233)

Although Damgaard distinguishes groups rather than individual parties, readers get first insights into the Danish party system. From left to right, the parties can be placed as small left-wing parties, Social Democrats, small centre parties, moderate right-wing parties (Liberals and Conservatives), and finally the far right (Independence Party and Progress Party, respectively). In other words, the readers *expect* that the Social Democrats choose policy positions further to the left than those of the Liberals or the Conservative Party. Furthermore, the Progress Party should choose policy positions further to the right than those of the Liberals, for example.



Similarly, expert surveys designed to obtain party left-right placements (Castles and Mair 1984; Laver and Hunt 1992; Huber and Inglehart 1995; Benoit and Laver 2006) do not use question wordings such as “in the most recent election”. Rather, the questions are more general asking about “political parties today” (Huber and Inglehart 1995), or do not mention the time dimension at all (Castles and Mair 1984; Benoit and Laver 2006). Hence, experts do not rate specific policy programs but rather draw a more general picture of the party positions. In other words, country experts state the general *expectations* of party policy positions. Moreover, these expert judgments (i.e. the expectations) highly correlate although the surveys are conducted over a period of 20 years (see e.g. McDonald and Mendes 2001). The expert judgments’ stability over time indicates that these judgments measure general expectations rather than policy issue positions in specific elections.

In essence, then, it is quite clear what expectations of party policy positions are: We expect that Communist parties pursue policies left of Liberal or Conservative parties. Moreover, Social Democrats should be more moderate (i.e. further to the right) than Communist or Socialist parties. However, such expectations are not uniform across countries. This is especially true for some party families. Liberal parties, for example, may be centre parties in some party systems (e.g. Great Britain) but may be located more to the right in others (e.g. the Netherlands). Hence, generalized left-right expectations based on party families (as e.g. in Adams et al. 2004; Adams, Clark et al. 2006) are likely to be inappropriate measures. Rather, country-specific expectations of left-right placements should be used.

I argue that the parties’ “expected” policy positions relate to three factors: First and most important, parties’ *ideologies* shape left-right expectations. Most parties hint at their ideology in their official name. In so doing, parties connect their respective ideologies with their “brand names” (Aldrich 1995). Given the common wisdoms about party ideologies (see above), voters develop specific expectations of what policies the parties pursue. Thus, Conservative parties are expected to pursue policies on the right, Socialist or Green parties represent policies on the left of the policy space. However, ideologies create different expectations across countries. As mentioned above, Liberal parties may be centre parties in some countries and right-wing parties in others.

Second, the *nature of the dominant left-right dimension* differs across countries. Talking about “left” and “right” does not determine what issue dimensions map on this general policy dimension (Huber 1989; Knutsen 1995). Although economic issues are most likely to reflect left-right mappings in most West European countries, other issues may also

affect party placements on this dimension. While a country's policy space may include other relevant policy dimensions (e.g. economic, social policy, religious or linguistic), placing parties on the left-right dimension however economizes voter considerations. For example, German voters (and country experts) often place the FDP (Liberals) between the SPD (Social Democrats) and the CDU/CSU (Christian Democrats) on the left-right scale (Castles and Mair 1984; Huber and Inglehart 1995; Thomassen 2005; Benoit and Laver 2006). In so doing, voters (and country experts) mix policy positions from the two dominant policy dimensions (Shikano and Pappi 2004). On economic, social and fiscal policy, the Liberals are right of the Christian Democrats. On the second major policy dimension (domestic, legal, and socio-political issues), however, the Liberals are more moderate than the Christian Democrats. Hence, economic factors are not the sole driving force when voters and country experts place the German parties on a left-right axis.

Third, the respective countries' *party systems* affect expectations of party left-right placements. Bipolar systems (as the British system) often "generate" left-right explanations. The Liberal Democrats are just expected to have policy views located in between. The German FDP (Liberals) often built coalitions "to the left" (with the SPD) and "to the right" (with the CDU/CSU) – another reason to place them in between the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats. In Sweden governments have either been "socialist" or "non-socialist" (Bergman 2000). Hence, voters place the "socialist" parties (Communist Party, Left Party, and the Social Democrats) on the left. The bourgeois parties (Centre Party, The Liberals, and the Conservatives) are placed on the right. Distinguishing within these blocs is much less relevant than the socialist-non-socialist divide. For example, the Centre Party and the Liberals occupy the "centre" of the policy space. Experts do not distinguish whether the Centre Party is left of the Liberals or vice versa (in Huber and Inglehart 1995 the parties get the exactly same value on the left-right dimension). In other party systems, we distinguish three, four or five groups of parties. This holds for example for Denmark where Damgaard (2000) distinguishes five party but, again, there are no expectations where parties *within* these groups are located.

In sum, we can define *voter expectations of party positions as ordinal party placements on a left-right scale arising from the parties' ideologies, the nature of the left-right scale (i.e. the main dimension of the party competition), and the respective country's party system.*

I argue that voters are likely to accept party position shifts as long as parties maintain (or reassume) their expected placements relative to the other parties. In contrast, voters are less likely to accept policy shifts away from the parties' placement relative to their competitors. Holding the reception of party policy shifts constant, this leads to

Hypothesis V12:

Voters are less likely to perceive party policy shifts if these shifts move the parties away from their expected placement relative to their competitors.

Voter expectations of relative party placements also affect the parties' decisions with regard to pursuing policy changes. Winning new votes requires that voters accept their policy shifts (Axiom 2). Hence, parties have incentives to maintain (or reassume) their placement relative to other parties according to the voters' expectations. This leads to

Hypothesis P12:

If party placements do not match with the voters' expectations, parties shift their positions to locate themselves relative to their competitors according to voter expectations.

### 4.3 Summary

This chapter added flesh to the bones of the theoretical model presented in the previous chapter. Because the reception and acceptance of party policy shifts are latent factors which are not directly observable, I introduce a set of covariates likely to affect the two perception factors. In total, I introduce 12 covariates expected to affect the reception and acceptance of party position shifts. Table 4.1 summarizes the variables and indicates their variation across voters, parties, or time.

I argue that the reception of party policy shifts is a cognitive process which is therefore driven by factors affecting the costs of information-gathering. Political awareness, education, and the updating motivated by individual policy position shifts are voter-specific factors that are expected to have a positive effect on the reception function. The parties' governmental status and the magnitude of the party policy shift are party-specific variables that should also increase the probability of receiving party policy shifts. Finally, the complexity of the political market (indicated by the number of relevant parties) negatively affects the reception of party position shifts.

**Table 4.1: Reception and acceptance covariates and their variation across voters, parties, and time**

		Factor varies across		
		Voters	Parties	Elections (Time)
<b>Reception</b>	Political awareness	X		X
	Education	X		X
	Magnitude of voter position shifts	X		X
	Party in government		X	X
	Number of parties			X
	Magnitude of party policy shift		X	X
<b>Acceptance</b>	Change in party leadership		X	X
	Party leader prestige	X	X	X
	Magnitude of past policy shifts		X	X
	Party identification	X	X	X
	Direction of voter position shifts	X		X
	Expected policy positions		X	

In contrast to their reception, acceptance of party position shifts is a political issue. It depends on whether voters trust in or believe a party’s claims. I argue that party leadership changes and the leaders’ prestige positively affect the acceptance of party policy shifts. Moreover, party policy shifts are less likely to get accepted if the party’s previous policy shift was large. Concerning the role of party identification, I expect a positive effect for party policy shifts towards a voter’s policy preferences. In contrast, party identification negatively affects the perception of party policy shifts away from a voter’s policy preferences. I also argue that voters are more likely to accept party shift that are in line with public opinion shifts. Furthermore, voters care about ideology and do not accept parties “leapfrogging” (Budge 1994) their competitors.

As indicated in Axioms 2 and 3 in the previous chapter, the consequences of the voters’ reception and acceptance are somewhat more complex. In general, parties benefit from increasing reception and acceptance. If the reception and acceptance differs across voters, however, parties benefit most if voters perceive shifts towards their policy position while voters being worse off from the platform shift do not perceive it. Therefore, hypotheses involving voter-specific covariates (Hypotheses P1b, P2b, and P8b) hinge on the direction of the party policy shifts. The voters’ party identification (Hypothesis P10) is the sole exception. For hypotheses involving voter position shifts (Hypotheses P3 and P11), parties are most likely to respond to voter shifts away from their policy position while staying put if voters shift towards it.

The following chapters test the hypotheses for voters (Chapters 5 and 6) and political parties (Chapters 7 and 8). Although both analyses suffer from restrictions in data availability, they provide first insights supporting the plausibility of the model developed here.

## **5 Voter perceptions of party position shifts in Great Britain: Data and methods**

The British panel election studies (Crewe et al. 1981; Heath et al. 1993; Heath et al. 1998; Heath, Jowell et al. 1999; Heath et al. 2002) offer a unique opportunity to study the voters' perceptions of party policy shifts. In contrast to cross-sectional election studies or campaign panels used in other European countries, respondents are interviewed twice at two subsequent elections. Hence, it is possible to observe the changing perceptions of party policy positions.

This chapter presents the variables and questions used in the subsequent analyses relying on data from the British panel election studies. The model presented in the previous chapter involves variables which vary across voters (e.g. party identification) and across parties (e.g. party leader changes). Testing the model hence requires data allowing for variation for both types of variables. Whereas the first condition is met studying a single election, the second group of variables is limited by the number of parties in the given country. Because the three major British parties do not suffice to study party effects quantitatively, I combine several election studies in a pooled data set. For that purpose, I use all available panel election studies conducted in Britain (from the 1970's onwards).

I present a statistical model which considers the theoretically assumed perception process. Recall that I conceptualize the perception of policy shifts as a two-stage process. First, the voters have to *receive* the party's shift message. Given reception, voters decide in a second step whether to *accept* (i.e. consider credible) the party's announced policy shift. A basic approach is to use logistic regression models to estimate the covariates' impact on the reception and acceptance of party policy shifts. However, there are three problems involved. First, given that the data describes the voters' perceptions of policy position shifts of different parties in several elections, heteroskedasticity exists. Second, we are not able to observe voters' reception or acceptance of party position shifts as separate events. Rather, it is only possible to observe the overall process, that is, whether voters *perceive* policy shifts. Calculating logistic regressions with the perception of policy shifts as the dependent variable may bias the results. Third and related, the reception and acceptance of policy shifts is a two-stage process. The reception and acceptance of party policy shifts depend on each other. The acceptance of a policy position shift requires its reception. Vice versa, receiving a party's shift message is not sufficient for the voters to perceive (i.e. also consider credible) the policy shift.

Estimating regression models with clustered standard errors corrects for the first problem (see e.g. Wooldridge 2002). The second and the related third problem require a specific regression model deviating from standard regression models. Hence, I present a two-stage logistic regression to be used in the analyses of the following chapter with stage one modeling reception and stage two the acceptance of party policy shifts. First, however, I describe the data and variables coming from the British panel election studies.

## 5.1 Data: The British panel election studies, 1974 – 2001

With the exception of the general elections in 1983 and 2005, the British panel election studies were conducted at every British general election since February 1974. To study voter- and party-specific covariates, it is necessary to pool these data files so that the variables at both levels vary. Pooling data from several election years requires making coding decisions which I describe in the next two sections. First, I discuss the dependent variable – the perception of party policy shifts. Thereafter I present the covariates used in the analyses covering variables from the election surveys and additional party-specific variables. Finally, I describe the data structure and the number of observations for the models estimated in the next chapter.

### 5.1.1 The dependent variable

In British election surveys, voters are asked to locate parties on issue-specific left-right dimensions. In contrast to “classical” left-right questions, voters locate themselves and the parties by answering questions on topics such as the nationalization of industries, the priorities of parties in fighting unemployment and inflation, and questions on EU affairs. Mirroring political debate, the issues asked changed over time. The same holds for the wording for some of the questions.

Table 5.1 shows the issue-specific questions asked in the British panel election studies from February 1974 onwards. With the exception of 1987 and 1992, voters were frequently asked to place the parties and themselves on scales measuring the policy positions towards “European integration”. Another policy scale frequently used since the 1970’s is the voters’ and the parties’ policy views on the “Privatization and Nationalization” of British companies. In fact, this is the only policy scale used in all British panel election studies from the 1970’s onwards. Since 1979, voters are asked to place parties on a policy scale called “Taxes vs. Services”. The end points of this policy scale describe the parties’ perceived views on the

priorities they put on two conflicting policy goals: increasing taxes to spend more on health and social services or to cut taxes and spend less on these policies.

**Table 5.1: Policy scales used in British panel election studies: 1974 - 2001**

Issue	Feb. 1974	Oct. 1974	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997	2001
Common market/EC	X <sup>1</sup>	X	X <sup>2</sup>				X	X
Nationalization	X <sup>1</sup>	X	X <sup>2</sup>		X	X	X	X
Taxes vs. Services			X <sup>1 2</sup>		X	X	X	X
Social Service		X	X <sup>2</sup>					
Unemployment			X <sup>1 2 3</sup>		X	X	X	X
Defense					X	X	X <sup>1 4</sup>	
Redistribution (income inequality)						X	X	X
Women's rights							X <sup>1</sup>	X <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Not asked in previous or current election.

<sup>2</sup> No indicators for Liberals.

<sup>3</sup> In 1979, the question wording was different from the following years. Voters were asked to locate parties on a scale describing the best way to create jobs (“companies keep profits” vs. “government spending tax money”). In the following years, the question changed. Now, voters were asked to set priorities between the opposed goals of “keeping the prices down” and “bringing people back to work”.

<sup>4</sup> Before 1997, the respondents were asked to state the parties’ policy positions on the number of nuclear weapons (more or less than the actual number). From 1997 onwards, the question wording changed asking for the amount of money spent on defense.

Note: The Table covers all policy fields covered in at least two election studies. Other policy scales were used occasionally: Parties’ and voter’s positions on immigration (February 1974), North Sea oil (October 1974), race relations (1979), law and order (1983), and welfare (1992).

Questions on the “Social Service” provided by the state were already asked in the election of October 1974 but the question changed over time: Voters were asked whether social services should be “cut back a lot” or “more are needed” without relating such decisions to increasing or decreasing costs and taxation. Since 1979, voters also place parties on a policy scale measuring the parties’ policy positions fighting “Unemployment”. As for the “Taxes vs. Services” scale, the question wording changed. In 1979, the question asked whether fighting unemployment can best be achieved if companies keep their profits or if the government spends tax money. From 1987 onwards, the endpoints of the policy scale changed indicating whether the party concentrates on fighting unemployment or the conflicting goal of keeping the prices down (i.e. fighting inflation).

At the end of the 1980’s additional policy scales were added. With the end of the Cold War, the question wording on the “Defense” scale changed, however. Voters were no longer



asked to locate parties on a policy scale measuring whether Britain should have more (or less) nuclear weapons. Rather, the question in 1997 asked for the willingness to spend on defense (more or less than the current budget). In addition, questions on “Redistribution” ask voters to locate parties on a policy scale ranging from putting “greater efforts to make people’s incomes more equal” to “be much less concerned about how equal people’s incomes are”. Finally, voters place parties on a policy scale measuring the parties’ views on “Women’s rights” in the society (at home vs. equal role with men in running business, industry and government).

**Table 5.2: Importance of policy issues for making vote choices (rank-order)**

	<b>Oct. 1974</b>	<b>1979</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1997</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	Common market/EC	Taxes vs. Services	Taxes vs. Services	Unemployment	Taxes vs. Services
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	Nationalization	Common market/EC and Nationalization	Unemployment	Taxes vs. Services	Unemployment
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>			Nationalization		Common market/EC
<b>NA</b>		Unemployment		Nationalization	

There is no panel data for the 1983 general election. In 2001, voters were asked to place parties on the four policy scales but no question quantifies the importance for their vote choices.  
 NA: Policy scale used but no indicator for importance of policy for vote choice.

For the selection of policy dimensions to measure the perception of party policy shifts, it is useful to consider those policy dimensions that (1) were asked in several election studies and (2) were important for making vote choices. Concerning the former, I consider policy scales used in at least four election studies. The policy scales on “European integration”, “Nationalization”, “Taxes vs. Services” and “Unemployment vs. Inflation” fall in this category. Regarding the importance for making vote choices, Table 5.2 shows the issues’ salience across several election studies using rank-orders.

“Taxes vs. services” and “Unemployment” (from 1987 onwards) are the two most important issues to voters. I will therefore use them in the following analyses, although they are not covered over the whole period. Because there is no measure for the “Taxes vs. Services” scale for the election in 1974, I use the social service scale as an equivalent in this election. Furthermore, I add the “Nationalization vs. Privatization” scale. Although its importance for making voting decisions is decreasing over time, the scale is covered in all available election studies and hence allows for larger sample sizes covering several elections.

With regard to the party-specific covariates, including as many time points as possible increases the degrees of freedom.

For many reasons, I do not use the question on European integration. First, this question was not asked in 1987 and in 1992 leading to missing values in the time series. Second, the parties' policy positions on European integration become less likely to influence vote choices. While being the most important policy issue in the 1970s, EU integration only ranks third place in the 1997 general election. Finally, questions on European affairs differ from the "classical" left-right scale on which I concentrated so far. Whereas party policy positions correlate highly between economic scales (Nationalization, Taxes vs. Services, Unemployment), there are no high correlation between those scales and party policy positions on European integration (see also Heath, Taylor et al. 1999; Green 2007). Additionally, I measure "official" party position shifts using the CMP's left-right scale (see below) which does not cover European issues. Although it is possible to adapt the model to more policy-specific areas like European affairs, I restrict my analyses to left-right issues. In what follows, I hence use the three policy scales "Nationalization", "Taxes vs. Services", and "Unemployment".

### 5.1.2 Independent variables

Most of the independent variables are taken from the British panel election studies ranging from October 1974 to the general election in 2001 (Crewe et al. 1981; Heath et al. 1993; Heath et al. 1998; Heath, Jowell et al. 1999; Heath et al. 2002).<sup>21</sup> All variables related to voters (e.g. political awareness, education, party identification) are drawn from these election studies. Additional sources were used to collect data for (party-specific) covariates.

Table 5.3 summarizes the independent variables used in the models estimated in the next chapter. *Political awareness* is measured using two different variables. In 1979 and 1997, respondents were asked to answer political quizzes. Voters answered questions testing the political knowledge on political figures (like party leaders) and institutions (e.g. number of MPs, maximal time between two elections). Political awareness is measured as the number of correct answers. This is perhaps the best approach to measure political awareness (Zaller 1992: 333-336). Unfortunately, the same measure does not exist for the remaining elections. As an alternative, I rely on political interest. Questions on political interest are asked regularly in various forms including interest in politics in general and the attention to newspaper

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<sup>21</sup> For the general elections in 1983 and 2005, only cross-sectional studies are available.

articles, TV and radio shows dealing with politics and election campaigns. Political interest as substitute for political quizzes suffers, however, from a major shortcoming: People tend to exaggerate their political interest. Because interest is desirable, voters report more political interest than they actually have. The social desirability may therefore bias the results (Schnell et al. 2005: 335). For example, Zaller (1992: 334) reports that according to a survey 40% of the American public listens to National Public Radio several times a week which is implausibly high and far above the radio's own estimates (by factor 10). Although the measure has its weaknesses, it is the only available measure for political awareness over time. The correlation between the scores in political quizzes (in 1979 and 1997) and the reported political awareness is 0.39 indicating that the measures (at least) tend to measure the same underlying concept.<sup>22</sup>

The variable *education* categorizes the voter's education in three categories: basic, moderate, and advanced. Basic education is the educational level reached when getting the O level or the CSE certificate. Moderate education captures qualifications obtained following the obligatory time in school (until the age of 16) either with the A level (or equivalents) or further education (e.g. BTEC ordinary national diploma). Finally, advanced education covers academic degrees from the Bachelor degrees onwards or equivalents. The coding follows the British National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for the comparison of degrees and qualifications.

*Voter position shifts* are derived from the same policy scales that are used to measure party policy shifts. Voters place themselves on the "Nationalization", "Taxes vs. Services", and the "Unemployment vs. Inflation" scales. Making use of the panel data structure, it is possible to measure voter position shifts between two subsequent elections. For the reception of party policy shifts, I use the absolute values of these policy shifts to measure the need for updating the parties' policy positions.

The remaining covariates for the reception of party policy shifts are party-specific and not taken from the British panel election studies. First, a dummy variable measures whether the *party was in government* before the current election or not. For obvious reasons, it is not possible to include the *number of parties*. The British party system consists of two major parties competing for government and the Liberal Democrats (Liberals and the Alliance,

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<sup>22</sup> However, the following analysis (see Chapter 6) reveals that using political interest and political quizzes to measure a voter's political knowledge leads to different empirical results. At least on the micro level, interest in politics is therefore no appropriate measure for political awareness.

respectively) as a third force. Because the mechanics of the party system did not alter over time, it is not possible to include this variable in the analysis. Finally, the *magnitude of party policy shifts* is obtained from the parties' left-right position changes from the last to the current election using the CMP party positions (Budge et al. 2001).<sup>23</sup>

**Table 5.3: Independent variables for the data analyses**

	<b>Variable name</b>	<b>Indicators and measurement</b>
<b>Reception</b>	Political awareness	Measured using political quizzes (1979 and 1997) or political interest (10-point scales)
	Education	Three categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Basic education: O level, CSE, City and Guilds certificate: ordinary/Part I</li> <li>- Moderate: A level, City and Guilds certificate: ordinary/Part II or III, BTEC: ordinary national certificate, RSA, nursing qualification</li> <li>- Advanced: University degree, City and guilds certificate: Full technological, BTEC: Higher national certificate or diploma, teacher training qualifications</li> </ul>
	Voter position shift (absolute value)	Voter shift on respective scale (Nationalization, Taxes vs. Services, Unemployment vs. Inflation)
	Government party	0 = Opposition party before current election 1 = Party in government before current election
	Number of parties	Not used
	Magnitude of party policy shift	Absolute distance of the party policy shift from previous to current election (CMP data)
<b>Acceptance</b>	Leadership change	0 = Same party leader as in previous election 1 = Party leader change since last election
	Party leader prestige	Evaluation of party leaders with standardized scores ranging from 0 to 4 using party leader evaluations in marks (1970's) and attributes (from 1987 onwards)
	Past party policy shifts	Magnitude of past policy shift (at previous election) using CMP data
	Party id	"think of yourself as (party)" questions in all election studies
	Voter shift (with direction)	0 = Party and voter shift in different directions 1 = Party and voter shift in same direction
	Policy shifts deviating from expected policy position	0 = Party position shift conforming to ideologically expected policy position (relative to other parties) 1 = Party position shift deviating from ideologically expected policy position (relative to other parties)
	Age	Age of respondent
	Sex	Sex of respondent

<sup>23</sup> CMP data on left-right positions mainly deals with economic issues. The policy scales on "Nationalization", "Taxes vs. Services", and "Unemployment vs. Inflation" address specific issues on that dimension so that it is reasonable to assume that the scales are comparable. Criticism and weaknesses of CMP data is more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 7 and Appendix A.

Turning to the covariates for the acceptance function, I hypothesized above that *changes in the party leadership* make the acceptance of party position shifts more likely. The data for leadership changes of the major British parties are drawn from different sources (Butler and Butler 2000; Zárata 2009). The variable is zero if the same party leader is in office and one if the party leadership changed since the last election.

The British panel election studies also measure the *party leaders' prestige*. The measures changed, however, over the years. In the 1970's, voters were asked to grade party leaders on a scale from 0 to 10. From the 80's onwards, respondents answered questions concerning the party leaders' attributes (e.g. whether they are capable of being a strong leader, able to unite the nation, or keep their promises). To obtain a comparable measure over time, I use a similar technique as applied by the European Voter project (Thomassen 2005) and transform the variables used in several election studies to a scale ranging from 0 (low prestige) to 4 (high prestige).

I also argued above that parties may not permanently change their policy positions. Parties with large *past policy shifts* are less likely to shift their policy platforms for the following election: Voters simply might get the impression that the party does not know what it wants to do. As for the magnitude of the party policy shifts, data for past policy shifts is obtained from the Comparative Manifestos Project (Budge et al. 2001). The variable measures the magnitude of the party's former policy shift on the CMP's left-right scale ranging from -100 to +100.<sup>24</sup>

The British panel election studies contain a question measuring the voters' *party identification*. Voters are asked whether they think of themselves as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, or another party. For voters not thinking of themselves as identified with any party, a follow-up question asks to which party the respondent feels "a little closer to". Therefore, there are two possibilities to measure the voters' party identification: A narrow measure only considers those voters who think of themselves as Conservatives, Labour, or Liberal Democrats. A broader concept also captures those who just feel closer to one of the parties. In the empirical analysis, I use the narrow concept. It should be noted, however, that the two variables correlate highly ( $r=0.98$ ).

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<sup>24</sup> I also used an alternative indicator measuring large consecutive party policy shifts (see Chapter 7 for more details). Due to restrictions in data availability, however, the number of observations reduces for this measure so that I refrain from using it in the following analysis.

For the acceptance of party policy shifts, it is also important whether the party's and the voter's policy shift are in the same direction. I argued above that party position shifts following *voter position shifts* are more likely to get accepted. I therefore created a dummy variable with value 0 if the voter's policy position shift (on the respective policy scale) runs counter to the party's official policy shift (taken from the CMP data) and value 1 if the two actors shift their policy positions in the same direction.

Finally, I measure whether parties perform policy shifts that are not in line with their *expected policy position*. The measurement of "expected" policy positions is a sensitive issue with I discuss in greater detail below (see Chapter 7). For the British case, I assume that voters expect the Labour party on the left, the Conservatives on the right, and the Liberal Democrats (the Liberals and the Alliance, respectively) in the centre of the policy space. To code parties deviating from their expected policy position, I compare the parties' *current* party platform with its rivals' policy positions at the *former* election. I use the *former* rather than the *current* policy positions of competitors as these are known by parties so that they can adapt their policy platforms accordingly. This would be less the case for the competing parties' *current* positions as party programs are written at roughly the same time.<sup>25</sup> If the platform is left of or right of its expected position, I code the policy shift as deviating from the party's expected position.

Figure 5.1 shows the party policy positions of the three major parties according to the CMP left-right scale. The grey-shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals obtained using the algorithm developed by Kenneth Benoit, Michael Laver, and Slava Mikhaylov (Benoit et al. 2009).<sup>26</sup> Until 1987, the policy positions most of the time correspond to the expected positions with Labour on the left, the Conservatives on the right, and the Liberals in between. The merging of the Alliance of Liberals and Social Democrats into the Liberal Democrats from 1987 to 1992 led to a policy shift to the left taking a policy position left of that of Labour in the 1987 elections. This is the first unexpected policy shift. The second is "New Labour" in 1997: Compared to its 1992 position, Labour shifted to the right, "leapfrogging" (Budge 1994) the Liberal Democrats. Finally, party position shifts were not in line with the voters' expectations in 2001: Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats did not sufficiently

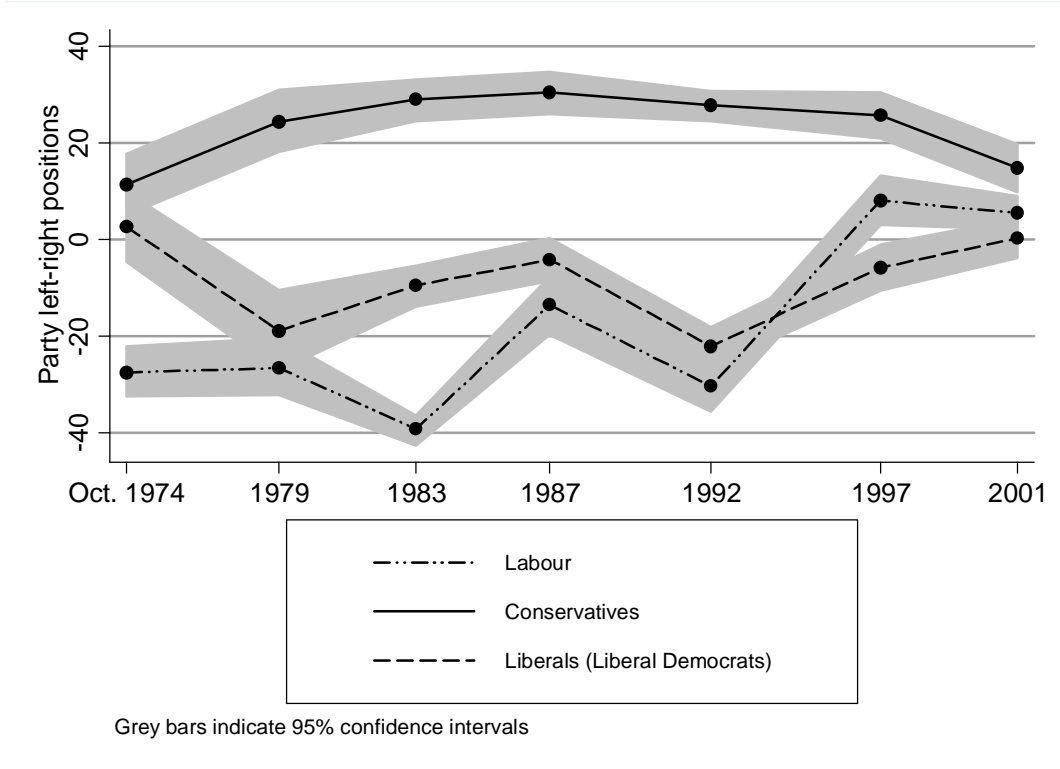
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<sup>25</sup> Moreover, even if parties would be fully informed about their competitors' intentions, it would be unclear whether voters perceive these shifts. Indeed, insisting that a competing party has not changed may help to undermine its strategy and freeze it at its former position in the eyes of the voters.

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Appendix A.

correct for the unexpected policy positions caused by “New Labour”. Compared to 1997, both parties are still in inappropriate or “unexpected” policy positions.

**Figure 5.1: Party left-right placements in Great Britain (October 1974 – 2001)**



In total, we have four instances of party shifts with are not in line with voter expectations: Liberal Democrats (1992), Labour (1997), Labour (2001), and again the Liberal Democrats (2001). Only the Conservatives “behave well”, having chosen policy positions in line with the ideological expectations in all elections under consideration. Due to missing data, we have no information on the voters’ perceptions of the policy shift of the Liberal Democrats in 2001. Therefore, the analysis is confined to three cases of policy shifts leading parties to assume “unexpected” policy positions relative to those of their competitors. Due to the small number, I exclude the variable from the multivariate analysis which follows in Chapter 6. As for the number of parties, the variable does not entail enough variance for a thorough statistical analysis. I will therefore analyze its effect on the perception of party policy shifts separately. Although the results drawn from that analysis are not as robust as those from the multivariate analysis, they allow for a first test of the plausibility of the arguments presented above.

As control variables, I add the voters’ *age* and *sex*. Although not having any specific expectations, it is common to control for these covariates. The voters’ age is measured in

years and the dummy variable “female” indicates whether the respondent is male (0) or female (1).

### 5.1.3 Data structure and number of observations

The data file contains the voters’ perceptions of party position shifts of the British general election from October 1974 until 2001. Each single case is voter  $i$ ’s perception of party  $j$ ’s policy shift at election  $t$ . In other words, at each election  $t$ , voter  $i$  generates three observations (one for each party  $1 \leq j \leq 3$ ).

**Table 5.4: Number of observations by elections**

	<b>October 1974</b>	<b>1979</b>	<b>1983</b>	<b>1987</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Nationalization</b>	1468	617		1571	1275	1673	3085	9689
<b>Taxes vs. Services</b>		632		1630	1285	1687	3019	8253
<b>Unemployment</b>				1553	1150	1557	2900	7160

Table 5.4 summarizes the number of observations for the data analyses in the next chapter. Note that the number of observations is rather small. Except for “Nationalization”, the policy scales are not used in all elections creating missing values for the elections in October 1974 (“Taxes vs. Services” and “Unemployment”) and 1979 (“Unemployment”). Missing values for the variables (most often in the placement of party policy positions) further reduce the number of observations. Nevertheless, roughly 7200 to 9700 observations exist for the pooled analysis presented in the next chapter. Analyzing a single party in one election reduces the sample size drastically: For the analysis of the “New Labour” policy shift only 581 observations exist. Before I turn to the regression results, I introduce the two-stage logistic regression model applied later on.

## 5.2 Methods: A two-stage logistic regression model

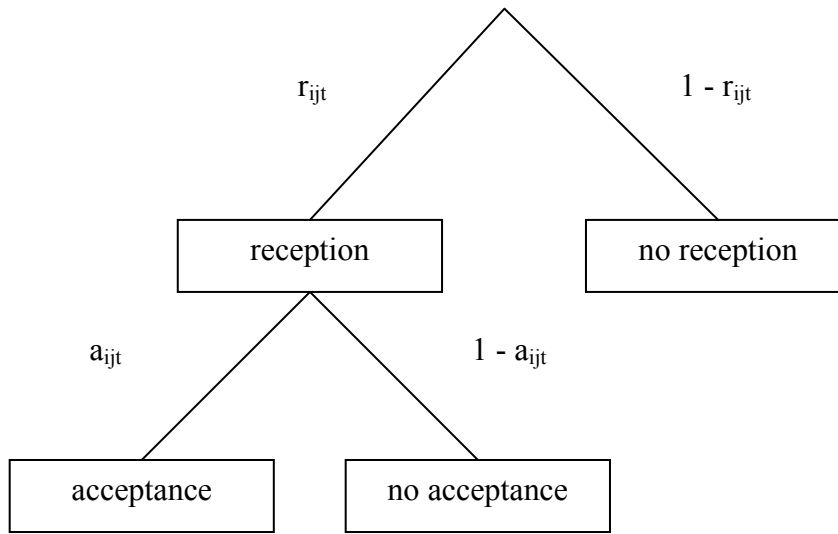
As mentioned in Chapter 3, I argue that the perception of party policy shifts is a two-stage process. Voters receive information on party policy shifts and then decide whether to accept (i.e. consider credible) the parties’ shift messages. I model this process denoting voter  $i$ ’s probability of receiving party  $j$ ’s shift message at time  $t$  with probability  $r_{ijt}(x_{ijt})$  where  $x_{ijt}$  is a vector capturing the covariates affecting the reception of party policy shifts. Given the reception of party policy shifts, voter  $i$  accepts party  $j$ ’s policy shift at time  $t$  with probability



$a_{ijt}(y_{ijt})$ . Again,  $y_{ijt}$  is a vector consisting of variables influencing the acceptance of party position shifts. Because the dependent variable is binary (perceiving/not perceiving party policy shifts), one could calculate two separate logistic regressions for the reception ( $r_{ijt}$ ) and the acceptance ( $a_{ijt}$ ) of party position shifts.

However, this approach violates some of the assumptions made by the theoretical model presented above. Specifically, the perception of party policy shifts is a two-stage process in which the acceptance of policy shifts requires their reception. In turn, the reception of policy shifts is not sufficient for their perception. In other words, the logistic regressions depend on each other. A pooled analysis covering the variables  $x_{ijt}$  and  $y_{ijt}$  of both functions is not sufficient to correct for this. Interaction terms between the reception and acceptance covariates are also not appropriate to model the two-level structure. To see this, Figure 5.2 maps the two-stage process of perceiving policy position shifts.

**Figure 5.2: The perception of party policy shifts in a two-stage process**



with

$$r_{ijt} = \Pr(\text{reception}) = \frac{\exp(\alpha \cdot x_{ijt})}{1 + \exp(\alpha \cdot x_{ijt})} \text{ and} \quad (1)$$

$$a_{ijt} = \Pr(\text{acceptance}) = \frac{\exp(\beta \cdot y_{ijt})}{1 + \exp(\beta \cdot y_{ijt})} \quad (2)$$

Voters only perceive party policy shifts if they receive *and* accept the party move. In other words, the probability of perceiving a policy shift is

$$\Pr(\text{perception}) = r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \quad (3)$$

and

$$\Pr(\text{no perception}) = (1 - r_{ijt}) + r_{ijt} \cdot (1 - a_{ijt}) = 1 - r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} \quad (4)$$

Compare this model to logistic regressions only considering either reception or acceptance probabilities. A logistic regression estimating the impact of the reception covariates on the perception of party policy shifts reveals

$$\Pr_{\text{rec}}(\text{perception}) = r_{ijt} \quad (5)$$

and

$$\Pr_{\text{rec}}(\text{no perception}) = 1 - r_{ijt} \quad (6)$$

In contrast to the two-stage model in (3) and (4), this model *assumes* that the acceptance probability of party policy shifts ( $a_{ijt}$ ) is equal to one. However, if some voters are more skeptical than others, the model yields biased estimates. Similarly, a logistic regression calculation of the acceptance of party policy shifts assumes that the reception probability  $r_{ijt}$  is equal to one. Empirical evidence suggests that this is not the case. Alvarez (1997) shows that more educated and more informed voters are more likely to locate presidential candidates' policy positions at their "true" policy positions.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, Alvarez and Brehm (2002: chapters 4 and 6) demonstrate that more informed voters show less response variability answering survey questions. Hence, it is not reasonable to assume that all voters receive party policy shifts.

Estimating a pooled logistic regression covering the covariates for the reception ( $x_{ijt}$ ) and the acceptance ( $y_{ijt}$ ) of party policy shifts is also not appropriate to model the two-stage process. To see this, compare the probabilities of perceiving policy shifts in a pooled model with the same probability of the two-stage model in (3). The comparison reveals that

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<sup>27</sup> A candidate's "true" policy position is measured using the mean of the voters' perception of the candidate's policy position.

$$\begin{aligned} \Pr_{\text{pooled}}(\text{perception}) &= \frac{\exp(\alpha \cdot x_{ijt} + \beta \cdot y_{ijt})}{1 + \exp(\alpha \cdot x_{ijt} + \beta \cdot y_{ijt})} \\ &\neq \frac{\exp(\alpha \cdot x_{ijt})}{1 + \exp(\alpha \cdot x_{ijt})} \cdot \frac{\exp(\beta \cdot y_{ijt})}{1 + \exp(\beta \cdot y_{ijt})} = r_{ijt} \cdot a_{ijt} = \Pr_{\text{two-stage}}(\text{perception}) \end{aligned} \quad (7)$$

Hence, the pooled model differs from the two-stage model presented above. Moreover, it can be shown that a pooled logistic regression with interaction terms differs from the two-stage model formulation. Furthermore, using interaction terms leads to more complications because all reception covariates would interact with all acceptance covariates. Because such a model is impossible to estimate, I deviate from ordinary logistic regression models using a two-stage logistic regression as described in Figure 5.2. The likelihood function of this two-stage logistic regression model is given by

$$\text{Likelihood} = \prod_{i=1}^N [r_{ijt} a_{ijt}]^{y_i} [1 - r_{ijt} a_{ijt}]^{1-y_i} \quad (8)$$

With (1) and (2), the logarithm of the likelihood function is equal to

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Log likelihood} = \\ \sum_{i=1}^N y_i \cdot \ln \left[ \frac{\exp(\alpha \cdot x_{ijt})}{1 + \exp(\alpha \cdot x_{ijt})} \cdot \frac{\exp(\beta \cdot y_{ijt})}{1 + \exp(\beta \cdot y_{ijt})} \right] + (1 - y_i) \cdot \ln \left[ 1 - \frac{\exp(\alpha \cdot x_{ijt})}{1 + \exp(\alpha \cdot x_{ijt})} \cdot \frac{\exp(\beta \cdot y_{ijt})}{1 + \exp(\beta \cdot y_{ijt})} \right] \end{aligned} \quad (9)$$

For the models presented in the next chapter, I first calculate logistic regressions for the reception and acceptance of party policy shifts. Although the models have several drawbacks (see above), I estimate the models for two reasons: First, the models contain fewer variables causing less collinearity between the covariates. Logistic regressions may therefore serve as simple preliminary tests of the theory. Second, I estimate the logistic regressions to compare the results with the estimates of the two-stage model. If the estimates are similar, the bias caused by omitting the two-stage structure is small. Different results indicate model misspecifications of ordinary logistic regressions. Hence, the analyses presented later on cover ordinary logistic and two-stage logistic regressions.

Finally, it should be noted that heteroskedasticity exists: Voters perceive party position shifts of several parties at more than one occasion (i.e. election). Hence, it is reasonable to assume that the observations of one election cluster and, furthermore, the perceptions of

individual voters systematically differ from each other. Therefore, I estimate robust standard errors clustered by elections and include party dummy variables to capture party specific effects.<sup>28</sup>

### 5.3 Summary

This chapter lays down the foundations for the data analysis in the next chapter. Using the British panel election studies from the 1970's until 2001, I use a pooled dataset of the British voters' perceptions of party policy shifts. The pooling allows for adding party-specific covariates that are constant investigating a single party's policy position shift.

I describe the dependent and the independent variables used in the analyses. So doing, I report the selection of the dependent variables and the measures for concepts introduced in Chapter 4. I also discuss alternatives and justify my choices. Two of the covariates presented above are not feasible in the multivariate analysis presented in the next chapter: First, studying one specific country with a relatively stable party system, the political market's complexity does not vary. Because constant covariates cannot explain variation in the dependent variable, I drop the variable from the analysis. A similar argument applies for the party policy shifts deviating from the expected positions vis-à-vis their competitors. The British party system most of the time conforms to the expectations so that there is little variance which, furthermore, captures distinct policy shifts such as "New Labour". I hence subject the variable to an analysis separate from the multivariate analysis.

Finally, I turn from data to methods presenting a two-stage logistic regression model applied in the subsequent analyses. For both the "New Labour" analysis and the estimation of the parameters for the pooled file, I use logistic regression models for the reception and the acceptance of party policy shifts. Additionally, I estimate two-stage logistic regressions showing how these estimates differ from the ordinary regression models. In case of the pooled sample, I use standard errors clustered for the different elections and party fixed effects capturing party-specific effects.

The next chapter is dedicated to the empirical tests of the factors described here. First, I study one remarkable party position shift – New Labour – before I turn to the analysis of the pooled data covering various parties in several elections. Finally, I present a brief analysis of

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<sup>28</sup> The analysis of the "New Labour" policy shift in 1997 is straightforward. Because the sample only covers one party in one election, ordinary and two-stage logistic regressions without clustering are sufficient.

how the deviant policy shifts – the variable decoupled from the multivariate analysis – affects the voters' perception of party policy shifts for those three cases with available data.

## **6 Voter perceptions of party position shifts in Great Britain: Results**

In this chapter, I analyze the perception of party policy shifts in Great Britain. After having presented the data and the methods in the previous chapter, I first show empirical results for one specific party position change: Labour's policy shift in 1997. In addition to the relevance of "New Labour" in British history, the case selection is also guided by measurement considerations. Studying only one party position shift at one point in time (i.e. one election) also allows for a coherent measurement of the concepts.<sup>29</sup> Holding party-specific covariates constant also simplifies the model and allows for focusing on the voter-specific covariates.

Subsequently, I study the pooled sample looking at the British general elections from October 1974 onwards. In addition to voter-specific covariates, these models also contain variables which only vary across parties. Hence, pooling the data of several elections allows for testing most of the hypotheses postulated in Chapter 4. Extending the sample size, it is moreover possible to check and to generalize the findings of the "New Labour" analysis.

I briefly discuss several regression models studying the perception of party position shifts on three policy scales. Thereafter, I present a short summary of the regression results in the different models. As the empirical results show, however, the compromises involved in the pooling of the election studies and multicollinearity of the measures create mixed results. I therefore present two additional regression analyses discussing the effects of two covariates in greater detail. I also provide potential explanations for findings that contradict the hypotheses presented above. In addition, I briefly discuss the effect of parties moving away from their expected policy positions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the three major British parties mainly stick to their expected policy positions between the late 1970's and 2001 so that there is not enough variance for including this variable in the multivariate analyses. I briefly discuss the findings before I conclude.

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<sup>29</sup> As shown in the previous chapter, pooling several panel election studies sometimes requires tough coding decisions and compromises in the selection of measures for the underlying concepts. Using only one panel election study avoids these problems and allows for more precise measures.

### 6.1 The “New Labour” policy shift

Between 1992 and 1997, Labour’s appearance changed in several ways. The 1993 Labour conference accepted the “one member, one vote” idea significantly reducing the trade unions’ influence on the selection of the party leader, the parliamentary candidates, and the decisions made at the annual party conference (Butler and Kavanagh 1997: 49). In addition to these institutional changes, the Labour Party moderated its policy platform in several ways. It abandoned Clause IV of the party’s constitution which committed the party to the “common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange” (from Seyd and Whiteley 2004: 46). Moreover, Labour abandoned its Keynesian policy views. Instead of aiming for low unemployment, the party committed itself to the goal of low inflation (Heath et al. 2001: 104). Finally, the party aimed at getting rid of its “tax and spend” image promising that a Labour government would not increase the rates of income tax during the next parliament’s lifetime (Seyd 1998: 60-62).

These policy changes helped creating a new party image and a new language distinguishing these reforms of “New Labour” from the former period. The policy program, for example, explicitly broke up with “old” Labour stating that “[w]e have changed the way we make policy, and put our relations with the trade unions on a modern footing where they accept they can get fairness but no favours from a Labour government” (Labour Party 1997). Gordon Brown, at that time shadow chancellor, stated in 1994 that “[i]t is equally clear that the old Labour language, tax, spend and borrow, nationalization, state planning, isolationism, full jobs for life for men while women stay at home – is equally inappropriate to the future as it was to the needs of the past” (Gordon Brown in the Financial Times, 28, 1994 cited in Wickham-Jones 2005: 667). In sum, the party’s institutional design, its image, and its policy program differed in many respects from its predecessors. Compared to 1992, the party’s image and policies were much more moderate.

**Table 6.1: Perception of “New Labour” in %**

	<b>Nationalization vs. Privatization</b>	<b>Taxes vs. Services</b>	<b>Unemployment vs. Inflation</b>
<b>Shift to the left</b>	22.4	18.7	29.0
<b>No shift</b>	15.8	21.5	28.5
<b>Shift to the right</b>	61.8	59.7	42.6
<b>N</b>	804	817	815

Given the importance of “New Labour”, it is remarkable that the share of voters perceiving the policy position shift is rather small (see Table 6.1). Taking the “Nationalization vs. Privatization” scale as a yardstick, only 60 % of the electorate perceived this moderating policy shift to the right. In other words, 40% of the survey respondents stated that Labour did not moderate its policy position compared to 1992. More specifically, around 20% of the voters asked in 1992 and the subsequent 1997 election perceived no policy shift. Even more surprising, 20% of the electorate perceived a Labour policy shift to the left. The same pattern emerges for the “Taxes vs. Services” scale. In contrast, the fraction of voters perceiving a rightward policy shift for “Unemployment vs. Inflation” is even smaller covering roughly 40% of the electorate. Six out of ten respondents stated that Labour made no shift or a shift to the left on this policy scale.

**Table 6.2: Expected effects of covariates for the reception and acceptance of “New Labour”**

	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Expectation</b>
<b>Reception</b>	Political awareness	+
	Education	+
	Magnitude of voter policy shift	+
<b>Acceptance</b>	Party leader's prestige	+
	Party identification: party shifts towards voter	+
	Party identification: party shifts way from voter	-
	Party shift similar to voter shift?	+

The main goal of this section is to analyze the differences between those voters perceiving the shift to the right and those perceiving no shift or even a shift to the left. Studying only one party policy shift, party-specific factors of the model presented in Chapter 4 are held constant. Table 6.2 summarizes the remaining voter-specific expectations. Recall that I expect to see positive and significant coefficients for the voters’ political awareness, education, and the magnitude of the voters’ policy shifts. Moreover, I argue that voters are more likely to perceive party policy shifts if they positively evaluate the party leader (Tony Blair) and if the shift is in line with their personal policy shift. Finally, party identification has a positive effect for voters being better off with Labour’s policy shift. In contrast, the effect of party identification is negative for party policy shifts moving away from the respective voter’s policy preferences.



**Table 6.3: Perception of “New Labour” 1997**

	(1) Reception (logistic regression)	(2) Acceptance (logistic regression)	(3) Two-stage logistic regression
Political awareness	0.139** (0.045)		0.167+ (0.091)
Moderate education	0.271 (0.208)		0.077 (0.447)
Advanced education	0.730* (0.304)		0.845 (0.761)
Magnitude of voter policy shift	-0.040 (0.057)		-0.029 (0.114)
Age	-0.005 (0.006)		-0.038* (0.019)
Female	-0.066 (0.185)		1.418+ (0.796)
Constant	-0.137 (0.401)		2.263+ (1.304)
Party leader's prestige		0.099 (0.103)	0.147 (0.153)
Party identification		0.409 (0.296)	0.952 (0.736)
Party shift away from voter preferences		-1.784** (0.258)	-2.495** (0.476)
Party id · Party shift away from voter preferences		-1.209** (0.432)	-1.926* (0.820)
Party shift in line with voter shift?		-0.064 (0.214)	0.053 (0.333)
Age		-0.003 (0.006)	0.025+ (0.014)
Female		-0.164 (0.202)	-1.180** (0.435)
Constant		1.187* (0.530)	1.224 (1.057)
Observations	581	581	581
Log likelihood	-370.9	-307.7	-296.3

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$   
Standard errors in parentheses

Table 6.3 shows the regression results for the “New Labour” policy shift. The first two models are logistic regressions for the reception (model 1) and acceptance (model 2) covariates. The third model presents the results of the two-stage logistic regression. Studying the effects of the first model, political awareness has a positive impact on the reception of policy shifts: Voters are more likely to receive the “New Labour” policy shift if they are able to answer questions on political topics correctly. This finding conforms to the theoretical expectation. Moreover, the effect of political awareness on the reception of policy shifts is

quite large. Political unaware voters answering none of the questions correctly have a 46% probability of receiving the party's shift message. This probability increases to 76% if the respondent is able to answer all questions correctly.<sup>30</sup>

The impact of education on the reception of party policy shifts is also positive: In comparison to voters with a basic education (i.e. O level or CSE, for example), voters with further or higher education are more likely to receive the Labour position shift. Again, this finding conforms to the theory arguing that more educated voters have less difficulty receiving party policy shifts. In comparison to the effect size of political awareness, the impact of education on the reception is slightly smaller. Whereas voters with a basic education receive policy shifts in 59% of the cases, voters with higher education receive the Labour shift with a probability of 74%.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, the magnitude of a voter policy shift does not impact on the perception of the "New Labour" policy shift. Although not conforming to the theory described above, these negative findings could also be due to specific patterns of the "New Labour" policy shift. In fact, Labour's policy shift in 1997 is not representative for British party policy shifts. For example, approximately 60% of the voters perceived this party policy shift. Although surprisingly low, this figure is much higher than the reception of other party policy shifts: In general, voters only perceive approximately one third of all party policy shifts from the 1970's onwards (see below). Hence, the negative finding may not hold for party policy shifts in general.

Turning to the acceptance of the Labour shift in 1997 (model 2), Tony Blair's prestige as a party leader has a positive impact on the acceptance of "New Labour": If Tony Blair's image is positive, voters are more likely to accept the proposed policy shift. Holding all other variables constant, voters with a negative view of Tony Blair accepted the party policy shift with a probability of 73%. Voters evaluating Tony Blair's prestige as high do so with a probability of 80%.<sup>32</sup> However, neither the regression coefficient nor the reported probabilities are statistically significant.

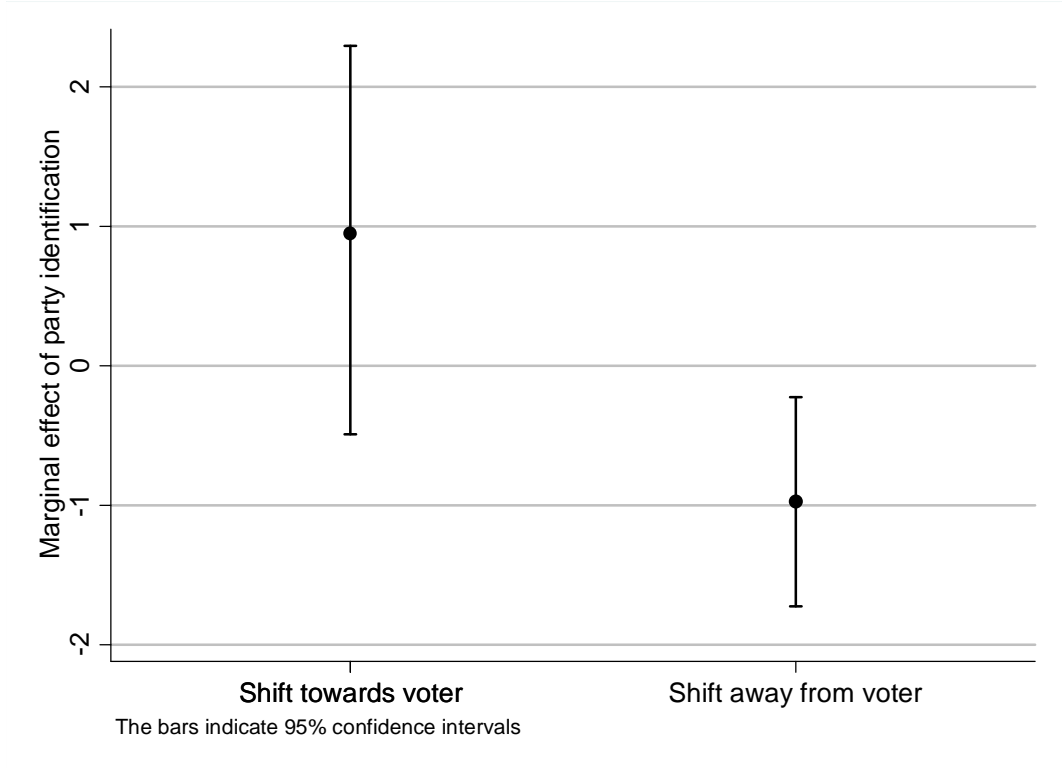
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<sup>30</sup> Probabilities computed using *Clarify* (King et al. 2000). The difference in the reported probabilities is highly significant at the 1% level. Other variables held at their mean (voter shift and age) or set to zero (female). The education is set to be moderate.

<sup>31</sup> As before, the probabilities are calculated using *Clarify* and the difference is also highly significant at the 1% level. The remaining variables are set as above with political awareness set to its mean value.

<sup>32</sup> As before, the size of the effect is calculated using *Clarify*. The probabilities reported hold for middle-aged male voters with no positive party identification for the Labour Party. Furthermore, the voter's policy shift is not

**Figure 6.1: Marginal effect of party identification on the perception of “New Labour” (depending on the direction of the party policy shift)<sup>33</sup>**



I argued above that the effect of the voters’ party identification on the acceptance of party policy shifts depends on the direction of the party policy shift: Voters with party identification are more likely to accept party policy shifts towards their policy preferences. In contrast, voters feeling close to Labour are less likely to accept shifts moving away from their personal policy preferences. Because interpreting the interacting regression coefficients is difficult, I illustrate the effect of the voter’s party identification on the acceptance of policy shifts in Figure 6.1.

I expect a positive (and significant) effect of party identification for party policy shifts towards the voters’ policy positions and a negative effect for shifts that are moving away from the voters’ preferences. As can be seen, the point estimates show the expected patterns. The confidence intervals indicate, however, that the effect is only significant for party policy shifts moving away from the voters’ preferences. Note that the confidence intervals on the right are much smaller than those on the left indicating that “New Labour” was a shift away from the preferences of most voters identified with Labour. This is reasonable because voters identified with Labour most often have left-leaning preferences and are worse off by Labour’s centrist

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in line with Labour’s shift to the right and “New Labour” deviates from the voter’s preferences. The probabilities are not statistically significant at conventional levels (p=0.18)

<sup>33</sup> The estimates are taken from model 3.

shift. Substantially, Labour leader Tony Blair benefitted most from left-leaning voters identified with Labour *not* accepting the party's moderating policy shift. The positive effect of voters with Labour identification appreciating the party's moderating shift towards their personal policy preferences was much smaller. Substantively, the effect sizes of party identification also differ across the two groups: For voters witnessing "New Labour" as a policy shift towards their preferences, the probability of accepting the party policy shift increases from 80% (no party identification) to roughly 85% (for voters identified with Labour). Compared to the estimates presented above, the increase of about 5 percentage points is rather weak. For voters being worse off by Labour's policy shift, the probability of accepting this platform change decreases from 40% (no party identification) to 23% (positive party identification). Hence, the negative effect of party identification on the acceptance of party position shifts moving away from the voters' positions is substantially larger (17 percentage points).<sup>34</sup>

Finally, I also argued that voters are more likely to accept party position shifts in line with their personal policy shifts. For "New Labour", voters turning to the right should hence be more likely to accept Labour's rightward shift. However, the estimate in model 2 does not show the expected positive effect. Rather, the coefficient is practically zero with no substantial effect. It should be noted, however, that voter position shifts correlate with the direction of Labour's policy shift: Voters shifting to the right are more likely to observe Labour's policy shift as a shift towards their policy preferences. The multicollinearity of the covariates may hence bias the results. As shown below, this is indeed the case: Dropping the party identification effect and its interaction terms, voter position shifts have a strong positive and significant effect on the acceptance of "New Labour".

So far, I calculated separate logistic regressions for the reception (model 1) and the acceptance (model 2) of Labour's policy shift in 1997. However, I argue that the perception of policy shifts is a two-stage process (see Chapters 3 and 5). Estimating separate models for the reception and the acceptance *assumes* that these steps are independent from each other what contradicts my theoretical expectation. Therefore, the question arises to what extent the estimates differ from a two-stage model.

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<sup>34</sup> As before, the size of the effect is calculated using *Clarify*. The probabilities reported hold for middle-aged male voters perceiving Tony Blair as an average party leader and the voter's policy shift is not in line with Labour's shift to the right. The difference of the reported probabilities is statistically significant at the 10% level (party shifts towards a voter's policy position) and the 1% level (for "New Labour" moving away from a voter's policy position).

The last column in Table 6.3 shows the estimates of the two-stage model. Note that the model contains two regression equations, one for the reception and one for the acceptance of the party policy shift. Comparing the results of the two-stage models with the reception (model 1) and acceptance (model 2) of “New Labour”, note that most of the (significant) effects in the separate models remain significant. Hence, the two-stage regression and the ordinary logistic regressions reveal similar estimates. However, two things are noteworthy: First, the effect sizes differ. For most of the covariates, the estimated coefficients of the reception and the acceptance part of the model equation are substantially larger than their separated counterparts presented in the separate analyses for reception (model 1) and acceptance (model 2). Hence, the findings indicate that the covariates of the acceptance function depend on the reception of policy shifts – as expected theoretically. Second, the standard errors of the two-stage model are larger than those of the separated logistic regressions. The increasing uncertainty of the model estimates is partly due to “noise” introduced by the inclusion of further covariates. Moreover, the interacting nature of the two combined model equations leads to an increase of the size of the standard errors. But although the increasing number of covariates and the complex model structure increase the estimates’ uncertainty, it is remarkable that most of the effects presented in models 1 and 2 remain statistically significant.

In sum, voters vary to the extent to which they perceive Labour’s centrist policy shift in 1997. First, political awareness and the voter’s education impact on the perception of “New Labour”. Less educated or political unaware voters are less likely to receive the party’s shift message. I also find empirical evidence for the voters’ party identification affecting the acceptance of “New Labour”. For party identifiers perceiving “New Labour” as a shift towards their policy preferences, being identified with Labour increases the changes of accepting the policy shift. The positive effect is, however, not statistically significant at conventional levels. In contrast, being identified with Labour has a strong negative effect on the perception of Labour’s shift away from the respective voters’ preferences. For those voters, Labour’s centrist shift contradicts the party’s image formed by their party identification. Because the party identification and the party’s announced policy position do not match, those voters are less likely to accept Labour’s 1997 policy shift.

## 6.2 The perception of party policy shifts in Great Britain 1974-2001

Labour's position shift in 1997 is rather exceptional in the British history of party competition. Moreover, I argued above that several party-specific covariates impact on the perception of party policy shifts. Testing these propositions is not possible studying only one party position shift. Therefore, I extend the analysis studying several parties at multiple elections in Great Britain between 1974 and 2001. The pooled sample allows for testing the theory outlined above on a larger sample including party-specific covariates.

**Table 6.4: Perception of party position shifts in Great Britain 1974-2001 (in %)**

		<b>Conservatives</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Liberal Democrats</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Nationalization vs. Privatization</b>	not perceived	60	71	68	66
	perceived	40	29	32	34
	N	7535	7547	5392	20474
<b>Taxes vs. Services</b>	not perceived	53	65	62	60
	perceived	47	35	38	40
	N	6038	6059	4882	16979
<b>Unemployment vs. Inflation</b>	not perceived	59	72	61	64
	perceived	41	28	39	36
	N	5399	5407	4922	15728

Table 6.4 gives a first overview of the perception of party policy shifts for different parties and policy scales. Taking the CMP left-right positions as a reference point, Table 6.4 indicates how many voters correctly perceive the parties' policy shifts. For all three policy scales the figures indicate that only one third of the electorate perceives party policy shifts. In other words, two-thirds of the parties' position shifts have no impact on the voters. Moreover, there is not much variance across parties and across scales.<sup>35</sup> These numbers are even lower than those reported above showing that the relatively high perception rate for "New Labour" (around 60%) is the exception rather than the rule.

What factors impact on the perception of party policy shifts? As for the Labour position shift in 1997, I first estimate logistic regressions predicting the reception and the acceptance of policy shifts. Then, I present the results of two-stage regression models distinguishing the reception and the acceptance stages of perceiving party policy shifts. I estimate these regressions for all three policy scales beginning with the "Nationalization vs. Privatization" scale.

<sup>35</sup> Note that Table 6.4 is based on respondents being able to locate party policy positions at two time points. In general, British voters are less likely to identify policy positions of the Liberal Democrats. Hence, voters are less likely to perceive their party position shifts.

### 6.2.1 Nationalization vs. Privatization

Table 6.5 reports the regression results for the reception (1), the acceptance (2), and the two-stage regression model (3) using the “Nationalization vs. Privatization” scale. For the ease of interpretation, the theoretical expectations are summarized in the last column. Regarding the reception of policy shifts, the results do not support most of the theoretical expectations presented above. The strong predictor for the reception of “New Labour”, political awareness, shows a different pattern in the pooled sample. The higher the voters’ political awareness, the *lower* the probability that voters accept the parties’ policy shifts. The finding hence contradicts the theoretical expectation and the positive finding for “New Labour”. Note, however, that the reception model in Table 6.5 uses political interest instead of political awareness because political quizzes were only used in the 1979 and 1997 election studies. Calculating regression models for those two elections using political awareness instead of political interest (see below), the effect is positive and highly significant. I hence argue that this negative finding is due to the unsatisfying measurement of the concept.

The effects of the voter’s education are in the predicted direction: Voters with moderate or higher education are more likely to receive party position shifts than voters with basic education. At least for voters with moderate education, the estimate is statistically significant at the 10% level. The remaining substantial covariates do not reach conventional significance levels: As in the case of “New Labour”, voters do not update party policy placements when shifting their personal policy preferences. Furthermore, the two party-specific covariates (i.e. governmental status and the magnitude of the party policy shifts) do also not affect the voters’ reception in this model specification.

The second model in Table 6.5 puts the acceptance covariates of party policy shifts to an empirical test. In addition to the control variables, five variables are of substantive interest. I expect that the acceptance of policy shifts increases with a change in the party leadership, higher prestige of the respective party leader, smaller party policy shifts in the past, and if the direction of party and voter policy shifts coincide. Moreover, I expect a positive effect of party identification if the party policy shift is towards the voters’ preferences. In contrast, the effect should be negative for party platform shifts away from the voters’ policy preferences.

**Table 6.5: Perception of policy shifts – Nationalization (with clustered SEs)**

	(1) Reception (logistic regression)	(2) Acceptance (logistic regression)	(3) Two-stage logistic regression	Exp. <sup>36</sup>
Political interest	-0.015* (0.007)		-0.058** (0.017)	+
Moderate education	0.172+ (0.089)		-0.007 (0.165)	+
Advanced education	0.053 (0.098)		0.031 (0.115)	+
Magnitude of voter policy shift	-0.014 (0.030)		0.162+ (0.085)	+
Party in government	-0.273 (0.456)		-11.604** (1.043)	+
Magnitude of party policy shift	0.016 (0.025)		-0.100** (0.020)	+
Conservatives	0.701** (0.135)		11.075** (0.792)	
Labour	0.231 (0.372)		9.515** (0.731)	
Age	0.003 (0.002)		0.003 (0.009)	
Female	0.020 (0.039)		0.403+ (0.215)	
Constant	-1.040* (0.416)		2.286** (0.757)	
Party leader change		0.263 (0.210)	0.293* (0.143)	+
Party leader's prestige		0.108* (0.048)	0.151** (0.038)	+
Magnitude of past party policy shift		-0.016 (0.022)	0.042** (0.013)	-
Party identification		0.482** (0.081)	0.552** (0.086)	+
Party shift away from voter preferences		-1.547** (0.302)	-2.101** (0.305)	
Interaction: Party id · Party shift away from voter preferences		-1.043** (0.125)	-1.158** (0.120)	-
Party shift similar to voter shift?		-0.093 (-0.089)	-0.200* (0.100)	+
Conservatives		0.054 (0.307)	0.105 (0.285)	
Labour		-0.050 (0.292)	-0.670 (0.410)	
Age		0.0007 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.003)	
Female		0.077 (0.056)	-0.079 (0.095)	
Constant		-0.049 (0.215)	0.117 (0.207)	
Observations	9689	9689	9689	
Log likelihood	-6295.5	-5370.6	-5174.0	

+ p &lt; 0.1, \* p &lt; 0.05, \*\* p &lt; 0.01

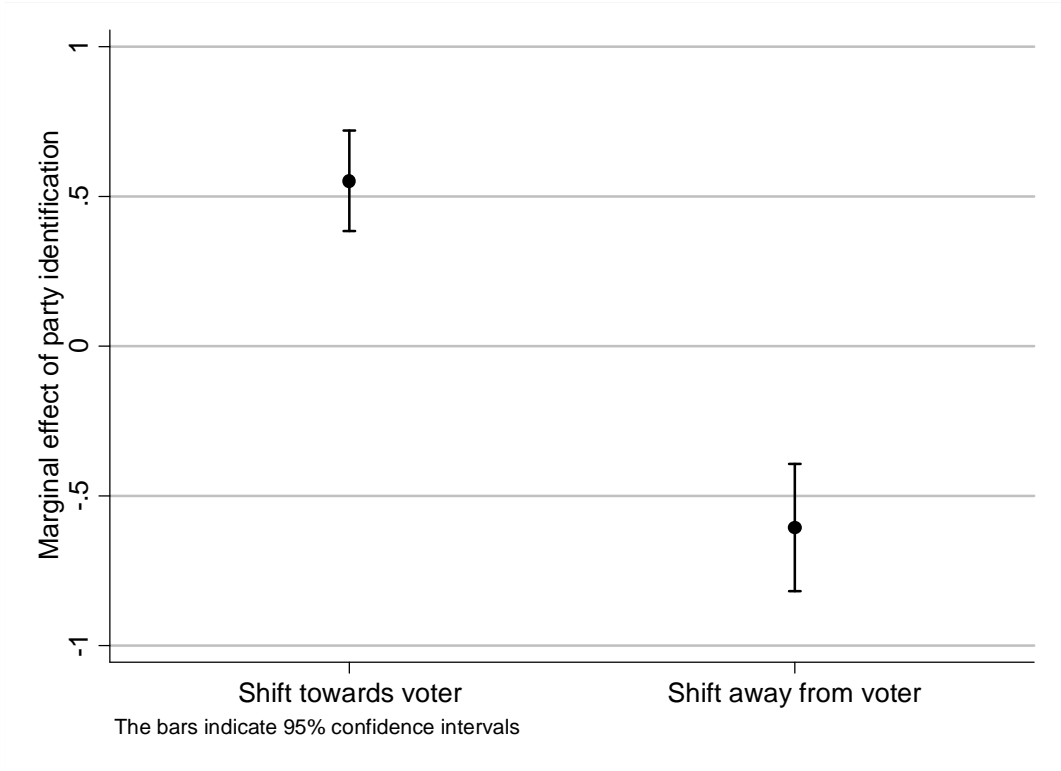
Clustered standard errors in parentheses

<sup>36</sup> If no specific expectation exists, the respective cell is empty.



The results show that the acceptance of party policy shifts increases if the leadership has changed. In the logistic regression model omitting the two-stage process, however, the finding does not reach statistical significance. Moreover, voters are more likely to accept party policy shifts if the party leader’s prestige is high. The coefficient is statistically significant at the 5% level and is in the expected direction. Furthermore, the magnitude of past party policy shifts does not have a significant impact on the acceptance of party policy shifts. In contrast, the empirical results support the theoretical expectations for voter party identification. To ease interpretation, Figure 6.2 shows the marginal effects of party identification on the acceptance of party policy shifts depending on the direction of the party policy shift. For party policy shifts towards the voter’s policy position, party identification shows the expected positive effect: Voters with party identification are indeed more likely to accept party position shifts towards their personal policy preferences. In contrast, the effect of party identification is negative for party shifts away from the voters’ policy preferences. Voters identifying with a particular party are hence less likely to accept (i.e. consider credible) policy shifts of “their” party away from their policy positions.

**Figure 6.2: The effect of party identification on the acceptance of policy shifts depending on the party shift’s direction: Nationalization<sup>37</sup>**



<sup>37</sup> The estimates are taken from model 3.

I do not find any effect for a higher acceptance of party policy shifts in line with voter position shifts. As for the “New Labour” case, however, voter position shifts show a high (negative) correlation with party shifts away from the voters’ preferences: Voters shifting in the same direction as their respective political parties are more likely to benefit from these party policy shifts. Hence, the insignificant effect may partly be due to multicollinearity of the two covariates. In fact, omitting party identification and the related direction variables from the model (see below), the coefficient for the voters’ direction of policy shifts has the expected positive effect: Voters are more likely to accept party policy shifts in line with their personal policy shifts.

Combining the reception (1) and the acceptance model (2), the two-stage logistic regression in model (3) considers the covariates of both models and the theoretically assumed perception process. It turns out that the model estimates differ in some respects from their one-stage predecessors. In the reception part of the model, educational variables no longer reach significance. In contrast, the regression results show the expected positive (and significant) effect of the voters’ updating process: The larger the voters’ policy shifts, the more likely voters receive the parties’ shift messages. Furthermore, the party-specific covariates of the reception function reach significance but both effects are against my theoretical expectation: Voters are less likely to receive party policy shifts of government parties. Moreover, the magnitude of the parties’ platform changes negatively affects their reception. While the former counterintuitive result may be due to specificities of the British party system (discussed below), the latter result is not replicable in the remaining analyses.

The results of the acceptance part of the model are more in line with those of the pure acceptance model (model 2). For three of the five effects, the coefficients of the two-stage model point in the expected direction: Voters are more likely to accept party position shifts if the party leadership changed and if the party leader’s prestige is high. Moreover, voters with party identification are more likely (less likely) to accept policy shifts towards (away from) their personal preferences. All regression coefficients are statistically significant. Yet, two effects are against my theoretical expectations. First, the larger a party’s previous policy shift, the more likely it is that voters accept another party policy shift. Moreover, voters are less likely to accept party policy shifts in line with voter position shifts. While the former result has substantive consequences for the theoretical model, the latter is again due to multicollinearity of the model covariates.

### 6.2.2 Taxes vs. Services

This section applies the same covariates to another dependent variable: the perceived party position shifts on the “Taxes vs. Services” scale. Compared to the analysis of the “Nationalization vs. Privatization” scale, the number of observations is smaller because the question was not asked before 1979. I proceed as before. I first estimate logistic regressions for the reception (1) and the acceptance (2) of party policy shifts. Then, I estimate a two-stage regression combining the covariates of the first and the second model (3). The regression results are displayed in Table 6.6.

Most of the estimates of the reception function are insignificant. The voters’ political interest does not affect the reception of party position shifts. As for the “Nationalization vs. Privatization” scale, the negative result is due to the measurement of the concept: Restricting the sample to the 1979 and 1997 elections allows for using political quizzes instead of political interest. Calculating the same reception regression with this reduced sample leads to a highly significant positive coefficient (see below). The coefficients for the voters’ education point in the right direction without reaching statistical significance. Moreover, the magnitude of the voters’ position shifts does not affect the reception of party policy shifts. Except for the control variables, only one covariate has a statistically significant effect on the reception of party policy shifts: The larger the party’s position shift, the higher the likelihood that voters receive the message. Hence, the effect is in the expected direction.

Turning to the acceptance of party policy shifts, model 2 in Table 6.6 reveals only one significant effect. The voters’ party identification has the expected effect on the acceptance of party policy shifts. Figure 6.3 plots the marginal effect of party identification depending on the direction of party policy shifts vis-à-vis the voters’ policy positions. As expected, voters with party identification are more likely to accept policy shifts of their parties if the policy shifts are towards their own policy preferences. In contrast, party identification negatively affects the acceptance of party policy shifts away from the voters’ preferences.

**Table 6.6: Perception of policy shifts – Taxes vs. Services (with clustered SEs)**

	(1) Reception (logistic regression)	(2) Acceptance (logistic regression)	(3) Two-stage logistic regression	Exp. <sup>38</sup>
Political interest	-0.018 (0.015)		-0.0313 (0.020)	+
Moderate education	0.026 (0.045)		-0.117 (0.080)	+
Advanced education	0.049 (0.076)		-0.133 (0.155)	+
Magnitude of voter policy shift	0.026 (0.021)		0.148 <sup>+</sup> (0.076)	+
Party in government	0.037 (0.154)		-0.333 (0.350)	+
Magnitude of party policy shift	0.029* (0.014)		0.039* (0.012)	+
Conservatives	0.585** (0.195)		0.475 (0.338)	
Labour	-0.114 (0.243)		0.245 (0.526)	
Age	0.002 (0.002)		0.013 <sup>+</sup> (0.008)	
Female	0.043 (0.039)		0.309* (0.153)	
Constant	-0.982** (0.287)		-0.244 (0.397)	
Party leader change		0.161 (0.357)	-0.073 (0.382)	+
Party leader's prestige		0.081 (0.057)	0.108 <sup>+</sup> (0.063)	+
Magnitude of past party policy shift		0.007 (0.014)	0.017 (0.016)	-
Party identification		0.532** (0.0876)	1.150** (0.286)	+
Party shift away from voter preferences		-1.547** (0.220)	-2.056** (0.302)	
Interaction: Party id · Party shift away from voter preferences		-0.861** (0.111)	-1.509** (0.377)	-
Party shift similar to voter shift?		0.083 (0.123)	0.126 (0.130)	+
Conservatives		0.137 (0.313)	0.308 (0.449)	
Labour		-0.278 (0.446)	-0.521 (0.426)	
Age		0.0002 (0.002)	-0.009** (0.003)	
Female		0.124** (0.040)	-0.077 (0.116)	
Constant		-0.133 (0.303)	1.212 <sup>+</sup> (0.721)	
Observations	8253	8253	8253	
Log likelihood	-5482.2	-4769.3	-4712.5	

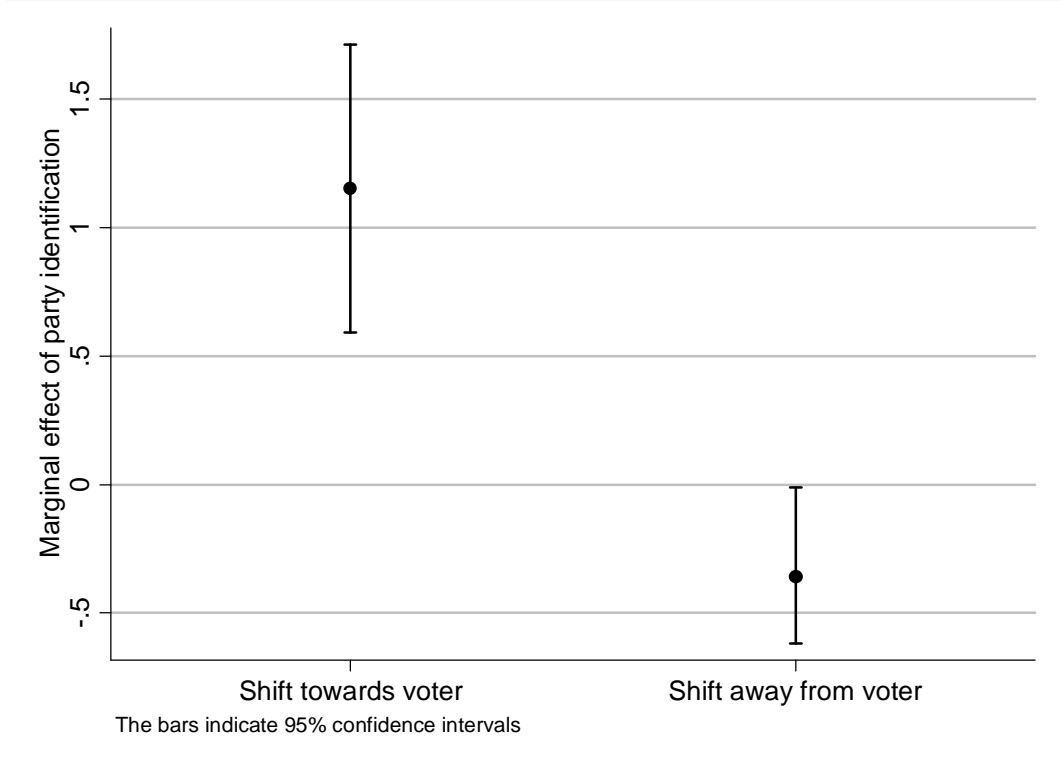
<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Clustered standard errors in parentheses

<sup>38</sup> If no specific expectation exists, the respective cell is empty.

The final model reported in Table 6.6 combines the reception and acceptance covariates in a two-stage logistic regression. The regression results are quite similar to the separate models of reception (model 1) and acceptance (model 2). Both the magnitude of the party policy shifts and the interacting effect of the voters’ party identification keep their expected and significant coefficients. In addition, the magnitude of the voters’ policy shift positively affects the reception of party policy shifts. As expected, voters “update” their information on political parties when shifting policy positions. In the acceptance part of the model, the party leader’s prestige affects the perception of party policy shifts. Conforming to the theoretical expectations, voters are more likely to accept party policy shifts if they positively evaluate the party leader.

**Figure 6.3: The effect of party identification on the acceptance of policy shifts depending on the party shift’s direction: Taxes vs. Services<sup>39</sup>**



**6.2.3 Unemployment vs. Inflation**

In this section, I use perceived party position shifts on the “Unemployment vs. Inflation” scale as the dependent variable. Compared to the former two scales, the number of observations is smaller as the questions are available only from 1987 onwards. The models are presented as above: First, I calculate a logistic regression containing the reception variables. The second

<sup>39</sup> The estimates are taken from model 3.

logistic regression covers the variables expected to impact on the acceptance of party policy shifts. Third, a two-stage logistic regression combines these covariates taking the data-generating process into account. The estimates of these models are presented in Table 6.7.

In the reception function, the magnitude of the party's policy shift positively impacts on its reception. The effect is positive and statistically significant at the 95% level. The remaining coefficients are insignificant and hence most of the hypotheses are not supported using policy shifts on the "Unemployment vs. Inflation" scale as the dependent variable. Specifically, political awareness does not affect the voters' reception of party policy shifts. This negative result is – once again – due to the measurement of the concept. As for the other two scales, restricting the model to elections for which political quizzes were conducted, the effect becomes positive and significant (see below).

Turning to the second model, the effect of the voters' party identification conforms to the theoretical expectation. As for the previous models, I display the marginal effect graphically. Figure 6.4 shows the expected pattern: Party identification positively affects the acceptance of party policy shifts if the party shift is towards the voter's policy position. In case the party moves away from the voter, however, voters with party identification are less likely to accept the party's new policy position. For the remaining substantial covariates, the effects are insignificant. Note, however, that multicollinearity between the voter's policy shifts and the direction of the party shifts prevents statistically significant effects of the former. Omitting party identification and its interaction terms from the model leads to the expected positive effect (see below).

Model 3 in Table 6.7 combines the reception (1) and the acceptance (2) models in a two-stage logistic regression. In the reception part of the model, political awareness has the expected positive effect on the reception of party policy shifts. Hence, the voters' reception of party policy shifts increases with their political interest. The magnitude of the party's policy shift no longer has a statistically significant effect on the voters' reception function. Although the size of the effect increases from model 1 (0.023) to model 3 (0.032), the coefficient no longer reaches a significant level in the two-stage model. The remaining covariates remain insignificant.

**Table 6.7: Perception of policy shifts – Unemployment vs. Inflation (with clustered SEs)**

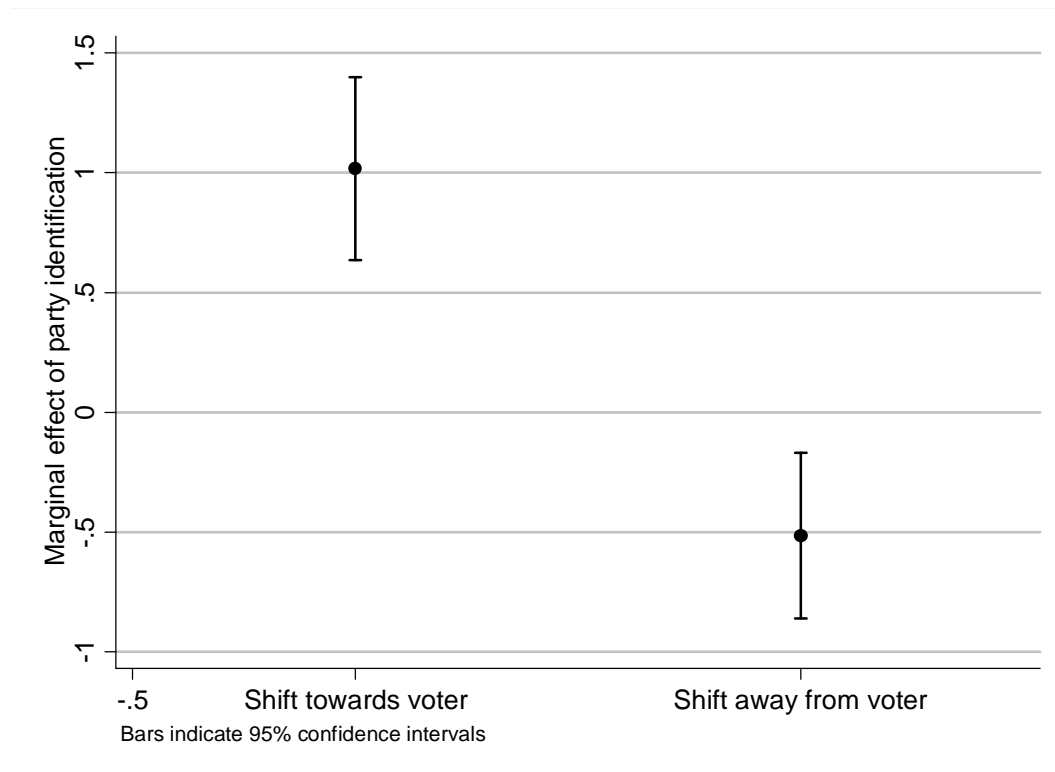
	(1) Reception (logistic regression)	(2) Acceptance (logistic regression)	(3) Two-stage logistic regression	Exp. <sup>40</sup>
Political interest	0.015 (0.014)		0.065** (0.018)	+
Moderate education	0.012 (0.048)		-0.127 (0.105)	+
Advanced education	-0.021 (0.048)		-0.187 (0.142)	+
Magnitude of voter policy shift	-0.015 (0.011)		0.078 (0.156)	+
Party in government	-0.0007 (0.252)		-0.317 (0.375)	+
Magnitude of party policy shift	0.023* (0.010)		0.032 (0.024)	+
Conservatives	0.335* (0.135)		0.070 (0.532)	
Labour	-0.289* (0.116)		1.149+ (0.641)	
Age	0.004+ (0.002)		0.027+ (0.015)	
Female	0.057 (0.075)		0.064 (0.289)	
Constant	-1.074* (0.424)		-0.609 (0.814)	
Party leader change		-0.065 (0.232)	-0.287 (0.197)	+
Party leader's prestige		0.031 (0.029)	0.045* (0.019)	+
Magnitude of past party policy shift		0.003 (0.004)	0.004 (0.005)	-
Party identification		0.714** (0.098)	1.017** (0.195)	+
Party shift away from voter preferences		-1.907** (0.191)	-2.227** (0.169)	
Interaction: Party id · Party shift away from voter preferences		-1.188** (0.096)	-1.532** (0.223)	-
Party shift similar to voter shift?		0.078 (0.133)	0.081 (0.155)	+
Conservatives		-0.055 (0.230)	0.222 (0.206)	
Labour		-0.229+ (0.123)	-0.502* (0.209)	
Age		0.006 (0.003)	-0.004* (0.002)	
Female		0.054 (0.033)	0.048 (0.078)	
Constant		0.003 (0.186)	1.072** (0.292)	
Observations	7160	7160	7160	
Log likelihood	-4657.9	-3770.6	-3745.5	

+ p &lt; 0.1, \* p &lt; 0.05, \*\* p &lt; 0.01

Clustered standard errors in parentheses

<sup>40</sup> If no specific expectation exists, the respective cell is empty.

**Figure 6.4: The effect of party identification on the acceptance of policy shifts depending on the party shift's direction: Unemployment vs. Inflation**<sup>41</sup>



Turning to the acceptance function, the voters' party identification still shows the expected pattern. As in the previous models, voters are more likely to accept party policy shifts towards their preferences if they also feel close to that party. In contrast, the effect of party identification is negative for party shifts away from the voters' policy preferences. In addition, the coefficient of the party leaders' prestige becomes significant. As expected, voters are more likely to accept party policy shifts if they rate the leaders' skills highly. The remaining substantial covariates do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

### 6.3 Overview: What can we draw from the different model specifications?

#### 6.3.1 An overview

The models presented above test the theoretical expectations of how voters perceive party policy shifts using different methods, samples, and variables. In this section, I give a short overview of the regression results in the various models. Some of the findings are robust and in line with my theoretical expectations. Other empirical results are rather mixed with

<sup>41</sup> The estimates are taken from model 3.



contradicting empirical evidence. I argue that some of the insignificant effects are due to the way the concepts are measured while others are the product of multicollinearity of the covariates. Finally, I discuss the effects contradicting the theoretical expectations.

**Table 6.8: Hypotheses and regression results for the reception covariates**

	New Labour 1997	Nationalization vs. Privatization	Taxes vs. Services	Unemployment vs. Inflation
Political awareness (political interest)	✓	✗		✓
Education	(✓)	(✓)		
Magnitude of voter policy shift		✓	✓	
Party in government before election?		✗		
Magnitude of party policy shift		✗	✓	(✓)

- ✓ Conforms to the hypothesis; significant effect (with at least 90% confidence) in the expected direction.
- ✗ Contradicts the hypothesis; unexpected, significant (with at least 90% confidence).
- ( ) Coefficient significant in the logistic regression but not in the two-stage model.

Table 6.8 summarizes the regression results for the reception covariates presented above. In two of the four models, the voters’ education and the magnitude of the voters’ policy shift are in line with my theoretical expectation. Hence, I argue that the empirical results support my hypotheses. In contrast, the findings contradict the hypothesis that party policy shifts are more visible for government than for opposition parties. In one of the three models capturing party-specific effects, the coefficient is negative and statistically significant. The remaining two covariates provide mixed results: The voters’ political awareness and the magnitude of the parties’ policy shifts show effects in the expected direction in some models and contradicting findings in others.

Turning to the acceptance covariates, Table 6.9 summarizes the empirical findings for the analysis of “New Labour” and the regressions of the pooled sample. The results are more clear-cut than for the reception covariates. Changes in the party leadership positively affect the acceptance in one of the three model specifications. Moreover, the party leader’s prestige shows the expected positive effect in three of the four model specifications. In contrast, the parties’ credibility is not constrained by large party policy shifts in the past. In three of the four model specifications, the positive effect of the voters’ party identification for shifts towards the party’s policy position is significant. Furthermore, the hypothesized negative effect of party identification for party shifts away from the voter’s policy preferences finds

empirical support in all four models. Finally, voters are not more likely to accept party position shifts in the same direction as voter position shifts.

**Table 6.9: Hypotheses and regression results for the acceptance covariates**

	New Labour 1997	Nationalization vs. Privatization	Taxes vs. Services	Unemployment vs. Inflation
Change in leadership		✓		
Party leader's prestige		✓	✓	✓
Magnitude of past party policy shift		✗		
Party identification: Shift towards voter's policy position		✓	✓	✓
Party identification: Shift moving away from voter's policy position	✓	✓	✓	✓
Party shift similar to voter shift?		✗		

✓ Conforms to the hypothesis; significant effect (with at least 90% confidence) in the expected direction  
 ✗ Contradicts the hypothesis; unexpected, significant (with at least 90% confidence)

6.3.2 Does political awareness matter?

I argued above that the mixed results for the voters' political awareness are due to the measurement of awareness using political interest. Using political quizzes for testing the voters' knowledge on political issues is the preferred measure (Zaller 1992: Appendix). Such a measure is unavailable in all but two elections and therefore I have to rely on political interest.

Table 6.10 shows the model estimates of logistic regressions using a restricted sample for which political quizzes as measures for political awareness are available. Note that the number of observations drops dramatically as the quizzes are only available for the elections in 1979 (except for the "Unemployment vs. Inflation" scale) and 1997.<sup>42</sup> The model estimates show that political awareness has a positive and significant effect in all four models. Hence, more aware voters are more likely to receive the parties' policy shift messages what conforms to my theoretical expectations. I hence conclude that political awareness indeed affects the

<sup>42</sup> Because the models only include two election years, I drop the party-specific covariates (governmental status and magnitude of the party's policy shift). Instead of clustered standard errors, the model contains party and election fixed effects.

reception of party policy shifts and that the mixed results in the above regressions are due to insufficient measurement (i.e. using political interest rather than political awareness).

**Table 6.10: Using political awareness instead of political interest and the effect on the reception of party policy shifts**

	(1) New Labour 1997	(2) Nationalization vs. Privatization	(3) Taxes vs. Services	(4) Unemployment vs. Inflation
<b>Political awareness</b>	<b>0.139**</b> (3.09)	<b>0.0533*</b> (2.39)	<b>0.0548**</b> (2.59)	<b>0.0656*</b> (2.48)
Moderate education	0.271 (1.30)	0.0667 (0.61)	0.0274 (0.26)	-0.170 (-1.39)
Advanced education	0.730* (2.40)	0.372** (2.93)	0.0740 (0.58)	0.00953 (0.06)
Magnitude of voter policy shift	-0.0403 (-0.71)	0.0368 (1.62)	0.00649 (0.25)	0.0114 (0.45)
Conservatives		0.518** (4.30)	0.705** (5.92)	0.107 (0.84)
Labour		0.880** (7.26)	0.858** (7.19)	0.269* (2.12)
1997		0.749** (6.53)	0.220+ (1.85)	
Age	-0.00483 (-0.80)	0.0000760 (0.03)	-0.00545+ (-1.87)	-0.00152 (-0.43)
Female	-0.0659 (-0.36)	-0.0716 (-0.79)	0.0662 (0.74)	-0.0591 (-0.54)
Constant	-0.137 (-0.34)	-1.797** (-6.35)	-0.992** (-3.58)	-0.626* (-2.50)
Observations	581	2290	2319	1557
Log likelihood	-370.9	-1529.5	-1572.0	-1062.0

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

### 6.3.3 Are voters more likely to accept party shifts in line with their personal policy shifts?

I hypothesize that voters are more likely to accept party policy shifts in the same direction as their own policy shifts. The empirical results presented so far suggest that the hypothesis does not hold. Yet, the model estimates may be biased by multicollinearity in the regression models: Voters shifting in the same direction as political parties are less likely to perceive the party's policy shift as moving away from the personal policy preferences. Because the two covariates correlate, the standard errors of the estimates increase and the coefficients may hence become insignificant.

**Table 6.11: Acceptance models without party identification: Avoiding multicollinearity**

	(1) New Labour 1997	(2) Nationalization vs. Privatization	(3) Taxes vs. Services	(4) Unemployment vs. Inflation
Change in leadership		0.561** (3.43)	0.447** (5.19)	0.303* (2.03)
Party leader's prestige	0.0791 (0.88)	0.0823* (2.37)	0.0721 (1.35)	0.0102 (0.32)
Magnitude of past party policy shift		-0.0219 (-1.36)	-0.000296 (-0.02)	-0.00816 (-0.89)
<b>Party shift similar to voter shift?</b>	<b>0.628** (3.57)</b>	<b>0.451** (6.82)</b>	<b>0.685** (7.42)</b>	<b>0.879** (11.54)</b>
Conservatives		0.0721 (0.23)	0.308** (4.52)	0.0576 (0.26)
Labour		0.295 (1.64)	-0.0867 (-0.18)	-0.0861 (-0.54)
Age	-0.00348 (-0.61)	0.000385 (0.15)	0.00125 (0.60)	0.00419* (2.03)
Female	-0.326+ (-1.87)	0.0417 (1.05)	0.0738** (3.65)	-0.0115 (-0.19)
Constant	0.263 (0.57)	-1.033* (-2.44)	-1.252** (-6.78)	-1.186** (-3.17)
Observations	581	9689	8253	7160
Log likelihood	-377.4	-6114.8	-5378.6	-4518.9

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

To test these considerations, Table 6.11 presents logistic regressions excluding the party identification effect and its interaction terms. A quick look at Table 6.11 reveals that the model estimates of party shifts in line with voter position shifts are positive and statistically significant in all four model specifications. Hence, I argue that party shifts in line with voter position shifts are indeed more likely to get accepted.

#### 6.3.4 Explaining contradicting effects

With the regression models presented in Table 6.10 and Table 6.11, two of the odd findings are identified as artifacts of their measurement and multicollinearity. Nevertheless, two covariates show empirical patterns contradicting the hypothesized effects. First, voters are (partly) *less* likely to receive position shifts of parties in governments. Second, one model shows that voters are *more* likely to perceive party position shifts if the party made large policy shifts before.

The first finding is rather counterintuitive: Although government parties may not be more likely to get their policy shift message heard, it is curious why government parties should be *less* visible than their rivals in opposition. It may be that this unexpected pattern is due to characteristics of the British party system. The British party system differs in many respects from many other European party systems. With two major parties, voters are able to concentrate on both the party in government and its major rival in opposition. Therefore, the difference between government and opposition parties could be less severe than for systems with three or more parties sending their signals to the electorate. With the increasing number of senders, the voters increasingly focus on action taken by government parties. Thus, the voters' reception differences between government and opposition parties are higher in multiparty systems.

One may also think of situations where opposition parties are more visible than their rivals in office. This is especially likely in party systems with two major rivals, eye-catching slogans in election campaigns of opposition parties or charismatic party leaders may get more attention than pale looking prime ministers with low popularity ratings. Particularly if the government parties heavily suffer from their time in office and a cabinet turnover is highly likely, voters may concentrate on the promises of the party in opposition rather than the excuses of the government party.<sup>43</sup>

Turning to the second negative finding, it is puzzling why voters are *more* likely to accept policy shifts if the party's previous policy shift was large. The reason for this odd effect may result from incentives from the party system.<sup>44</sup> In some instances, political parties have to react to changing incentives in their environment. Public opinion shocks, shifts of rival parties, and current party positions not in line with their "expected" policy position may force parties to adapt their policy platform irrespective of past policy shifts. Given that this hypothesized effect is correct, voters may also acknowledge the parties' need to respond to such challenges: If the political market requires parties to shift their policy positions, large party policy shifts of the past may only signal that parties can indeed adapt to changes in their environment. Hence, voters are *more* likely to accept party policy shifts if the previous shift

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<sup>43</sup> For party systems covering more than two relevant parties, blame avoidance and credit claiming of coalition partners turns more attention to cabinet parties. Moreover, losing votes not necessarily involves the loss of office. Some government parties may survive in subsequent cabinets either adding new partners to the current coalition or continuing in government in a coalition with former opposition parties. As a result, multiparty systems are less likely to result in a situation with voters dedicating attention to opposition rather than government parties.

<sup>44</sup> For a more detailed discussion see Chapter 8.

was large. Yet, this positive effect should only hold in times of political market turbulences. In calm times, however, the hypothesized effect could hold.

### 6.3.5 Voters' acceptance of party policy shifts deviation from their "expected" policy positions

In the theoretical part (see Chapter 4), I introduce the concept of "expected" party positions and argue that voters are less likely to accept party policy shifts deviating from their expected location relative to their rivals. Due to restrictions of the available data, however, I am not able to include this variable in the multivariate models. For the period between 1979 and 2001, the British party system only witnessed four party shifts not in line with the expected policy positions. Moreover, data is missing for one of those shifts (Liberal Democrats 2001).

**Table 6.12: The acceptance of "unexpected" party policy shifts**

	(1) Nationalization vs. Privatization	(2) Taxes vs. Services	(3) Unemployment vs. Inflation
<b>Labour 1997</b>	<b>1.549<sup>+</sup></b> <b>(1.87)</b>	<b>1.215<sup>**</sup></b> <b>(3.28)</b>	<b>0.376</b> <b>(1.04)</b>
<b>Labour 2001</b>	<b>-0.432</b> <b>(-1.54)</b>	<b>-0.574<sup>**</sup></b> <b>(-3.92)</b>	<b>-0.576<sup>**</sup></b> <b>(-4.24)</b>
<b>Liberal Democrats 1992</b>	<b>0.118</b> <b>(0.37)</b>	<b>0.270</b> <b>(1.21)</b>	<b>-0.377<sup>*</sup></b> <b>(-2.15)</b>
Magnitude of party policy shift	-0.0178 (-0.65)	-0.0142 <sup>+</sup> (-1.86)	-0.00175 (-0.16)
Age	0.00171 (0.66)	0.00263 (1.08)	0.00416 <sup>+</sup> (1.77)
Female	0.0237 (0.44)	0.0707 <sup>+</sup> (1.77)	0.0457 (0.60)
Constant	-0.417 <sup>+</sup> (-1.77)	-0.337 <sup>*</sup> (-2.56)	-0.623 <sup>**</sup> (-2.59)
Observations	9689	8253	7160
Log likelihood	-6312.1	-5515.5	-4675.6

*z* statistics in parentheses

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ , <sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.01$

We are therefore left with three cases of parties shifting to locations that do not conform to their expected policy positions: the Liberal Democrats in 1992, and the two Labour party policy shifts in 1997 and 2001. In Table 6.12, I present multivariate analyses regressing these policy shifts on the voters' perception of party policy shifts for the "Nationalization" (1), "Taxes vs. Services" (2), and "Unemployment" policy scales. Party policy shifts are measured as dummy variables. In addition, I control for the magnitude of party policy shifts. The

respondents' age and sex are also captured as control variables. As in the previous models, the standard errors are clustered for the respective elections.

The regression coefficients show the expected negative effects for two of the three party positions shifts (Labour 2001, Liberal Democrats 1992) but the model estimates are positive for "New Labour" in 1997. Holding the magnitude of the party policy shift constant, voters are hence less likely to perceive the policy shifts of Labour in 2001 and the Liberal Democrats in 1992 but more likely to perceive "New Labour". The results suggest that parties may sometimes be able to credibly leave their ideological habitat while voters do not accept (i.e. consider credible) such shifts in other situations.

The two subsequent policy shifts of Labour in 1997 and 2001 are well suited for studying such differences in the perception of party policy shifts. Note that I already control for the magnitude of the party policy shift indicating that the perception of party policy shifts is not due to the policy distance between the old and the new party policy position. Rather, party policy shifts not in line with the "expected" policy position should affect the voters' acceptance. Regarding the differences, Tony Blair's role as a party leader could play a role here. The two policy shifts differ in two respects. First, the 1997 election was the first election for Blair as a party leader. Blair presented himself as a reformer who had fundamentally changed Labour's structure, ideas, and policies. Voters may have accepted that these policies and ideas are not in line with the party's ideologically expected policy position because Blair was a new leader expected to handle things differently. In other words, party leader changes may outweigh the negative effects of shifting a party's policy position away from its expected policy location. Moreover, skillful and charismatic party leaders may be one factor reducing the negative consequences of policy shifts moving away from its expected policy position: In 1997, Tony Blair was rather popular and able to "sell" the party's policy shift in 1997. In the subsequent election in 2001, Blair's mean popularity decreased from 3.4 (1997) to 2.4 (2001) points on a scale ranging from 0 to 4 so that he was no longer able to legitimize policies that were not in line with Labour's image as left-wing party. Hence, positive party leader evaluations may lead voters to perceive party policy shifts deviating from expected policy locations.

In sum, voters are not likely to accept (i.e. consider credible) a party's position shift moving away from its expected policy position relative to its competitors. However, some parties may counteract these negative effects by newly elected and charismatic leaders who are able to "sell" these policy shifts to the electorate. Although the considerations are

plausible, the available data does not allow for testing them empirically. Although British panel election studies are the best data source to study the perception of party position shifts, the number of observations at the party level is insufficient for a detailed analysis of the perception of parties moving away from their “expected” policy positions.

## 6.4 Summary and conclusion

This chapter analyzes the perception of party policy shifts in Great Britain. Drawing on several panel election studies starting from the 1970’s onwards, I study (1) how voters perceive the parties’ policy shifts and (2) explain why voters differ in their perception of these shifts. For that purpose, I apply several statistical models using different dependent variables.

First, I study the Labour Party’s policy shift in 1997. Using a single party’s policy shift simplifies the model because some (party-specific) covariates are held constant. Using the “Taxes vs. Services” scale as dependent variable, I estimate logistic regressions covering the covariates for the reception and acceptance of “New Labour”. Furthermore, I present a two-stage logistic regression combining the covariates of the reception and the modified acceptance model. To study party-specific covariates, I pool several election studies creating a dataset that covers voter perceptions for party position shifts for several parties and multiple elections. The pooling has several drawbacks including trade-offs between the measurement of key concepts. As dependent variable, I use the perceptions of party position shifts on three policy scales: “Nationalization vs. Privatization”, “Taxes vs. Services”, and “Unemployment vs. Inflation”. For each of them, I estimate several models. Logistic regressions estimate the impact of the reception and acceptance covariates. Finally, a two-stage logistic regression is estimated to combine these effects.

Some of the results for the different model specifications strongly conform to the theoretical expectations. For others, the empirical findings contradict the hypothesized effects. For two covariates that provided rather mixed evidence in the analyses, I show that the hybrid effects are due to measurement problems (political awareness) and multicollinearity (direction of voter and party policy shifts). Table 6.13 summarizes the regression results distinguishing factors strongly supported by the empirical models, those with predominantly positive results, those showing mixed evidence, and factors contradicting the theoretical expectations.



**Table 6.13: Summary: Reception and acceptance covariates**

	Variable	Hypothesis	Findings
<b>Reception</b>	Political awareness	V1	✓
	Education	V2	(✓)
	Magnitude of voter policy shift	V3	(✓)
	Party in government before election?	V4	✗
	Magnitude of party policy shift	V6	mixed
<b>Acceptance</b>	Change in leadership	V7	(✓)
	Party leader's prestige	V8	✓
	Magnitude of past party policy shift	V9	✗
	Party identification: party policy shifts towards voter's policy position	V10	✓
	Party identification: party policy shifts away from voter's policy position		✓
	Party shift similar to voter shift?	V11	✓

- ✓ Strong empirical support.
- (✓) Empirical support in some model specifications.
- ✗ Findings contradicting the theoretical expectations.

The voters’ political awareness, the prestige of the party leader, the voters’ party identification, and the direction of voter shifts relative to parties show the expected patterns in (almost) all model specifications. Voters are more likely to perceive party policy shifts if their political awareness (rather than interest) is high, if they positively evaluate the party leader, and if the party policy shift is in the same direction as the voter’s position shifts. In addition, party identifiers are more likely to perceive party policy shifts towards their policy preferences while not perceiving those moving away from their policy position. The regression results for the voters’ education, the magnitude of their policy shifts, and changes in the party leadership have the expected effects in some of the regression models. To a certain extent, at least, educated voters and those shifting their personal preferences are more likely to perceive party position shifts. In addition, voters are more likely to accept party position shifts following changes in the party leadership.

Three covariates show negative results: While the regression results are rather mixed for the magnitude of the parties’ policy shifts, the parties’ governmental status and the magnitude of past party policy shifts are not in line with the theoretical expectation. I discuss the covariates in greater detail arguing that (1) the government-opposition divide is not as crucial in two-party systems as it is in multiparty systems and that (2) voters may accept large consecutive party policy shifts if changes in the parties’ environment (rival parties or public opinion shifts) require doing so.

I also discuss the implications of party policy shifts which are not in line with the parties' expected policy positions. As the data is scarce, the findings have to be treated with caution. Nevertheless, the rare events suggest that voters are less likely to perceive these shifts. A comparison of Labour's policy shift in 1997 and 2001 reveals, however, that parties may outweigh the negative effects if (1) the party leadership changed or (2) the party leader has a good reputation.

Next, I turn from voters to parties I ask how the varying reception and acceptance covariates affect party behavior. The following chapter presents the data and the methods I use in approaching these questions. Chapter 8 presents the empirical results.

## **7 How voters' reception and acceptance affect party policy shifts: Data and methods**

I hypothesize in Chapter 3 that parties face voters who may not receive or accept specific party policy shifts. As a consequence, parties may not be willing or able to perform such changes. In this chapter, I describe the data, the variables, and the methods used to study the consequences of voter perception on party policy shifts. First, I describe the sample used to test the hypotheses and justify the case selection. Next, I turn to the measurement of the dependent variables before I turn to the covariates. Finally, I present the model specifications used to test the proposed effects. A brief conclusion follows.

### **7.1 Case selection**

The selection of cases is a crucial step in the testing of theoretically hypothesized relationships. One selection strategy is Przeworski and Teune's "most similar systems design" (see also Mill 1846; Przeworski and Teune 1970). If all "relevant" control variables are held constant, variation in the dependent variable Y may only be explained by changes of the variable of interest X. In terms of party position shifts, it may be wise to study a single party holding party-specific, time-constant covariates (e.g. the party's ideology) constant.

Yet, a quantitative research design requires a reasonable number of observations. There are two ways to increase the number of observations. One strategy is to "dig deeper", studying party policy shifts in several policy areas such as economic, social, foreign, and environmental policies. This approach is, however, not suitable for answering the research question stated here. I argue that parties face voters not receiving or accepting party position shifts and (consequently) react to these challenges. Yet, gathering information of party policy shifts involves costs and voters are only likely to take these costs for policy dimensions affecting their vote choices. Voters' reception and acceptance of party policy shifts is therefore less relevant for policy areas with a limited impact on their vote choices. Studying several policy areas is hence no useful strategy to reach a reasonable number of observations.

Another way to increase the number of observations is to study party position shifts of several parties within one country. So doing, specific variables (e.g. the parties' ideologies) vary across parties but at least institutional factors (such as the electoral system) are held constant. Unfortunately, party position shifts within individual countries still do not provide

enough cases for statistical tests.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, some of the covariates of interest do not show sufficient variance within countries. As the analysis of the voters' perception of party policy shifts has shown, the complexity of party systems mainly varies across but rarely within countries. Hence, it is necessary to enlarge the sample studying party position shifts in several countries.

For the selection of cases, we hence aim at (1) selecting a reasonable number of cases and (2) keeping as many control variables as possible constant. I solve this puzzle by studying party position shifts in West European countries. Due to restrictions on data availability, I omit party position shifts in France, Greece, Portugal, and Spain. Moreover, I drop Italy because previous research (Pelizzo 2003) doubts the validity of the CMP data I use (see below). The sample hence contains party policy shifts in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.

The sample is sufficiently large to allow for statistical tests. Furthermore and compared with other potential case selections of the same size, the countries offer at least some degree of homogeneity: All countries in the sample are stable democracies with democratic structures since the post-war period. The long-lasting democratic tradition provides for many elections and thereby reduces the number of countries required to obtain a reasonable sample size. In South America and Southern and Eastern Europe with a much more limited democratic tradition, an equal number of observations may only be achieved by sampling more countries (and hence by increasing variance on potential unobserved further variables).

Moreover, the selected sample only contains parliamentary democracies. The government's dependence on the majority support in the legislature provides incentives for parties to be cohesive (Diermeier and Feddersen 1998; Heidar and Koole 2000: 261) and cohesion results in a common party policy position. In contrast, the variety of intra-party policy positions which may emerge in presidential system makes the evaluation of a party's policy position difficult. Moreover, actors within the same party may move in different directions thus makes the concept of a "party policy shift" less useful. The case selection focusing on parliamentary systems avoids such problems. Finally, the countries are quite similar with respect to their development (as indicated by the GDP, expectation of life, and

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<sup>45</sup> Using party policy programs to measure party policy positions (and hence party position shifts), we observe around 100 party policy shifts per country in most West European countries over the whole post war period.

the education level). Compared to other samples with an equal number of observations, the selected countries hence share several similarities.

## 7.2 The dependent variable

For the analyses which follow, I use the parties' policy shift on the left-right scale to measure changes in policy positions. To measure *party policy shifts*, I rely on data collected by the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006). Using hand-coding, the election manifestos of political parties are subdivided in so-called "quasi-sentences". Each of these sentences is then assigned to one of 56 policy categories. Using these categories, it is possible to derive a variable measuring the parties' policy positions on a left-right scale (see also Laver and Budge 1992: 26-27).

CMP data is widely used in articles appearing in high-ranking journals (e.g. Budge 1994; Adams et al. 2004; Adams, Clark et al. 2006; Tavits 2007; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009a; Somer-Topcu 2009c). It is the only data source measuring party positions over time. Neither other methods using content analysis (Laver et al. 2003; Slapin and Proksch 2008) nor expert surveys have been used to systematically measure party policy positions over time. The dataset is often criticized as lacking validity (Pelizzo 2003) and suffering from methodological weaknesses (see e.g. Benoit and Laver 2007b; Benoit et al. 2009). In Appendix A, I provide an overview of research dealing with criticizing and modifying data derived from the Comparative Manifestos Project and present the arguments why I do not take these modifications into account. In what follows, I rather use CMP left-right positions in two subsequent elections to measure the dependent variable *policy shift*. Values larger than zero stand for policy shifts to the right. Position shifts to the left are indicated by values smaller than 0.

Most of the hypotheses stated above focus on the magnitude of party policy shifts. The higher the political interest, for example, the larger party policy shifts should be (Hypothesis P1a). Hence, it seems to be appropriate to use the absolute value of the policy shift variable as a dependent variable in the analysis. Nevertheless, I rely on a dependent variable capturing the direction of policy shifts. I do so for two reasons: First, it allows for using the same dependent variable for all hypotheses. Hypotheses on voter policy shifts and voter expectations of party positions make predictions on the *direction* of the policy shift so that the dependent variable has to capture the direction of the policy shift. The second reason for using the policy shift variable is methodological: The variable nicely follows a normal distribution

and hence fulfills one of the Gauss-Markov assumptions for linear regression models. In contrast, the magnitude of policy shifts (i.e. the absolute value) reveals a different variance structure with asymmetric right-skewed properties.

Instead of transforming the dependent variable, I hence recode the covariates (and the constant term) to allow for correctly testing the hypotheses stated above. Formally, let  $y$  denote the variable *policy shift*, then  $|y|$  denotes the *magnitude of party policy shifts*. Further, let  $x$  be a variable which is expected to affect the magnitude of policy shifts and hence

$$|y| = a + b \cdot x + \varepsilon \tag{1}$$

To obtain a recoded variable  $x_{\text{rec}}$  affecting  $y$ , define

$$x_{\text{rec}} = \begin{cases} x & \text{if } y \geq 0 \\ -x & \text{if } y < 0 \end{cases} \tag{2}$$

and

$$a_{\text{rec}} = \begin{cases} a & \text{if } y \geq 0 \\ -a & \text{if } y < 0 \end{cases} \tag{3}$$

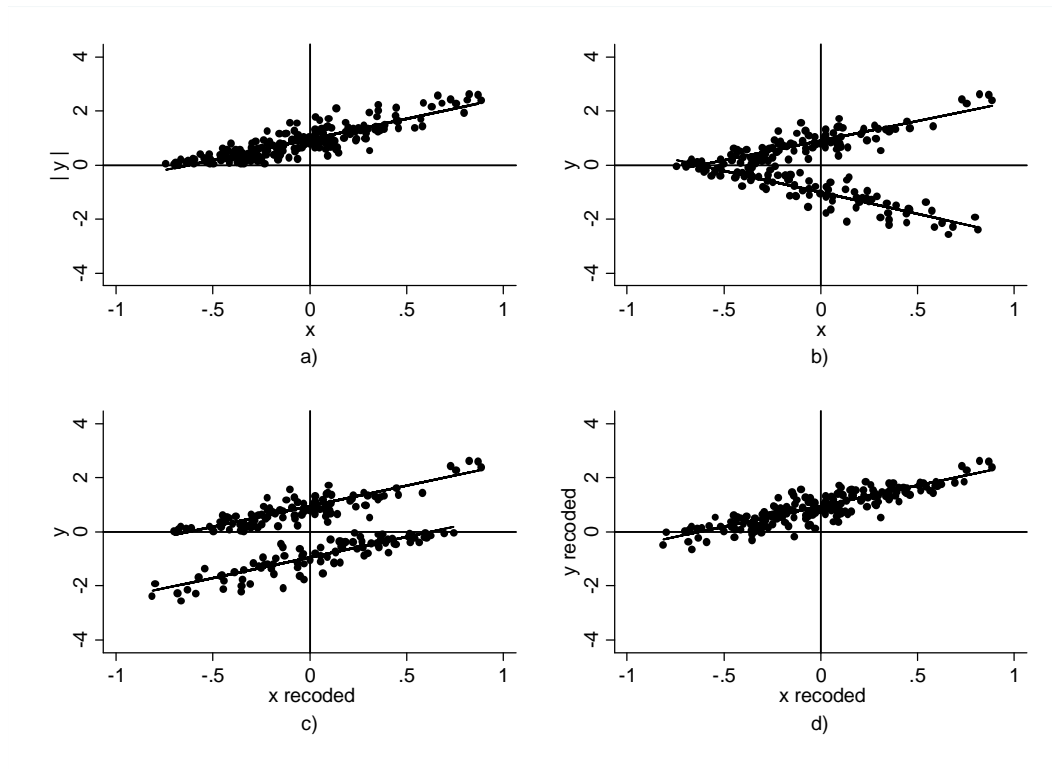
Then

$$|y| = a + b \cdot x \Leftrightarrow y = a_{\text{rec}} + b \cdot x_{\text{rec}} \tag{4}$$

holds. Figure 7.1 shows the recoding process graphically. The first graph on the upper left (a) shows the expected effect of  $x$  on  $|y|$ . Given that  $y$  is normally distributed however, the distribution of  $|y|$  is skewed to the right (i.e. the mass of the distribution is close to the  $x$ -axis). To avoid using the skewed variable  $|y|$ , I stick to the variable  $y$ . Including the direction of the policy shift, the impact of  $x$  on  $y$  is twofold (graph b): The effect is positive for  $y \geq 0$  and negative if  $y < 0$ . For that reason, I transform  $x$  as described above to obtain  $x_{\text{rec}}$ . Its effect on  $y$  is shown in the graph on the lower left (c) in Figure 7.1. Note that both regression lines are parallel (i.e. the slope is identical) but the intercept differs. In fact, the intercept of the lower regression line is the negative value of the intercept  $a$  of the upper regression line. To obtain

valid estimators, it is hence necessary to use different regression intercept for  $y \geq 0$  and  $y < 0$ . For the ease of interpretation, graph d) in Figure 7.1 corrects for the different intercepts by shifting the lower regression line upwards (i.e. by adding the intercept's coefficient twice if  $y < 0$ ). Note that the slope and the intercept of the graphs a) and d) are identical.

**Figure 7.1: Recoding covariates for the analysis**



### 7.3 Covariates

Table 7.1 shows the covariates and the measures used in the subsequent analyses. First, I use survey questions on *political interest* as a substitute for political awareness. Theoretically, I argue that the voters' awareness affects the reception of policy shifts. In practice, however, surveys rarely contain information on political knowledge. As we have seen in Chapter 5, the British (panel) election studies only ask quizzes on political information in 1979 and 1997. For all other election years, such indicators are missing. Cross-nationally, the situation is even worse. Hence, I rely on a substitute measure: the mean claimed political interest of all survey respondents. Recall that political interest and awareness are conceptually different (Zaller 1992: 333-336) and similar substitutions in individual level data led to flawed estimates (see Chapter 6). However, the bias may be diminished by using aggregate survey data. I standardize the political interest scores for each election year in every country and calculate the *mean political interest*.

For this variable and the following ones based on survey data, I first and foremost rely on the European Voter database (Thomassen 2005). To allow for comparative electoral research, the European Voter project compiled data of several national election studies in six West European countries (Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden). National experts compiled data of various variables in election studies until the late 1990s. To extend the time series, I collect additional data on more recent elections using election studies in Denmark (Andersen et al. 2003), Germany (Falter et al. 2002), Great Britain (Clarke et al. 2005), the Netherlands (Irwin et al. 2005), and Norway (Aardal et al. 2003). I did not gain access to data of the Swedish national election study in 2002. For the remaining countries, I collect data for as many election years as possible using various national election studies, the Eurobarometer trend file, and national voter barometers. More specifically, I collected additional data for Belgium (Billiet et al. 1991; Billiet and Swyngedouw 1995; Swyngedouw et al. 1999; Gschwend and Pappi 2003), Finland (Finnish Voter Barometer 1984 2000; Finnish Voter Barometer 1986 2000; Finnish Voter Barometer 1987 2000; Finnish Voter Barometer 1975 2002; Finnish Voter Barometer 1979 2002; Karvonen and Paloheimo 2003; Finnish Voter Barometer 1983 2004; Finnish Voter Barometer 1990 2006; Finnish Voter Barometer February 1995 2006; Finnish Voter Barometer January 1999 2006), and Ireland (Marsh and Sinnott 2002; Schmitt 2006). For Austria, election studies and Eurobarometer data are not available.

Because of serious data constraints with regard to the voters' *educational achievements*, I refrain from testing my hypothesis on the voters' education and its effect on party position shifts. Because the types and names of educational achievements change over time, comparisons would require recoding of the data. For the British panel elections studies (see Chapter 5), I have distinguished only three categories (basic, moderate, and higher education). Including a cross-national comparison would lead to further complications because coding requires knowledge on the national training and educational systems in various countries and across time. Although attempts do exist to standardize classifications of education (UNESCO 1997; OECD 1999), the recoding decisions still rest with the individual researcher. Creating a time-consistent valid and reliable measure of education for several countries from various election studies simply is beyond the scope of this dissertation.



I derive data on voter policy position from the surveys mentioned above. First, I use the standard question on left-right self placements<sup>46</sup> and standardize the respondents' answers on a scale ranging from 1 (left) to 11 (right). Next, I estimate the mean voter's policy position at time *t*. The mean voter's position shift is indicated by the difference in the mean voter's policy position from time point *t*-1 to *t*. Values smaller than zero indicate public opinion shifts to the left, values larger than zero stand for shifts to the right. Consequently, the *absolute value of mean voter's position shift* ranges from 0 to 10.

**Table 7.1: Independent variables for the data analyses**

	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Indicators and measurement</b>
<b>Reception</b>	Mean political interest	Mean political interest of the electorate/ party voters per election; standardized to [0;1] 0 = No interest in politics 1 = Highly interested in politics
	Voter position shift (absolute value)	Size of mean voter position shifts from <i>t</i> -1 to <i>t</i> 0 = No shift at all 10 = Maximal mean voter position shift
	Governmental share	Share of time spent as party in government since the last election
	Effective number of parl. parties	Effective number of parties in parliament following Laakso and Taagepera (1979)
<b>Acceptance</b>	Leadership change	0 = Same party leader as in previous election 1 = Party leader change since last election
	Party leader prestige	Mean party leader prestige; standardized to [0;1] 1 = Minimum 11 = Maximum
	Past party policy shifts	Number of consecutive position shifts larger than the mean of previous party position shifts (CMP data)
	Share of voters with positive party identification	Share of voters with a positive party identification for the respective party
	Voter shift (with direction)	Mean voter position shifts from <i>t</i> -1 to <i>t</i> -10 = Maximal mean voter position shift to the left +10 = Maximal mean voter position shift to the right
	Voter expectations of party policy positions	Comparison of the party's actual with its expected policy position: - Deviation to the left - In accordance with expectation - Deviation to the right

Third, I hypothesize that government parties are more visible than parties in opposition. Thus voters are more likely to receive party policy shifts of government parties and consequently position shifts of government parties are more likely. I measure the *parties' share in*

<sup>46</sup> The question usually reads as follows: "In politics, people sometimes talk about parties and politicians as being on the left or right. Using the [scale on card], where the end marked 1 means left and the end marked 11 means right, where would you place yourself on this scale?"

*governmental office* in the last legislative period. Parties in opposition for the full term get the value of 0. In contrast, permanent government parties get the value of 1. In case the government composition changes, parties switching from government and opposition (and vice versa) hold values representing their time share spent in office. Thus, the measurement is more precise than using a simple government dummy variable. Data on government participation is mainly drawn from the *Constitutional Change and Parliamentary Democracies* project (Müller and Strøm 2000a; Strøm et al. 2003; 2008). In addition, I update the data using various sources for Austria (Pelinka 2003: 529), Belgium (Hecking 2006: 52), Denmark (Nannestad 2003: 67), Finland (Auffermann 2003: 202), Great Britain (Woldendorp et al. 1998; Sturm 2003), Ireland (Elvert 2003: 270), the Netherlands (Lucardie 2006: 345), Norway (Groß and Rothholz 2003: 142), and Sweden (Jahn 2003: 99).

Fourth, I use the *effective number of legislative parties* (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) to indicate the complexity of party competition. The higher the number of (relevant) competitors, the lower the probability that voters observe policy shifts of individual parties. I calculate the effective number of parties for the current (t) and the last (t-1) legislative term. As for parties' share in governmental office, data is drawn from the project on *Constitutional Change and Parliamentary Democracies* (Müller and Strøm 2000a; Strøm et al. 2003; 2008). I use own calculations based on additional data for Great Britain (Butler and Butler 2000) and more recent elections (Parties and Elections in Europe 2010).

Turning to the covariates coming from the acceptance function of party policy shifts, I argue that *changes in party leadership* increase the acceptance of party policy shifts. As a result, parties are more likely to shift policy positions if the party leader changed since the last election. Data on party leaders was collected using various sources including data handbooks (Schindler 1999; Butler and Butler 2000; Feldkamp 2005), secondary literature (Arter 1991; 1995), the *World Political Leaders* database (2010), Munzinger online (2010), and various web pages of national governments and parliaments, political parties and politicians. The variable *party leader change* is a dummy variable indicating whether party leadership changed since the last election.

The *party leaders' prestige* is hypothesized to affect the acceptance of party policy shifts. The higher the prestige, the higher is the probability that voters accept shifts away from the status quo. Unfortunately, data on the evaluation of party leaders is rare. In comparison to data on "classic" socioeconomic factors, vote choice, party identification, and left-right placements, surveys seldom ask questions on the party leaders' prestige. In case they do, the

question formats vary enormously. Some questions ask for the party leaders' competence,<sup>47</sup> sympathy,<sup>48</sup> the voters' feeling about the party leaders,<sup>49</sup> and specific questions on party leaders attributes.<sup>50</sup> I am aware that comparing these questions over time and space may be problematic. Nevertheless, all question formats are likely to correlate highly and, on average, the data may hence be comparable. I standardize all scales to a scale ranging from 1 (minimal prestige) to 11 (highest prestige).

The *magnitude of past party policy shifts* should also affect the acceptance of party policy shifts. Parties constantly shifting their policy positions should be less trusted so that parties with large (i.e. visible and memorable) policy shifts in the past are constrained to stick to their policy positions for the next election. The magnitude of party policy shifts may depend on characteristics of the parties (e.g. the size or intra-party decision-making rules) and the party system (e.g. the number of competitors). To control for these effects, I measure the mean magnitude of the parties' past policy shifts at t-2. Party policy shifts at t-1 larger than this threshold are large policy shifts, values smaller are classified as small party policy shifts.<sup>51</sup> Using that information, I calculate the number of subsequent large party policy shifts. The variable takes values ranging from 0 (previous shift is classified as "small") to 10 (ten subsequent policy shifts larger than their respective preceding mean party shift).

Whether voters accept party position shifts also depends on their party identification. I argue that the larger the share of voters feeling attached to the party, the higher the probability that the party shifts its policy position. Party identification is measured using the standard question for party identification.<sup>52</sup> For each election, I apply the survey data summarized above to estimate the *share of party voters with a positive party identification*. The indicator varies between 0 and 100.

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<sup>47</sup> "Using a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means a very incompetent leader and 10 means a very competent leader, how would you describe X?" (question taken from the British national election survey 2005)

<sup>48</sup> "I would also like to know how sympathetic you find the following politicians. If you don't know a politician, please feel free to say so. First X. Which score would you give him?" (question taken from the Dutch national election survey 2002)

<sup>49</sup> "I'd now like to ask you how you feel about some Irish politicians, using what we call the "feeling thermometer". The feeling thermometer works like this: If you have a favourable feeling (a warm feeling) towards a politician you should place him/her somewhere between 50 and 100 degrees; If you have an unfavourable feeling (a cold feeling) towards a politician, you should place him/her somewhere between 0 and 50 degrees; and If you don't feel particularly warm or cold (have no feeling towards the politician at all) then you should place him/her at 50 degrees. Where would you place these Irish politicians?" (question taken from the Irish national election survey 2002)

<sup>50</sup> such as whether they are capable of being a strong leader, able to unite the nation, or keep their promises

<sup>51</sup> I rely on the average magnitude of *previous* policy shifts to ensure an exogenous measurement of the covariate.

<sup>52</sup> "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Party A, Party B,..."? If possible, I use a narrow measure for party identification avoiding the inclusion of voters who just "feel a little closer to" a specific party.

I also test whether parties shift their policy positions in line with public opinion shifts. I argue that voters are more likely to accept party policy shifts if they shifted their policy position in the same direction. As a consequence, parties follow public opinion shifts if the electorate shifted away from the party's previous policy position. Using the survey data summarized above, I calculate the mean voter's policy position on a left-right scale ranging from 1 to 11. *Voter policy shifts* are measured as the difference between the mean voter's policy position at time  $t$  and the mean voter's policy position at time  $t-1$ . Negative values indicate public policy shifts to the left, positive values stand for public opinion shifts to the right.

Measuring *voter expectations* appropriately is crucial for testing the model. Although left-right expectations are often uncontroversial, in other cases, such placements are more difficult: Liberal parties, for example, occupy the centre of the policy space in some countries (e.g. in Great Britain or Norway) whereas they are on the right in others (e.g. in the Netherlands or Belgium). Because of these difficulties, I use different measures for voter expectations to check the robustness of the results.

First, I derive country-specific left-right expectations from expert judgments and election surveys for *all parties* covered in the CMP dataset (Castles and Mair 1984; Huber and Inglehart 1995; see country chapters in Müller and Strøm 2000b; Thomassen 2005; Benoit and Laver 2006). The ordinal party placements are shown in Appendix B. Although most of the party placements are uncontroversial, there are some cases where left-right placements are difficult. This is the case for a number of small and short-lived parties such as DS70 in the Netherlands or small German parties in the 1950s (Zentrum, DP, and GB/BHE). Because the coding of the expected party policy positions of these parties affects whether other parties are located in their appropriate policy positions, misspecifications may bias the results.

To keep these problems in check, I also code left-right expectations for a sample *restricted to major political parties* (defined as parties receiving at least 5% of the vote share in two subsequent elections). The list of parties passing this threshold and the left-right expectations of the restricted sample are presented in Appendix C. Whereas this measurement avoids bias due to misspecified voter expectations of small parties, it is at risk of disregarding party reactions to small parties not passing the threshold. In addition, placing parties on an ordinal scale may still be too fine-grained for skeptical readers. Especially expectations on the placement of "left" parties may be hard to disentangle. Are Green parties expected to be left

or right of the Social Democrats? And are the Greens left of the Communists or Socialists? Taking these doubts seriously, I code left-right expectations using a *trichotomous measure distinguishing left-wing, centre, and right-wing parties*. The classification is shown in Appendix D.

Comparing the parties' actual policy positions (measured with CMP scores) with these expected positions, I estimate whether these positions conform to the expected position. Using the expected position as a reference category, I code two dummy variables indicating whether a party is *left of* or *right of its expected position*. For the following analysis, I use the position in the *last* election (i.e. the lagged values) to predict a party's position shifts to the left or the right. If several parties hold the same expected positions, I code parties as having inappropriate policy positions if no party rank-order exists which places the respective party in its expected policy position. For example, left-wing parties hold inappropriate policy positions only if *no* center and right-wing parties exist with policy platforms right of the left-wing party's actual policy platform. Hence, this coding is "conservative" as it tends to underestimate party policy deviations from their expected policy positions.

## 7.4 Number of observations, data structure and model choice

### 7.4.1 The covariates

Table 7.2 summarizes the covariates used in the analysis in the next chapter. In total, the dataset consists of 920 party policy shifts of 99 parties in 10 countries. Note that missing values for the covariates are especially common for data taken from election studies. For voter position shifts, the number of cases drops to roughly 450 cases and data on the voters' party identification and political interest is only available for about 400 party position shifts. Since survey research did not begin before the 1960s or 1970s, missing values mainly occur in the 1940s and 1950s. Across countries, Austrian parties drop out of the analysis because Austrian election studies do not exist for the sample period.<sup>53</sup> The situation is worse for data on the party leaders' prestige. Data is only available for 275 policy position shifts. Although nine out of ten countries are represented, data for Belgian (3) and Irish (6) parties is scarce. Moreover, about 80% of the cases are party position shifts from the 1980s onwards. Only 20% of the cases are party policy shifts in the 1960s and 1970s. Data on government participation, the

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<sup>53</sup> Except for voter position shifts between the general elections in 1995 and 1999, no data from the Eurobarometer could be used for measuring public opinion shifts, party identification, political interest, or the party leaders' prestige.

effective number of parties, leadership changes, prior policy shifts, and voter expectations of party policy positions is available for more cases. Missing values are mainly due to cases for which the respective variables are not defined. Past party policy shifts, for example, require data on previous elections. Hence, party position shifts from the first to the second election the party competed in are dropped. In a similar vein, the sample restriction of expected party positions removes small and irrelevant parties from the dataset.

**Table 7.2: Independent variables: number of observations and mean values**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Mean political interest (all voters)	421	0.497
Voter position shift (absolute value)	448	0.252
Governmental share	919	0.385
Effective number of parl. parties (t)	920	4.255
Effective number of parl. parties (t-1)	920	4.205
Leadership change	844	0.404
Party leader prestige	275	6.414
Past party policy shifts	783	0.95
Share of voters with positive party identification	397	59.136
Voter shift (with direction)	448	-0.038
Voter expectations of party policy positions (t-1) (all parties)	871	- left of exp. position: 178 - right of exp. position: 199
Voter expectations of party policy positions (t-1) (restricted selection)	792	- left of exp. position: 154 - right of exp. position: 168
Voter expectations of party policy positions (t-1) (left-wing, centre, and right-wing parties)	792	- left of exp. position: 48 - right of exp. position: 73
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>920</b>	

#### 7.4.2 Data structure

The data covers party position shifts of different parties over several elections in various countries. Hence, the observations are not independent and violate the Gauss-Markov assumptions for OLS regressions (Beck and Katz 1995; 1996; Beck 2001). In general, let  $y_{kjt}$  denote a party policy shift of party  $j$  at time  $t$  in country  $k$ . With a covariate  $x_{kjt}$  the linear regression model reads as follows:

$$y_{kjt} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \cdot x_{kjt} + \xi_{kjt} \quad (5)$$

Beside others, the Gauss-Markov assumptions state that the error terms  $\xi_{kjt}$  should be independently distributed and homoskedastic:

$$E(\xi_{kjt} \xi_{k'j't'}) = 0 \quad (6)$$

and

$$\text{Var}(\xi_{kjt}) = \sigma^2 \quad (7)$$

Using data from different countries, parties, and elections, these assumptions may not hold true. First, there may be unobserved *heteroskedasticity* across countries, parties, and elections. In other words, cases may differ due to (unobserved) factors thereby violating the homoskedasticity assumption. Consequently, the variance of the error term varies across countries, parties, and elections:

$$\text{Var}(\xi_{kjt}) = \sigma_k^2 \quad (8)$$

$$\text{Var}(\xi_{kjt}) = \sigma_j^2 \quad (9)$$

$$\text{Var}(\xi_{kjt}) = \sigma_t^2 \quad (10)$$

Second, parties and their policy positions are not independent of each other. It is unreasonable to assume that parties shift their policy positions independent of their competitors' shifts. During elections, parties interact and are influenced by several election- and country-specific (probably unobserved) factors. Hence, there may be *contemporaneous correlation*:

$$E(\xi_{kjt} \xi_{k'j't}) \neq 0$$

$$E(\xi_{kjt} \xi_{k'j't'}) = 0 \quad \text{for } k \neq k', t \neq t' \quad (11)$$

Third, observations of parties are not independent over time. Party positions and party position shifts at time  $t$  are influenced by party decisions made at  $t-1$ . In other words, the *serial correlation* occurs:

$$\xi_{kjt} = \rho \cdot \xi_{kj(t-1)} + \eta_{kjt} \quad , \eta_{kjt} \sim N(0, \tau^2) \quad (12)$$

### 7.4.3 Model choice

Heteroskedasticity at different levels, contemporaneous correlation and autocorrelation are hard to cope with in a single model. Hence, I test the hypotheses using three different model

specifications: a three-level random intercept model using elections as a second level, a three-level random intercept model with parties on the second level, and a Prais-Winsten regression with panel corrected standard errors. Each specification is best to account for specific violations of the Gauss-Markov assumptions while none of them controls for all potential errors. Robust results across different model specifications thus increase the confidence in the empirical results.

The first model is a three-level random intercept model clustering cases in countries  $k$  and elections  $t$  (for an overview see Steenbergen and Jones 2002; Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2005; Gelman 2006; Gelman and Hill 2007). Multilevel models subdivide the error term at different levels allowing for election- and country-specific level differences. In formulas, the model reads as follows:

$$y_{kjt} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \cdot x_{kjt} + \gamma_k + \delta_{kt} + \varepsilon_{kjt} \quad (13)$$

with

$$\gamma_k \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$$

$$\delta_{kt} \sim N(0, \tau^2)$$

$$\varepsilon_{kjt} \sim N(0, \nu^2)$$

In contrast to an OLS regression, the error term has three components capturing country-specific errors  $\gamma_k$ , election-specific errors  $\delta_{kj}$ , and a white noise error term  $\varepsilon_{kjt}$  at the lowest level. This model specification nicely captures heteroskedasticity across countries and elections. Previous analyses using variance components models show that the observations are most likely to differ across elections. This first model specification fits best to take this into account. However, the model also shows deficits: First, we are not able to control for heteroskedasticity across parties. Although the variance is highest across elections, capturing variance across parties may also be worthwhile. Second, the model specification does not allow for using the Prais-Winsten transformation for modeling autocorrelation. Instead, the lagged dependent variable is used to capture time effects. However, lagged dependent variables absorb variance of the dependent variable without actually explaining the variance based on a theoretical explanation. Moreover, the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable risks a downward bias of the effect of the remaining (and theoretically relevant) covariates



(see Plümper et al. 2005 for a detailed discussion).<sup>54</sup> Finally, the model does not capture correlations between party position shifts in the same election (i.e. contemporaneous correlation).

The second proposed model corrects for two of these deficits. Instead of clustering parties in elections, it clusters parties at different points in time. The regression equation

$$y_{kjt} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \cdot x_{kjt} + \gamma_k + \delta_{kj} + \varepsilon_{kjt} \quad (14)$$

with

$$\gamma_k \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$$

$$\delta_{kj} \sim N(0, \tau^2)$$

$$\varepsilon_{kjt} \sim N(0, \nu^2)$$

looks quite similar to equation (13). Nevertheless, the interpretation is different: This model considers heteroskedasticity across parties to be more important than across elections. In contrast to the first model, however, this model specification does not allow the error variances to vary across elections. I note above, however, that empirically error variance across elections is more relevant than differences across parties. Apart from this shortcoming, a nice feature of this model specification is that it allows for a Prais-Winsten transformation to capture autocorrelation. Instead of including a lagged dependent variable, serial correlation is estimated taking relevant information from the error term. Assuming an autoregressive process of order 1, we estimate  $\rho$  using equation (12).

Whereas both model deal with various forms of heteroskedasticity and serial correlation, both fail in correcting for potential interdependence of party policy shifts in the same election. For that reason, I also calculate a Prais-Winsten regression using panel corrected standard errors (PCSE) (see Beck and Katz 1995; 1996; Beck 2001). Most important, the model takes heteroskedasticity across parties into account and also allows for contemporaneous correlation. Time effects are also covered using the Prais-Winsten transformation. But the PCSE model specification also has its disadvantages: Because error variances are assumed to vary across parties, the observations may also differ across

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<sup>54</sup> Another reason for using the Prais-Winsten transformation instead of the lagged dependent variable is the modification of the covariates and the intercept described above. Due to the modification, the estimates for the lagged dependent variable are flawed. Note, however, that the effects of the modified covariates are not affected.

countries. There is, however, no direct measure to account for this. Even more important, the model does not allow for different error variances across elections. As mentioned above, however, the empirical evidence suggests that elections are the most important source for variance across observations.

**Table 7.3: Error structure and model specification**

		Model specification 1	Model specification 2	Model specification 3
		Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	PCSE regression
Heteroskedasticity	across countries	X	X	(X)
	across elections	X		
	across parties		X	X
Contemporaneous correlation				X
Serial correlation		Lagged dependent variable	Prais-Winsten transformation	Prais-Winsten transformation

Table 7.3 summarizes the potential problems arising from the data’s error structure and the models’ solutions. As can be seen, none of the models accounts for all potential misspecifications. Model specification 1 is best in dealing with heteroskedasticity. The most crucial form is given by heteroskedasticity across elections and neither of the remaining model specifications considers these data characteristics. Model specification 1 does not, however, allow for using a Prais-Winsten transformation which is preferable to using a lagged dependent variable to capture autocorrelation. In that sense, model specification 2 is superior to model specification 1. The major advantage of using a PCSE model (model specification 3) is its inclusion of contemporaneous correlation. Yet, model specification 3 does not capture different error variances across elections. Because none of the model specifications perfectly considers the data structure, I use all models to test my hypotheses. If the coefficients are robust to different model specifications, this provides further backing of the empirical findings.

### 7.5 Summary

This chapter is dedicated to the description of the data and the methods for testing the effect of the voters’ perceptions of party policy shifts on actual party position shifts. First, I justified my case selection. Then I described the dependent variables used in the analyses. Thereafter, I turned to the covariates expected to affect party position shifts. I described the sources from which the variables were drawn (including election studies, secondary literature, data

handbooks, and online databases) and the coding procedures. I furthermore outlined the data structure and the problems involved when studying party position shifts of several parties over time and in various countries. Most important, the time-series cross-section (or multilevel) data structure violates the Gauss-Markov assumptions and hence, OLS regression is inappropriate. Finally, I presented the models used to account for these difficulties. In the next chapter, I present the empirical results.

## **8 How voters' reception and acceptance affect party policy shifts: Results**

In this chapter, I analyze party reactions to the voters' perception of party position shifts. I hypothesize that voters differ in their ability to receive and to accept (i.e. consider credible) party position shifts. The empirical results presented in Chapter 6 show that variation in the perception of party policy shifts can be explained by differences in their reception and acceptance function. I now turn to the effects of the voters' reception and acceptance on party policy shifts: Are there constraints on party policy shifts resulting from the voters' ability to realize (i.e. to receive) the parties' shift messages? Moreover, are parties constrained by the voters' limited acceptance of party policy shifts? I discuss these questions one by one starting with covariates derived from the reception of party policy shifts. For each variable, I present several empirical models (i.e. multilevel and PCSE regressions) testing the robustness of the results. The last section concludes.

### **8.1 Reception covariates and their effect on party policy shifts**

#### **8.1.1 Political interest**

As a first hypothesis, I test the effect of the voters' political interest on party position shifts. I hypothesize that politically aware voters are more likely to receive party policy shifts. Choosing policy positions, parties refrain from shifting policy positions if the voters do not receive the parties' shift message. Hence, the higher the political awareness, the larger party policy shifts should be (Hypothesis P1a). Because questions on political awareness are rare, I take the voters' political interest as a substitute. Table 8.1 reports the regression results of the voters' mean political interest for the magnitude of party policy shifts.

The three models show the results for the different model specifications using the mean political interest of the electorate as a covariate. The regression results are quite similar across the model specifications although the number of observations varies.<sup>55</sup> The higher the

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<sup>55</sup> Note that the number of observations differs across the model specifications. The reason is that model 1 uses the lagged dependent variable to capture serial correlation. In contrast to the remaining models using the Prais-Winsten transformation, additional information on prior party policy shifts is used. Hence, the number of observations is lower in model 1 containing the lagged dependent variable. Instead of restricting all models to the lowest number of cases (here n=399), I use the additional information given by the additional number of observations used to estimate the coefficients.

voters' political interest at t-1, the larger the parties' policy shifts at time t. The significance levels vary across the models but the size of the effects is quite robust. Increasing the electorate's political interest by one standard deviation increases party policy shifts by about 1 point. From its minimal to its maximal value, political interest positively affects the magnitude of party policy shifts by roughly 4.7 points on the CMP left-right scale.<sup>56</sup> Compared to the average magnitude of party policy shifts (about 12 points on the CMP left right scale), the size of the effect is moderate.

**Table 8.1: Political interest of voters and its effect on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Political interest (t-1)	11.28 <sup>+</sup> (1.90)	12.64 <sup>*</sup> (2.18)	11.68 <sup>+</sup> (1.80)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.228 <sup>**</sup> (-7.01)		
Constant	5.129 <sup>+</sup> (1.72)	4.378 (1.49)	5.423 (1.61)
$\rho$		-0.330	-0.104
Observations	399	421	421

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

In a slightly modified version, I state that the voters' mean political awareness makes party policy shifts more likely if the party position moves towards preferences of the majority of voters. In contrast, politically aware voters do not motivate parties to move away from their preferences. To test the more fine-grained Hypothesis P1b, I differentiate between party position shifts towards the mean voter's policy position and shifts away from it.<sup>57</sup> I expect that the positive relationship only holds for the former but not for the latter.

Table 8.2 reports the regression results. I split the sample for each model specification distinguishing shifts towards and away from the mean voter's policy preferences. Due to the additional information for the mean voter's policy position and the sample splits, the number of observations decreases from around 400 to about 100 per regression. Nevertheless, we observe the expected patterns: Voters' political interest influences the magnitude of party

<sup>56</sup> The estimates are based on the coefficients and the number of cases in model 1.

<sup>57</sup> To measure the direction of party position shifts, I rely on survey data and party position shifts using CMP data. Party shifts are moving away from the mean voter's preferences if the mean party placement at t-1 is left of (right of) the mean voter's policy position at t-1 and if the respective party shifts to the left (to the right).

policy shifts *if* these shifts are towards the mean voter’s policy preferences. For the first two model specifications (model 1 vs. model 2; model 3 vs. model 4), the effect sizes differ widely: For policy shifts towards the mean voters’ preferences, increasing the political interest by one standard deviation increases the magnitude of party policy shifts by about 1.7 points. In contrast, the effect is substantially smaller for shifts away from the mean voter’s preferences (0.8 points).<sup>58</sup> From minimal to maximal values, political interest increases the magnitude of party policy shifts towards the mean voter position by 7.6 points on the CMP scale. For policy shifts away from the mean voter’s policy preferences, the effect size (3.7) is considerably smaller. In addition, the effect is only significant if party policy shifts are towards the mean voter’s policy position. I hence conclude the direction of the party policy shift indeed affects the relation between the voters’ political interest and the magnitude of party policy shifts.

**Table 8.2: Political interest and its effect on party policy shifts: Distinguishing directions**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)		(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)		(3) PCSE regression	
	Towards mean voter	Away from mean voter	Towards mean voter	Away from mean voter	Towards mean voter	Away from mean voter
Political interest (t-1)	19.01* (2.25)	9.165 (0.93)	17.71+ (1.73)	10.57 (1.05)	11.47 (0.90)	9.893 (0.80)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.162** (-2.68)	-0.155** (-2.64)				
Constant	-1.693 (-0.41)	3.344 (0.68)	0.0993 (0.02)	3.656 (0.74)	3.096 (0.53)	4.005 (0.68)
$\rho$			0.271	-0.169	0.196	-0.050
Observations	95	93	102	95	102	95

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

### 8.1.2 Size of public policy shifts

Do parties shift policy positions when voters change their policy preferences? I hypothesize that voters are more likely to update information on party policy shifts when they also shifted their policy preferences. In case the majority of voters shifts towards a party’s policy position (benign public opinion shift), parties have no incentives to shift their policy platform. If voters

<sup>58</sup> The estimates are based on the coefficients and the number of cases in the models 1 and 2.

move away from the party's policy position (harmful public opinion shift), parties make use of large public policy shifts to change their policy platforms.<sup>59</sup> Table 8.3 reports the regression results using different model specifications and distinguishing voter shifts towards and away from the party's policy platform.

**Table 8.3: The magnitude of mean voter shifts and its effect on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)		(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)		(3) PCSE regression	
	Benign shift	Harmful shift	Benign shift	Harmful shift	Benign shift	Harmful shift
Voter policy shifts (magnitude)	-2.619 (-0.52)	-2.800 (-0.66)	-0.166 (-0.04)	-7.439 <sup>+</sup> (-1.68)	-2.959 (-0.60)	-7.084 (-1.54)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.387 <sup>**</sup> (-5.13)	-0.254 <sup>**</sup> (-5.06)				
Constant	11.25 <sup>**</sup> (5.97)	9.649 <sup>**</sup> (6.90)	9.925 <sup>**</sup> (6.79)	12.52 <sup>**</sup> (8.60)	12.09 <sup>**</sup> (4.74)	12.32 <sup>**</sup> (7.47)
$\rho$			-0.825	0.100	-0.119	0.036
Observations	105	111	111	119	111	119

*z* statistics in parentheses

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

The regression coefficients of voter position shifts are negative meaning that larger voter position shifts decrease the magnitude of party position shifts. Furthermore, there are only minor differences between voter shifts towards the party's policy position at t-1 and those away from it. The effects hence contradict the theoretical expectation stated in Hypothesis P3. Compared to the findings of political interest, the effect sizes are also rather small.<sup>60</sup> Irrespective of its direction, public opinion changes of one standard deviation make parties to shift their policy position about 0.6 points on the CMP left-right scale. The maximal change of the mean voter's policy position in two subsequent elections (~1.2 points on the 1-11 scale) makes parties to shift their policy position about 3.3 points on the CMP scale. With one exception (model 4), the effects do not reach a conventional level of statistical significance so I conclude that the magnitude of voter policy shifts does not affect party position shifts.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Public opinion is moving away from a party if its policy position at t-1 is right (left) of the mean voter's position at t-1 and the mean voter's policy position shifts to the left (right) at time t.

<sup>60</sup> Again, the estimates are based on the coefficients and the number of cases in the models 1 and 2.

<sup>61</sup> Because voter position shifts are usually rather small, the negative finding may be due to measurement error (see the following side note for a more detailed discussion).

### 8.1.3 Government parties

I argue that government parties get higher media attention so that their policy shifts are more visible for the electorate. As a consequence, government parties should be more like to shift their policy positions (Hypothesis P4). To test this expectation, I regress party policy shifts on the parties' time spent in government since the last election. I expect a positive and significant coefficient.

**Table 8.4: Government participation and its effect on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Government participation	1.651 <sup>+</sup> (1.95)	1.976* (2.38)	2.096* (2.37)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.217** (-9.52)		
Constant	11.04** (20.90)	10.86** (21.55)	11.31** (21.31)
$\rho$		-0.244	-0.092
Observations	820	919	919

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

The results in Table 8.4 conform to the theoretical expectation: The regression coefficient is positive and reaches significance in all three model specifications. The size of the effect is rather similar for all three model specifications. Its interpretation is straightforward: The policy shifts of parties which took office in the last legislative term are about 1.65 (model 1) or 2 points (models 2 and 3) larger than those of opposition parties. Taking the average 12 point party policy shift as a baseline, the size of the effect is moderate.

### 8.1.4 The effective number of parliamentary parties

Party policy shifts should also depend on the complexity of political arena. The higher the number of relevant actors, the lower the probability that voters perceive policy shifts of individual parties. Parties refrain from investing in shifting policy positions if the expected effect (i.e. the perception of the party's new policy position) fails to materialize. As a consequence, party systems with many relevant actors hamper policy changes of individual parties (Hypothesis P5). Using the effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) as a proxy for the complexity of the political arena, Table 8.5 shows the regression results



using the current number of parties (models 1 to 3) and the lagged value (models 4 to 6) as covariates.

**Table 8.5: The effective number of parliamentary parties and its effect on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression	(4) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(5) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(6) PCSE regression
Eff. # of parties	-0.494 <sup>+</sup> (-1.92)	-0.467 <sup>+</sup> (-1.82)	-0.531 <sup>*</sup> (-2.09)			
Eff. # of parties (t-1)				-0.508 <sup>+</sup> (-1.91)	-0.420 (-1.58)	-0.465 <sup>+</sup> (-1.69)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.218 <sup>**</sup> (-9.60)			-0.219 <sup>**</sup> (-9.61)		
Constant	13.79 <sup>**</sup> (11.75)	13.60 <sup>**</sup> (11.75)	14.43 <sup>**</sup> (12.81)	13.81 <sup>**</sup> (11.62)	13.37 <sup>**</sup> (11.33)	14.11 <sup>**</sup> (11.90)
$\rho$		-0.243	-0.080		-0.245	-0.085
Observations	821	920	920	821	920	920

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

The regression results show similar patterns across the different models. The effective number of parties has the expected negative effect on party policy shifts. In other words, the higher the number of effective parties, the smaller the parties' policy shifts. The size of the effect is similar across the models and statistically significant in 5 out of 6 models. Shifting from the mean number of effective parties (4.28) by one standard deviation (1.54), the magnitude of the parties' policy shifts alters by around 0.75 CMP points.<sup>62</sup> Compared to the legislative term with the lowest number of effective parties (Great Britain 1959, effective number of legislative parties = 1.99), party policy shifts in the most complex term (Belgium 1999, effective number of legislative parties = 9.1) decrease by 3.5 points on the CMP scale. Compared to the other effects discussed so far, the size of the effect is rather small.

## 8.2 Acceptance covariates and their effect on party policy shifts

So far, I discussed the effects of covariates derived from the reception of party policy shifts. The results support three out of four hypotheses. First, the voters' political interest positively affects the magnitude of party policy shifts. Moreover, government parties perform larger

<sup>62</sup> Again, the estimates are based on the coefficients and the number of cases in model 1.

policy shifts than opposition parties. Finally, parties are more likely to shift their policy positions if the number of competitors is low. The coefficient for the magnitude of public opinion shifts is insignificant. Next, I turn to the covariates derived from the acceptance of party policy shifts.

### 8.2.1 Change in party leadership

I argue that long-term party leaders become identified with their previous policies so that voters do not accept (i.e. consider credible) party policy shifts. New party leaders have more leeway to breathe life into a party because voters are more likely to accept party policy shifts introduced by them. Therefore, I expect that parties use leadership changes to shift their policy platforms. Table 8.6 shows the regression estimates for the three model specifications.

**Table 8.6: Change in party leadership and their effect on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Change in party leadership	-1.749* (-2.06)	-0.978 (-1.20)	-1.126 (-1.33)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.215** (-9.13)		
Constant	12.72** (23.05)	12.40** (23.20)	12.95** (22.07)
$\rho$		-0.238	-0.098
Observations	763	844	844

z statistics in parentheses

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01

$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

The estimates reported in Table 8.6 show a negative effect of party leader changes on party policy shifts. If the party leadership changed, the magnitude of party policy shifts *decreases* by 1.7 (model 1) or roughly 1 point (models 2 and 3) on the CMP scale. Although the effect is only significant in the first model, the findings contradict my expectation. If voters are more likely to accept party position shifts of new party leaders, why do new party leaders refrain from using this advantage?

Analyzing the causes, newly elected party leaders may lack the resources for policy shifts. For example, party leaders taking office shortly before an election (e.g. because of a scandal the previous party leader was involved in) do not have the time for major policy shifts. Moreover, intra-party resistance may prevent new party leaders to go for significant

policy changes. Moving away from the status quo usually requires the discussion and approval of party congresses or, at least, major actors within the party's elite. Some party leaders may be successful in convincing the party's rank-and-file and in getting the support of the major intra-party factions. Yet others lack this support and face major intra-party actors who are in doubt of the leader's ability to be successful in the next election. In this case, intra-party actors refrain from giving their leader the mandate for party policy changes.

Combining these thoughts with my previous theoretical expectation, we may expect a curvilinear relationship between the tenure of party leaders and the magnitude of party policy shifts: Due to a lack of resources, newly elected party leaders are less likely to shift party policies. With one or two successful election campaigns on the record, party leaders extend their power within the party so that tenure has a positive impact on the magnitude of party policy shifts. The more time party leaders spend in office, however, the more they become identified with prior policies and hence, the less likely are party position shifts.

I test the effect of tenure as party leader on party policy shifts for the three model specifications mentioned above. As for the models reported in Table 8.6, the findings are mixed. Figure 8.1 shows the curvilinear effect of leadership tenure on party position shifts using the estimates of model 1. The model estimates indeed show a curvilinear pattern for leadership tenure on party policy change. Newly elected party leaders shift party policy positions significantly less than more experienced leaders being in office for two or three elections. Thereafter, the trend is negative: The longer party leaders stay in office, the smaller the party position shifts. Yet, the differences are not significant. This is mainly due to the low number of cases with a long-lasting tenure.<sup>63</sup> The findings do thus not fully support the curvilinear relationship.

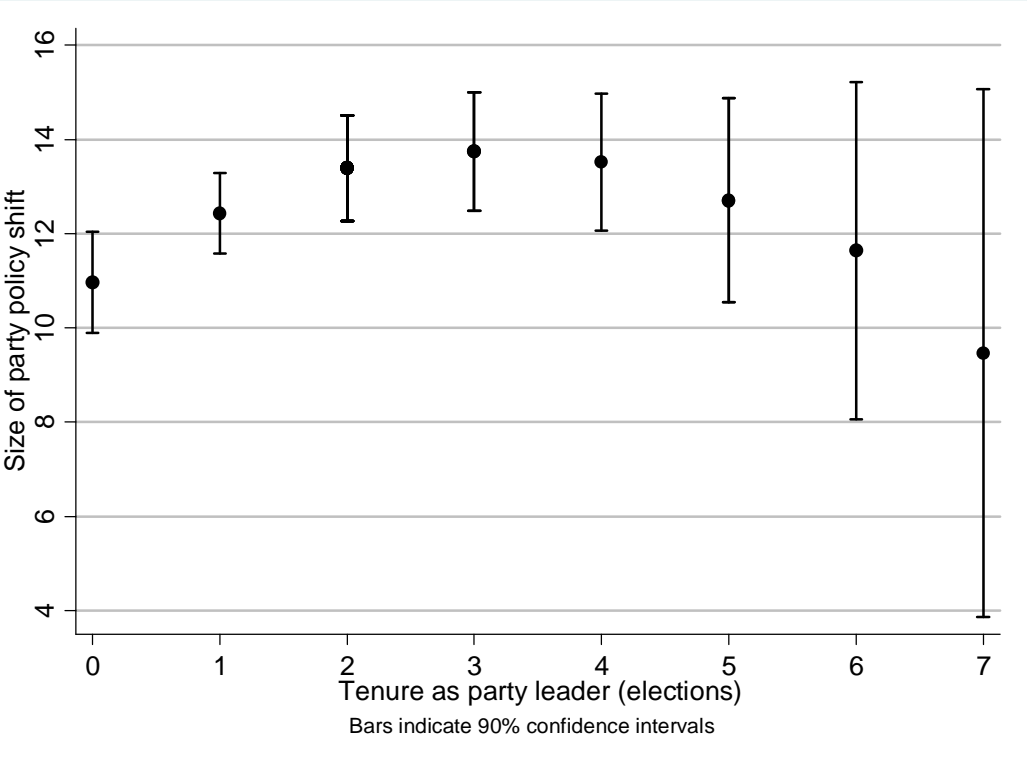
Instead of using the new party leaders' lack of resources to explain the absence of large party policy shifts, it may also be that newly elected leaders have no incentives to shift the party's policy position. Although missing incentives cannot explain why freshmen shift party policy positions to a significantly lesser extent (model 1 in Table 8.6), they may explain why newly elected leaders do not differ from party leaders which are in office for a longer period (models 2 and 3 in Table 8.6). Leadership turnovers are not always signs of change. Rather, leadership changes may also be a continuation of old policies by a new generation.

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<sup>63</sup> Out of the 748 cases in the analysis, only 9 party leaders were in office for 7 or more elections. The cases include party leaders in Sweden (Hedlund (CP), Erlander (SAP)), Denmark (Jakobsen (CD), Petersen (SF), Jørgensen (RV), Jespersen (DKP), and Schlüter (KF)), and Germany (Brandt (SPD) and Kohl (CDU)).

Newly elected party leaders may have been in the party’s wider leadership circle before they took office or they belong to the same intra-party faction as the previous party leader. Both factors are especially likely if newly elected party leaders are foster-sons (and daughters) of the old party elite.

**Figure 8.1: Curvilinear effect of leadership tenure on party policy shifts**



Note: Model estimates based of model 1 (N=748). Prior policy shifts are kept on their mean value.

Unfortunately, I do not have data on policy preferences or factional membership. Neither do I have data on the party leaders’ prior membership in the party leadership or whether they are political foster-sons (and daughters) of prior party leaders. Nevertheless, a party leader’s willingness to shift the party platform can be measured using the voters’ expectations of party policy positions as a substitute: If a party’s policy position corresponds to its expected position (see below), there is no exogenous need for party policy shifts. However, if the policy position is not in line with its expected policy position, a party leader has incentives to correct that.

If willingness is the main factor explaining smaller policy shifts of new party leaders, party leaders should only differ according to the necessity for party policy shifts. If there is no necessity, party position shifts are rather small. Yet, if the party’s policy position is not in line with its expected position, party position shifts should be significantly larger. Whether or not the party leadership changed should not affect this relationship.

**Table 8.7: The magnitude of party policy shifts depending on party leader change and the necessity to shift party policy positions**

	No leadership change	New party leader	Significant difference
No necessity	10.91	10.39	
Necessity for policy change	15.92	11.92	✓**
Significant difference	✓**		

Estimates based on model 1 (N = 742)

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 8.7 reports the average magnitude of party policy shifts depending on the party leader’s tenure and the necessity to shift party policy positions. The necessity for policy change has a positive effect on the magnitude of party policy shift if the party leadership did not change (increasing from roughly 11 to 16 points on the CMP scale) and if a new party leader took office (from 10 to 12 points). However, the difference is only significant for the former group. In other words, while party leaders with a longer tenure react to the necessity for party policy shifts, newly elected party leaders fail to do so. In addition, there is no significant effect of tenure on party policy shifts if there is no necessity for shifting the party’s policy position. If the necessity is given, however, newly elected leaders are *not* more likely to shift the party’s policy position. Rather, party leaders which are at least in office since the last election make significantly larger party policy shifts. Both findings do not conform to the “lacking willingness” hypothesis which may hence be discarded.

In sum, the findings suggest that although voters are more likely to accept party policy shifts of newly elected leaders, leadership changes do not lead to larger party policy shifts. Exploring the reasons, I propose two explanations. First, newly elected party leaders may lack the resources for party policy change. Lacks of time or intra-party support reduce a new party leader’s ability to shift the party policies. With one or two successful election campaigns in the past, party leaders’ power within the party increases. Combining this effect with the expected negative relation of leadership tenure and the magnitude of party policy shifts, we expect to see a curvilinear relation. As an alternative explanation, newly elected party leaders may have no incentives to shift the party’s policy position. If the policy preferences and the factional membership of the old and the new party leader are identical, changes in leadership should have no effect. Although we lack data for testing these theories adequately, preliminary results rather support the first explanation. Controlling for the leaders’ willingness for policy change, I still find significant differences between incumbent and newly elected leaders suggesting that new leaders are *not able* to act in the same way as party

leaders with a longer tenure. The findings encourage further investigation on organizational features and their effect on party policy change to which I turn in Chapter 9.

### 8.2.2 Party leader prestige

I now turn to party leader evaluations. I reason that a party leader's prestige affects the acceptance of party policy shifts. If voters evaluate a party leader positively, the acceptance of party policy shifts increases. Hence, parties should be more likely to shift their policy positions if their party leader's prestige is high (Hypothesis 8a). Table 8.8 reports the regression results testing this expectation for the three model specifications.

**Table 8.8: Party leader prestige and its effect on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Party leader prestige	0.972* (2.10)	0.833+ (1.70)	0.922 (1.21)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.324** (-8.42)		
Constant	5.536+ (1.80)	6.317+ (1.94)	6.874 (1.36)
$\rho$		-0.313	-0.040
Observations	261	275	275

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

All three coefficients point in the expected positive direction: Increases in the party leader's prestige (on a 1 to 11 scale) increase the magnitude of party position shifts by about 0.8 to 0.9 points on the CMP scale. To compare the effect size with the remaining covariates, increasing the party leader's prestige by one standard deviation ( $SD = 1.5$ ), the policy position shift increases by 1.46 points.<sup>64</sup> Taking the range of all party leader prestige scores from its minimum to its maximum, party policy shifts increase by roughly 9 CMP points. Using the average magnitude for policy position shifts (about 12 points) as a baseline, the effect size is rather large. Although the effect of the party leader evaluation does not reach statistical significance in model 3, I find empirical evidence supporting my hypothesis in two of three model specifications.

<sup>64</sup> The estimates are based on the models and observations of model 1.

**Table 8.9: Party leader prestige and its effect on party policy shifts: Distinguishing directions**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)		(3) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)		(5) PCSE regression	
	Towards mean voter	Away from mean voter	Towards mean voter	Away from mean voter	Towards mean voter	Away from mean voter
Party leader prestige	3.695** (3.54)	2.090* (2.08)	3.447** (3.39)	1.713 (1.43)	4.163** (2.73)	1.777 (1.51)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.231** (-3.14)	-0.384** (-6.58)				
Constant	-13.78* (-1.97)	-4.347 (-0.64)	-11.40+ (-1.66)	1.050 (0.13)	-16.06+ (-1.73)	0.258 (0.03)
$\rho$			0.330	0.247	0.149	0.037
Observations	90	87	97	90	97	90

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

In its more fine-grained version, I hypothesize that the positive effect of a party leader's evaluation on the magnitude of party policy shifts only exists if the party shifts its platform towards the mean voter's policy preferences (Hypothesis P8b) and that a party leader's evaluation has no effect if the party shifts its platform away from the majority of the voters. Table 8.9 reports the regression results for the three model specifications splitting the sample in party shifts towards the mean voter's position and those away from it. Note that the sample split and the additional information used for the direction of the party position shifts reduces the number of observations from about 260 to 90 cases for each regression.

Although the number of observations is considerably lower than for the models in Table 8.8, the coefficients indicate that parties are more likely to shift their policy positions if voters evaluate the respective party leaders positively. Moreover, the effect size is larger for party policy shifts towards the mean voter position than for shifts away from the majority of the voters. Taking the models 1 and 2 as an example, increasing the party leaders' mean prestige by one standard deviation increases the magnitude of party policy shifts towards the mean voter's policy position by about 4.4 points on the CMP scale. The effect is considerably smaller (2.5 points) for shifts deviating from the mean voter's policy position. All three model specifications report a positive and significant effect for party shifts toward the mean voter's preferences. In contrast, only model 2 reports a statistically significant (but considerably

smaller) effect for shifts away from the majority of voters. The findings are hence in line with the theoretical expectations of Hypothesis P8b.

### 8.2.3 Magnitude of past party policy shifts

I argue that large policy shifts in the past preclude large policy shifts in the future. The argument is that parties have to conform to party policy reforms of the past to maintain their credibility. Hence, the effect of past policy shifts should have a negative effect on the party's current policy shifts.

Table 8.10 reports the regression results for the three model specifications. All three models reveal a negative but insignificant effect of large past policy shifts on the magnitude of policy shifts at time  $t$ . Increasing the number of large party policy shifts by one standard deviation ( $SD = 1.4$ ) decreases the magnitude of party policy shift by about 0.5 points on the CMP left-right scale. Compared to the remaining covariates, this effect is very small. Because the model coefficients are insignificant, I reject Hypothesis P9.

**Table 8.10: Magnitude of past party policy shifts and their effect on current party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties) <sup>65</sup>	(3) PCSE regression
# of previous policy shifts larger than mean policy shift	-0.352 (-1.21)	-0.310 (-1.06)	-0.00905 (-0.03)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.213** (-8.97)	-0.207** (-8.81)	
Constant	12.08** (24.28)	12.18** (24.72)	12.54** (21.63)
$\rho$			-0.088
Observations	783	783	733

$z$  statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

While the theoretical argument generally seems sound, the empirical results do not show that parties are in general constrained by their past policy shifts. Exploring the reasons, I argue that a party's past policy choices do *not* constrain the voters' acceptance of party policy shifts if turmoil in the political arena requires the party to adapt its policy platforms. I do not

<sup>65</sup> Because model 2 does not converge using a Prais-Winsten transformation, I include the lagged dependent variable.



consider this special case in my theoretical model but I discuss in its implications in the following side note.

Side note: When the party's history does not matter – Necessities for party policy change

Turmoil in the political arena may put stable party systems out of equilibrium. These “shocks” may require party policy adaptations and hence, parties shift their policy shifts irrespective of their prior position shift. Take the Danish 1973 “earthquake” election as an example. All five parties represented in parliament before the 1973 elections suffered at the polls and the number of parties in parliament increased from five to ten (Pedersen 1987; Mair 1997: 215; Damgaard 2000: 233) and the Progress Party won 28 out of 179 seats from scratch. The changing environment for political parties is also indicated by the effective number of parties in parliament which increased from 4 to 7 parties. Clearly, parties are likely to react to these challenges although they made large policy shifts before.<sup>66</sup>

I identify four variables factors that indicate changes in the parties' bargaining environment. First, parties may have incentives to react to *changes in their competitors' policy shifts* (see also Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009b). If the competitors change their policy platforms, rival parties should react to this. Shocks may then intervene in the usual adaptation process so that competitors change their policy positions massively. The same argument holds for *changing volatility scores*: Volatility is an indicator for the complexity of the political market. Abrupt changes in the voters' party choices may force parties to react by shifting their policy position massively.<sup>67</sup> Third and related, *changes in the party system* make parties to adapt their policy positions: New competitors force other parties to react to new challenges. As the Progress Party in 1973, successful new competitors change the bargaining environment by shifting the balance of power. Hence, I expect that changes in the number of effective parties make parties to shift their policy positions. Finally, a party may also be forced to adapt its policy platform if it is not in line with its *expected policy position* relative to those of its competitors (see below). Party system shocks such as the entry of new successful competitors may leave parties in policy positions not matching with their expected policy positions. Hence, parties react by shifting their policy positions. The shock caused by new competitors

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<sup>66</sup> In fact, three out of four parties with a large policy shift in the previous election reacted by making a large consecutive policy shift in 1973.

<sup>67</sup> Electoral volatility was measured using the Pedersen index (Pedersen 1979). Various sources (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Webb et al. 2002; Plasser and Ulram 2006) are used to obtain data on volatility scores. For individual elections, the numbers are based on own calculations.

may have several repercussions in the following election periods until the party system reaches a new equilibrium.

**Table 8.11: Explaining large consecutive policy shifts**

	Magnitude of party policy shift (t)	Expected effect
$\Delta$ Mean size of competitors' policy shifts	0.165 <sup>+</sup> (1.90)	+
$\Delta$ Volatility	-0.0682 (-0.45)	+
$\Delta$ Effective number of parties	0.642 (0.56)	+
Party in ideologically exp. position (t-1)	-2.977* (-2.14)	-
Constant	2.982** (2.79)	
Observations	335	

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 8.11 reports the regression results testing the outlined expectations. Because I am interested in differences between parties which are constrained by their past behavior, I restrict the sample to cases where the previous shift was large. The dependent variable measures the magnitude of the parties' current policy shift compared to the mean size of previous shifts. Values larger than zero indicate large policy shifts and hence patterns of large consecutive shifts. Negative values indicate rather small earlier policy shifts combined with large recent ones.

Two of the four variables show the expected significant effects. Changes in the mean size of the competitors' policy shifts do indeed affect the magnitude of party policy shifts. If rival parties move, parties cannot afford to stay put. Increasing the rival parties' policy shifts by one standard deviation, party policy shifts increase by roughly 1.25 points on the CMP scale. Compared to the mean size of party policy shifts (12 points on the CMP scale), the effect size is rather large. In addition, expectations on party policy positions have a significant impact on the persistency of large policy shifts. If the actual policy position does not correspond to the expectations, parties adapt policy positions even if they made a large policy shift in the previous period. The effect reported in Table 8.11 is negative and significant at the 5% level. In other words, policy shifts of parties with expected policy positions are roughly 3 points smaller than those of parties deviating from their expected policy position.

In my theoretical framework, I hypothesize that parties are constrained by their past policy shifts. Large party policy shifts should constrain parties in that similar shifts are not possible for the next election. The results presented in Table 8.10 do not support this expectation. Regarding the factors which may explain large consecutive shifts, I argue that shocks changing the parties' bargaining environment put the party system out of equilibrium and force parties to react regardless of their prior policy shifts. The empirical results presented in Table 8.11 suggest that rival parties' shifts and the party's policy position relative to those of its competitors affect a party's shifting patterns. Yet, the coefficients for changes in the number of (effective) parties and volatility do not reach statistical significance. Hence, I conclude that parties are sometimes forced to adapt to "shocks" in their environment. So doing, past policy shifts do not constrain parties in their policy choices.

#### 8.2.4 Party identification

Party identification affects voters' perception of party policy shifts. If party policy shifts move the party towards a voter's policy preferences, voters with party identification are more likely to accept (i.e. consider credible) the position shift. In case the party shifts away from its identifiers, however, the acceptance of the policy shift decreases. Nevertheless, parties may benefit from the non-acceptance in the sense that voters with party identification still perceive the party's policy position closer to their preferences than it actually is. Hence, the direction of the policy shift does not alter the positive effect of voters with party identification: The larger the share of identifiers, the more room for maneuver (Hypotheses P10).

Table 8.12 reports the regression results for the three model specifications. The share of voters identifying with a party has the expected positive effect in all three model specifications. The higher the ratio of voters with party identification, the larger the party position shifts. The size of the effect varies across the models ranging from roughly 0.03 (models 2 and 3) to 0.05 (model 1). Taking the estimates of model 1 as a baseline, the size of the effect is moderate. Increasing the share of identifiers by one standard deviation, the magnitude of party policy shifts increases by 1.11 points on the CMP scale. Although the effect is only statistically significant at conventional levels in the first model, the empirical evidence gives limited support to the expected effect.

**Table 8.12: Share of voters with party identification and their effect on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Share of voters with party identification	0.0519* (2.36)	0.0317 (1.48)	0.0339 (1.40)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.194** (-5.97)		
Constant	6.556** (4.65)	8.116** (6.00)	8.328** (5.35)
$\rho$		-0.234	-0.058
Observations	376	397	397

z statistics in parentheses

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01

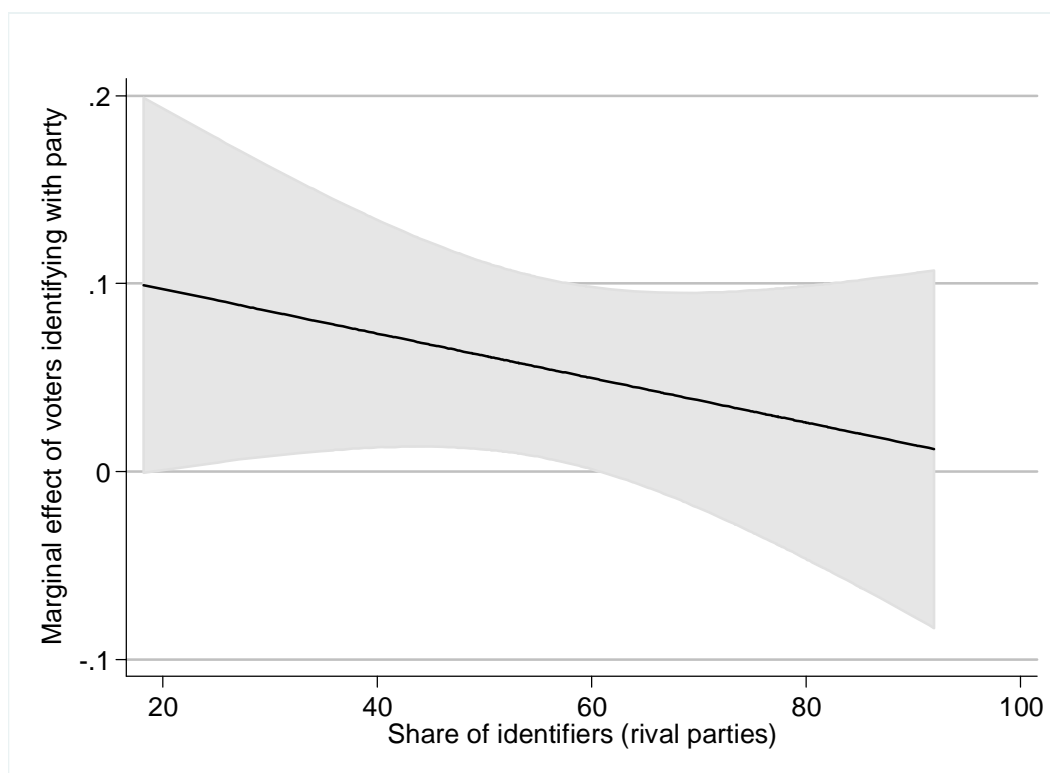
$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

Critical readers may argue that the parties' advantage of having a large share of identifiers depends on characteristics of the electorate. If most of the voters feel attached to a specific party, "floating voters" are rare. The higher the number of parties enjoying the advantage of having a large share of identifiers, the less likely it is that party policy shifts result in gains of votes. Hence, the effect of voters with party identification on the magnitude of party policy shifts depends on the share of voters who identify with rival parties. The higher this share, the lower the effect of voters with party identification on party position shifts should be.

Figure 8.2 plots the marginal effect of the share of voters with party identification depending on the share of voters identifying with rival parties. The grey-shaded areas indicate 90% confidence intervals and the model estimates are based on the first model specification presented in Table 8.12. Keep in mind that the overall coefficient for party identification reported in Table 8.12 is 0.05. The marginal effect plotted in Figure 8.2 shows that there is some variation of the effect size depending on the share of voters identifying with rival parties.<sup>68</sup> If only a small share of voters identify with the competitors, having a large share of identifiers is strong (about 0.09) and statistically significant. The positive effect diminishes as the share of voters who identify with the party's rivals increases. Hence, having identifiers is mainly beneficial if competing parties do not.

<sup>68</sup> Note that the overall interaction effect does not reach a significant level. Nevertheless, the graph shows that the positive effect of the share of voters with party identification on the magnitude of party policy shifts is mainly due to cases where the competing parties only hold a low share of voters with party identification.

**Figure 8.2: Effect of party identification depending on rival parties' share of voters with party identification<sup>69</sup>**



Note: Grey bars indicate 90% confidence intervals.

### 8.2.5 Public opinion shifts

Previous research highlights the role of public policy shifts for party position shifts. We expect parties to respond to the changing demands of the public. Previous research by Adams and colleagues (2004) found that parties indeed react to shifts in the mean voter's policy position. The theoretical model presented in Chapter 4 implies the same expectation that parties follow voter position shifts away from their policy position.

Table 8.13 presents regression results distinguishing benign and harmful public opinion shifts. Irrespective of the direction of the voter policy shift and the model specification, the coefficients are statistically insignificant. Moreover, there is merely no difference in the parties' reactions to benign and harmful public opinion shifts.

The insignificant results are puzzling. Using similar data, Adams and colleagues (Adams et al. 2004) reported statistically significant effects. Exploring the reasons for this discrepancy, I draw on recent research (Ezrow et al. 2009; Somer-Topcu 2009a) which emphasizes that parties only react to specific voter groups: Instead of reacting to shifts in the

<sup>69</sup> Estimates based on model specification 1 (N = 376).

general public, parties are more responsive to their voters. As a consequence, parties react to shifts of their respective supporters rather than to the whole electorate.<sup>70</sup> Using similar data on party voter shifts instead of the mean voter's shifts, I do not get similar results. I also test for differences between mainstream and niche parties: Previous research (Ezrow et al. 2009) found significant differences in the parties' reactions to shifts in public opinion in that mainstream parties are more likely to adjust their policy positions to shifts of the mean voter than niche parties. Restricting the sample to mainstream parties, however, still leads to insignificant effects. Hence, the question remains why party position shifts seem to be independent of voter position shifts although previous research reported such findings.

**Table 8.13: Voter position shifts and their effect on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)		(3) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)		(5) PCSE regression	
	Benign shift	Harmful shift	Benign shift	Harmful shift	Benign shift	Harmful shift
Voter policy shifts	-0.984 (-0.21)	-3.493 (-0.84)	-5.444 (-1.43)	-4.002 (-1.01)	-3.979 (-1.23)	-3.245 (-0.77)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.543** (-5.85)	-0.360** (-5.47)				
Constant	3.203 <sup>+</sup> (1.78)	1.429 (0.99)	1.328 (0.71)	0.951 (0.73)	1.651 (1.02)	0.720 (0.48)
$\rho$			-0.667	-0.137	-0.278	-0.357
Observations	105	111	111	119	111	119

*z* statistics in parentheses

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

$\rho$  capturing serial correlation

I argue that the findings presented in previous research are flawed because of interpreting small changes in the mean voter positions as voter position shifts rather than measurement error. To distinguish “white noise” from substantial voter position shifts, statistics offer the two-sample *t* test as an instrument for mean comparisons in two different samples. Using reasonable values for sample sizes and standard deviations in surveys,<sup>71</sup> the test shows that voter position shifts with a magnitude smaller than 0.2 points on the 1 to 11 scale are not statistically significant at the 5% level. For the data used here, about 50% of the

<sup>70</sup> However, party voters (and hence their preferences) change from election to election. Comparing party voters over time to measure “shifts” is questionable.

<sup>71</sup> I assume equal variances in both samples and test for significant differences (at the 95% level) using the average standard deviation of the voter left-right placements (~2.27). Because data on survey respondents is not included in the dataset, I set the number of respondents in both surveys to 1000. Note that the critical value, roughly 0.2, is an approximate value of what we would expect to see on average and is only used for illustrative purposes.

observations fall in this category. In other words, in around half of the cases tiny differences in voter positions are interpreted as voter position shifts although they may also be due to measurement error. Additional evidence comes from a comparison of voter positions and voter position *shifts* from different data sources: For some elections, data coming from national election studies and the Eurobarometer trend file is available (N = 171). The correlation of voter policy positions using the different data sources is rather high (0.55,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, comparing the voter position shifts derived from consecutive national election studies and the Eurobarometer (N = 104) reveals that the correlation is practically zero and insignificant (-0.03,  $p = 0.74$ ). Hence, although left-right placements of mean voters are quite comparable, the shifts (i.e. the differences over time) capture measurement error so that the differences are not statistically significant.

In sum, I do not find evidence that parties follow harmful shifts in the public opinion. This negative finding holds for shifts of the whole electorate and shifts of party voters. Moreover, there is no difference between mainstream and niche parties as hypothesized by previous research (Ezrow et al. 2009). I argue that this is mainly due to the fact that (mean) voters do not shift their policy positions to a great extent. As a consequence, shifts in public opinion could be fluctuations rather than ideological shifts and the model estimates reflect measurement error.

#### 8.2.6 Voter expectations of party policy positions

I also argue that voters are less likely to accept party position shifts that move the party away from ideological expectations. If a party shifts to the right (to the left) although its actual policy platform is already right of (left of) its expected position, voters are less likely to accept the party's policy shift. With voters being less likely to accept party position shifts deviating from ideological expectations, parties avoid those policy shifts that would entail costs (e.g. writing new policy programs) but no potential benefits (i.e. attracting new voters on policy grounds). Hence, parties have incentives to respond to voter expectations correcting for inappropriate policy positions. I expect that parties shift to the left (to the right) if their policy platform is right of (left of) its expected policy position.

**Table 8.14: Shifts reacting to voter expectations of party policy positions**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression	(4) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(5) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(6) PCSE regression	(7) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(8) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(9) PCSE regression
	All parties			Restricted to major parties			Distinguishing left, centre, and right-wing parties		
Party left of ideologically expected position (t-1)	6.169** (4.22)	5.052** (4.07)	5.941** (3.90)	7.235** (4.56)	5.985** (4.50)	7.051** (4.22)	8.294** (3.19)	7.530** (3.59)	8.023** (3.07)
Party right of ideologically expected position (t-1)	-5.379** (-3.76)	-5.222** (-4.39)	-5.976** (-4.49)	-6.163** (-4.00)	-5.423** (-4.21)	-6.234** (-4.29)	-6.780** (-3.15)	-6.446** (-3.66)	-7.225** (-3.83)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.313** (-9.78)			-0.319** (-9.58)			-0.353** (-10.61)		
Constant	-0.415 (-0.45)	-0.211 (-0.35)	-0.244 (-0.35)	-0.319 (-0.34)	-0.289 (-0.47)	-0.358 (-0.50)	-0.113 (-0.13)	-0.125 (-0.25)	-0.107 (-0.17)
$\rho$		-0.332	-0.202		-0.341	-0.203		-0.360	-0.261
Observations	783	871	871	722	792	792	722	792	792

z statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$  $\rho$  capturing serial correlation



Table 8.14 shows the regression results testing this relationship. The regressions test the proposed effect using different measures of voter expectations and model specifications. Models 1 to 3 use voter expectations of all parties and models 4 to 6 report the regression results using a restricted sample of major parties (i.e. those with a minimum of 5% of the vote share in two subsequent elections). Models 7 to 9 capture the effect of voter expectations distinguishing three classes of parties: left, centre, and right-wing parties.

The estimates presented in Table 8.14 strongly support the proposed effect: Compared to parties located at their expected party positions, parties with policy platforms left of their expected policy position shift their policy positions to the right (indicated by a coefficient larger than zero). Similarly, parties right of their expected policy position shift their policy positions to the left (indicated by a coefficient smaller than zero). Both coefficients point in the expected directions and are statistically significant at the 1% level irrespective of the model specification and the measures of voter expectations. Moreover, the effects are large. Compared to parties with policy positions conforming to the voters' expectations, parties left of their expected position shift their policy positions around 5.1 (model 2) to 8.3 points (model 7) further to the right. In a similar vein, parties to the right of their expected policy position are more likely to shift their policies to the left. The policy shifts are 5.2 (model 2) to 7.2 (model 9) points further to the left than those of competitors with ideologically "appropriate" policy positions. Compared to the average policy shifts around 12 points on the CMP left-right scale, the effects are large.

In sum, then, the findings conform to the theoretical expectations: If the parties' policy positions deviate from the expectations voters hold about the party's "appropriate" policy position, parties react by shifting their policy positions. The size of the effects reported in Table 8.14 is also remarkable, given the average magnitude of party position shifts on the CMP left-right scale of about 12 points.

### 8.3 Summary

This chapter presents results of the voters' reception and acceptance of party position shifts and their effects on the parties' shifting options. Calculating a pooled analysis implies losing information on other covariates so that I tested the hypotheses one by one. To show the robustness of the findings and to control for potential model misspecifications, I estimated multilevel models capturing variance between elections (model specification 1) and parties

(model specification 2), and a linear regression using panel corrected standard errors (model specification 3).

**Table 8.15: Summary of the findings: How reception and acceptance affect party position shifts**

	Variable	Hypothesis	Findings	Effect size (CMP points) <sup>72</sup>
<b>Reception</b>	Mean political interest	P1a	✓	1
	Mean political interest (with direction)	P1b	(✓)	1.71
	Voter position shift (absolute value)	P3	0	-0.60
	Governmental share	P4	✓	1.65
	Effective number of parl. parties	P5	✓	-0.75
<b>Acceptance</b>	Leadership change	P7	(✗)	-1.75
	Party leader prestige	P8a	(✓)	1.46
	Party leader prestige (with direction)	P8b	✓	4.40
	Past party policy shifts	P9	0	0.50
	Share of voters with positive party identification	P10	(✓)	1.11
	Voter shift (with direction)	P11	0	-1.12
	Voter expectations of party policy positions	P12	✓	5.77

✓ Finding in line with expectation.

0 No significant effect.

✗ Finding contradicts hypothesized effect.

( ) Mixed findings.

Table 8.15 summarizes the results and indicates whether the empirical results conform or contradict the theoretical expectations and whether the findings are robust across model specifications. Moreover, the effect size is shown to allow for easy comparison. The empirical results support most of my theoretical expectations: Parties are more likely to shift their policy positions if the mean political interest is high, if they have been in government before, and the complexity of the party system is low. All three expectations arise from the voters' reception of party position shifts. Turning to the acceptance of party position shifts, parties are more likely to shift their policy positions if the party leader's prestige is high and if the share of voters identifying with the party is large. Furthermore, a party shifts its policy positions if it is not in the ordinal position among its competitors expected on ideological grounds.

<sup>72</sup> For continuous variables, the change in the dependent variable is shown if the covariate increases by one standard deviation. For the governmental share, leadership changes, and the voters' expectations of the parties' policy positions, changes from 0 to 1 are reported. For variables distinguishing directions of party policy shifts (P1b and P8b), the effect size for party policy shifts towards the mean voter policy position is shown. For variables measuring voter position shifts, the effect sizes are valid for harmful public opinion shifts. The effect size for the voters' expectations is an average of the expected shifts to the left and the right. Estimates based on the first model specification reported in the previous Tables.

I do not find any effect of public opinion shifts on changes in party positions. These negative findings are surprising given that (1) voters are more likely to accept party position shifts in line with voter position shifts (Chapter 6) and (2) previous research emphasized the normative and empirical links between voter and party position shifts. For the effect of the direction of voter position shifts, I test modified models distinguishing party supporters and the whole electorate. I also consider the distinction between mainstream and niche parties (Ezrow et al. 2009). The regressions do not reveal any significant result. I argue that this non-finding is due to the fact that most public opinion shifts are relatively small. Using reasonable parameters, I show that about 50% of the empirical voter position shifts are not statistically different and hence could be due to measurement error. If these voter position shifts are indeed meaningless, using different data sources<sup>73</sup> leads to different (random) estimates of voter position shifts. Studying the effect of public opinion shifts on party platforms (and hence proposed policy output) requires further research and robustness checks.

Finally, the results for leadership changes and the parties' past policy shifts do not conform to my theoretical expectations. New party leaders are, at least in one model specification, less likely to shift the party's policy position. Instead of giving a new impetus to the party's life, new party leaders shift the party's platform to a lesser extent than party leaders who are in office for a longer time. I suggest that the negative "newbie" effect may be due to the new party leader's lack of resources for immediate policy shifts.

Furthermore, I do not find any significant effect of large past party policy shifts. In a side note, I show that "shocks" in the party system may force parties to adapt their policy platforms irrespective of their policy changes in the past. The incentives resulting from a party system out of equilibrium seem to exceed the incentives coming from the acceptance of party position shifts.

Turning to the size of the reported effects (see Table 8.15), the insignificant effects unsurprisingly are among the smallest effect sizes. Increasing the respective variable by one standard deviation, neither the effect of the magnitude of mean voter position shifts nor its direction leads to a party policy shift considerably larger than one CMP point on the left-right scale. Although comparing the effect sizes of continuous and dichotomous variables is problematic, most of the other effects are quite similar in size. Only the effects of the party

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<sup>73</sup> Other authors (Adams et al. 2004; Ezrow et al. 2009; Somer-Topcu 2009a) rely on Eurobarometer data while I mainly use data from national elections studies. Although the left-right placements correlate quite highly, the shifts of mean voters do not.

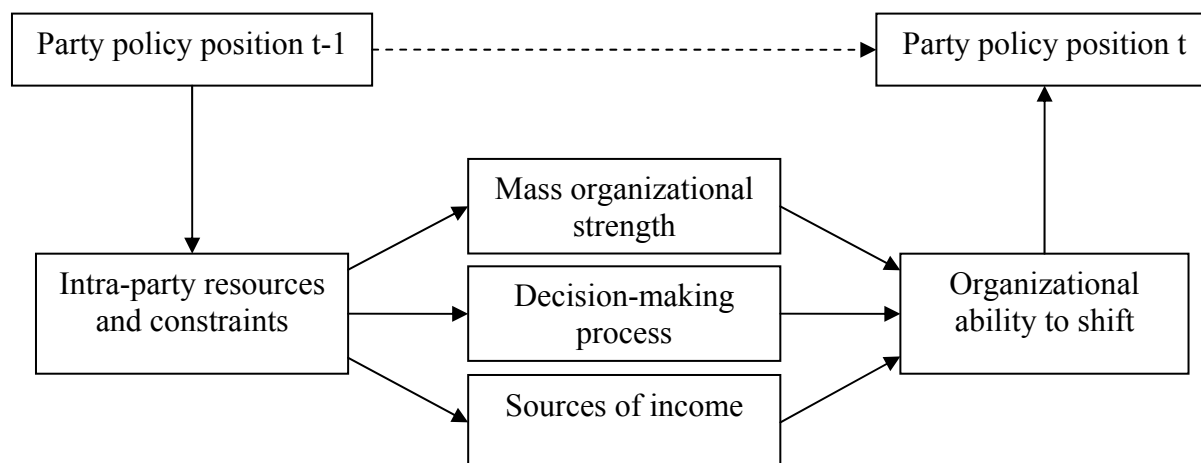
leader's prestige (including the direction of the party policy shift) and voter expectations stand out. Both effects are in line with the theoretical expectations. The effect is especially large for voter expectations of party position shifts. This finding encourages further research on party position changes as responses to rival parties' policy positions and the need to satisfying the voters' demands.

## **9 How parties' internal structures affect party policy shifts: Theory**

The previous chapters have focused on voters' perceptions of party policy shifts. I emphasize that parties face constraints on the electoral market which they have to take into account when shifting their policy positions. In other words, parties compete under constraints set by the voters' perception process of party policy shifts.

This chapter turns the attention to another factor affecting the parties' abilities to shift their policy positions. I argue that a party's internal structure affects its behavior. So far, I have treated parties as "unitary actors". But although they "do in practice tend to go into and come out of government as single actors" (Laver and Schofield 1998: 15), parties do not merely consist of a relatively small team seeking votes and office. Rather, parties are more or less complex organizations comprising many – often many thousand – people with various interests. Moreover, organizational rules provide a hierarchical structure. In this chapter, I outline the consequences of intra-party factors on party position shifts.

**Figure 9.1: Intra-party structure and its effect on party policy shifts**



The chapter proceeds as follows: I discuss the consequences of relaxing the assumption that parties are unitary actors. Specifically, I study three factors which are expected to affect a party's ability to shift its policy platform (see Figure 9.1). First, I argue that a party's ability to shift its policy positions hinges on its labor resources it may activate: To advertise a party position shift, activists help to "spread the word". Therefore, parties equipped with many activists are more likely to get their message heard. Yet, parties may substitute lacking rank-

and-file by more capital-intensive forms of advertisement. Hence, the positive effect may diminish once public subsidies are in place.

Second, I argue that a party's internal decision-making processes affect its way of making policy reforms. Drawing on the principal-agent literature, I argue that party leaders act as agents of their policy-seeking rank-and-file. As for all principal-agent relationships, delegation entails chances but also risks: The more discretion party leaders have, the more likely they can make use of their expertise. Yet, giving leeway to party leaders also puts the members' representation at risk. Party leaders may be more interested in gaining votes and office spoils than representing the rank-and-file's policy preferences. Parties can counteract such ambitions by creating an intra-party structure with tight control mechanisms. As a major drawback, however, more inclusive party organizations granting more say to their members become inflexible. Such parties are hence less likely to move away from the status quo. I therefore expect that more hierarchically organized parties involving less veto players are more likely to shift their policy positions.

Third, I address the implications of public party funding for the dynamics of party positions. Drawing on the literature studying public finance accompanied by the emergence of cartel parties (Katz and Mair 1995), I argue that parties depending on their members' financial contributions are more likely to stick to their members' preferences. The emergence of public funding weakens the ties between parties and their rank-and-file thus decreasing the leader's dependence on the party activists. Hence, public subsidies allow for a higher flexibility when changing the policy program and make policy shifts more likely. Finally, I briefly conclude.

## 9.1 Mass organizational strength and the consequences for party policy shifts

Labor provided by party members helps party elites to achieve their goals. Strøm (1990) identifies three needs for parties to organize: First, organizations provide information about the electorate and its preferences. Second, party organizations are necessary for election campaigns and the mobilization of supporters (see also Ware 1996: 64). Third, organizations allow for the implementation of party policy in public office. It may be added that party members provide party and campaign finance (Strøm and Müller 1999: 15) and increase the legitimacy of their party's policy goals. Furthermore, party leaders may not be in the position to choose the basic organizational patterns of their party. Rather, a party's history predisposes how it organizes. Elite parties emerged from within the parliaments. Although they adapted to

the challenges of mass suffrage, their extra-parliamentary organizations remained rather weak. In contrast, mass parties root in the civil society. Following the bottom-up approach, their extra-parliamentary organizations are stronger (see also Katz and Mair 1995). The same holds for parties emerging from social movements (e.g. Green parties or the Polish Solidarność). If a party builds on such a strong extra-parliamentary pillar, party leaders can rely on a more comprehensive organization.

Party elites hence need party organizations for various reasons. But how do these factors impact on a party's ability to shift its policy position? I argue that parties benefit from having strong (i.e. sizable) party organizations. For designing favorable policy shifts, parties need *information on the citizens' preferences*. What issues are crucial for voters? What are the voters' concerns? And what policies do voters prefer? Are the supporters satisfied with a party's performance in parliament and government? Or should the party behave differently? Party activists can help providing answers to these questions by acting as the party's ears towards civil society. To the extent that activists succeed with this task, the party elite gains information on how to react to demands of the electorate. This information is crucial for choosing policy platforms that maximize a party's vote share. In light of the model presented above, parties get information on what voters expects them to do. Without being informed about voter expectations, parties are at risk of making policy shifts which voters do not accept (i.e. consider credible). Uncertainty on the voters' acceptance and thus the expected benefit makes parties to refrain from taking the costs of shifting policy positions. Information on the supporters' demands thus increases the acceptance of party policy shifts and makes party position shifts more likely.

Party activists also help parties to get their shift message heard. One of the major advantages of large party organizations is the *workforce members provide during election campaigns*. Party members organize party rallies and other activities, talk to citizens, provide information on their party's goals, defend their party against criticism, and advertise its issues. In short, party activists make voters to vote for their party. Regarding policy position shifts, parties with mass organizational strength have more capacity to advertise and to promote these shifts. Parties lacking activist manpower miss this kind of communication channel to the electorate. Consequently, the voters are less likely to receive platform changes.

In addition, party organizations are a *recruitment pool for public office*. They train future political elites and serve as screening mechanism for the candidates' abilities for higher office (Müller 2000: 327-328). Within parties, candidates for public office learn the rules of

political professionalism (e.g. delivering a speech or arguing in a discussion) and parties hence improve the quality of political elites. Parties currently face membership losses both within the core party (Mair and van Biezen 2001) and in their youth organizations (Hooghe et al. 2004). Decreasing membership figures have severe consequences for political parties and their recruitment of eligible candidates. The smaller the pool of potential candidates, the less likely is competition for intra-party office. Moreover, the smaller the pool of candidates, the less likely is the recruitment of good candidates for public office. In other words, organizationally weaker parties are less likely to produce competent party elites. In the model presented above (see Chapter 4), I argue that the party leader's prestige is crucial for the voters' acceptance of party policy shifts. The weaker parties are in organizational terms, the less likely the emergence of competent party leaders and consequently, the less likely it is that voters accept policy shifts.

A party's rank-and-file also serves as a *source of income*. Higher incomes allow for costly campaigns which, in turn, increase the electoral chances of parties. Prosperous parties are able to hire professional advisors and can afford more expensive election campaigns including TV commercials and radio spots. In contrast, parties with empty coffers are less likely to run effective campaigns and to attract potential members and voters. This, in turn, decreases their future revenues. While the sources of party income vary between systems and parties, membership fees figure prominently for most parties. Parties hence also benefit financially from large membership stocks.

In sum, a party's mass organizational strength affects its ability to shift policy positions in several ways. Activists serve as feedback loops that provide information on the voters' demands, advertise policy shifts, increase the pool of potential candidates for higher office, and fund election campaigns. So doing, party members provide information on the voters' acceptance of party policy shifts and increase the party's visibility and hence, the reception of party policy shifts. These considerations lead to

#### Hypotheses O1:

The higher a party's mass organizational strength, the higher is its ability to shift the policy platform.

As a refinement of Hypothesis O1, one may argue that the role of party activists has changed over time. In fact, the outlined mechanisms mainly hold for older forms of political communication. In the classical mass party (Duverger 1954), party members are the central



link between the party and the electorate. It is party members who advertise policies (and policy shifts) and provide the party's campaign funding. But the time has changed and so have parties, party membership, and political communication. In the 1950s, Duverger (1954) argued that mass parties are superior to other forms of party organization. But as Epstein (1967: 257) noted already in the 1960s, Duverger's outlook may have been too hasty. Parties adapted to the changes in their environment and transformed from the mass party to the catch-all party (Kirchheimer 1966), electoral-professional party (Panebianco 1988), and more recently the cartel party type (Katz and Mair 1995). Over the course of time, the role of party members has changed. Once television entered the mass arena, the forms of political communication changed fundamentally (Mancini 1999). Instead of direct contacts, parties rather communicate to larger audiences via the public mass media (see also Müller 1997). Moreover, parties in Western Europe recently suffer from decreasing membership figures (Mair and van Biezen 2001) and parties in new democracies in Southern and Eastern Europe show much lower membership levels than their West European counterparts (van Biezen 2003).

These developments change the role of party members. Parties are able to substitute (lacking) members by other means. Hence, the advantage of parties with organizational resources diminishes. Parties substitute labor-intensive with capital-intensive activities (Strøm 1990; Strøm and Müller 1999). Instead of relying on "cheap labor" of their activists, parties use financial means to fulfill functions once performed by mass organizations. Paid professionals and polls substitute the feedback mechanisms of party members. Rather than relying on reports from their rank-and-file, parties consider evaluation and sympathy scores from polling institutes and may react accordingly. Moreover, making public party policy shifts partly passes over to the media. Instead of talking to voters face-to-face, parties build on radio and TV advertisement and their presence in news reports and talk shows. Finally, parties' dependence on financial membership contributions decreases. On the one hand, the drop in membership figures diminishes the rank-and-file's contribution to party revenues. On the other hand, parties manage to (over-)compensate these losses by generating income from new sources, in particular public party financing.

The state supports political parties in a number of ways: Parties benefit from free time for radio and TV spots during election campaigns, financial aid to youth organizations, means for their parliamentary groups, and direct public subsidies to the central party organizations. The precise nature of these means and their introduction vary across countries. Moreover,

parties differ in the share of their total income coming from public subsidies. In general, however, public subsidies nowadays provide the lion's share of party income. At the end of the 1980s, public money on average constituted around 25% of the income of Austrian parties. In Finland and Germany, the parties' share of income from public money even accounts for roughly 75% (Pierre et al. 2000). It is therefore reasonable to assume that parties receiving public subsidies can substitute the members' contributions in terms of voluntary labor by resorting to capital-intensive means. As a consequence, public subsidies diminish the effect of a party's mass organizational strength on its ability to shift the policy position. I postulate a refinement of Hypothesis O1:

Hypotheses O2:

The higher a party's mass organizational strength, the higher is its ability to shift its policy platform *if* public subsidies are not in place.

## 9.2 Intra-party decision-making and its effect on party policy shifts

Party activists do not merely work for the party for the joy of activism. As a consequence, party organizations do not only provide cheap labor but also constrain party leaders because members expect to have an impact on the party's policy (Strøm 1990: 574).

The relationship between a party's elite and its rank-and-file may be understood best in terms of a principal-agent relationship (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). As Lupia notes, delegation is "an act where one group or person, called a *principal*, relies on another person or group, called an *agent*, to act on the principal's behalf" (Lupia 2003: 33; emphasis in the original). Within parties, members delegate competences to the party elite. Delegation is useful if the principals do not have the time and the expertise to do the tasks themselves (Epstein and O'Halloran 1994). Yet, delegation also entails risks of *adverse selection* and *moral hazard*. Party members may select inappropriate agents (*adverse selection*) who are unable or unwilling to fulfill their tasks. *Moral hazard* implies that agents take actions unobserved and undesired by their principals (Lupia 2003). Especially if the agent's preferences diverge from his principal's, the latter may be worse off by delegating tasks to the agent. Principals are also able to counteract potential delegation problems within parties (for an overview see Müller 2000; Müller and Meyer 2010). For example, party members screen candidates for higher office to ensure that their agent's interests are in line with their personal preferences. Moreover, a party's rank-and-file monitors the agent's action in office to prevent (or to contain) moral hazard. Most important, however, party members can hold their party

leaders accountable by disposing them from office if their behavior is not in line with the members' expectations.

The members' expectations are closely linked to the reasons for participating in their respective party. Whatever drives the members' motivation to become and stay members of a political party: Party leaders have to fulfill these needs to keep their jobs. In fact, the question of why people participate in political parties has been subject to vast scholarly attention. Parties produce public goods (Schlesinger 1984) so that all voters are affected by the party's policy output. Hence, participating in parties is a collective action problem because voters can also "free-ride" taking the benefits without taking the costs (Olson 1965). The problem is solved if side payments exist. Such side payments grant party members private benefits such as patronage and prospects of upward organizational mobility for their participation (Strøm 1990: 577).

Although activists may benefit from party patronage, they are mostly willing to carry the costs of participation because they aim at influencing policy decisions. Hence, activists are policy-seeking actors (Robertson 1976: 32; Aldrich 1983; Katz and Mair 1993: 598). If a party no longer pursues its members' policy preferences, dissatisfied members will not accept these policies. If party leaders nevertheless aim for such policies, the rank-and-file will attempt to veto the proposed policies, remove the leadership, or take the "exit option" (Hirschmann 1970).

To keep and attract party members, party elites may give power to the party's rank-and-file. Party activists are more likely to work for the party (and its leadership) if they have a say in policy and personnel matters. Party leaders may therefore open the party for intra-party democracy by decentralizing policy decisions. Furthermore, party leaders may increase their dependence on their members by decentralizing the leadership selection. So doing, party leaders stress their accountability vis-à-vis the party's rank-and-file (Strøm 1990). Hence, party leaders "pay" for the manpower of activists by granting access to policy decisions and by linking their fate as party leaders to the good will of their members.

A party's organizational form has various implications on its modus operandi. If a party chooses a decentralized organizational structure, intra-party democracy increases the number of intra-party veto players. Yet, as the number of veto players increases, policy stability does not decrease (Tsebelis 2002: 25). Therefore, parties with more intra-party democracy are less flexible than centralized parties. If (as I argue) party members are policy-

seeking actors, their inclusion into decision-making processes hinder party leaders to adapt the party to new challenges. In fact, parties with a high number of intra-party veto players should be most vulnerable to “friction” (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). In other words, decentralized parties are not likely to adapt to changing environments.

The causal mechanism hence works as follows: A party’s history and its dependence on its members’ workforce determine the intra-party decision-making processes. Party leaders give more say to the party’s rank-and-file (and hence reduce the incentive problems of their members) if they depend on their manpower. Yet, increasing the rank-and-file’s say in decision-making increases the number of veto players and policy stability does (at least) not decrease. Therefore, decentralized parties are less able to adapt the party’s policies.

Several studies show the effect of organizational characteristics on the party’s ability to adapt to a changing environment. Comparing Austrian and Swedish Social Democrats, Kitschelt (1994a) argues that classical mass parties face new challenges. If mass parties grant their members a say in policy and personnel decisions, they become inflexible. In contrast, if a party’s leadership is rather autonomous, it is more likely to adapt to a changing political market and hence increases its electoral chances. Similarly, Robertson (1976) argues that parties aim at winning elections but they also aim at attracting party members. The two goals may contradict each other and a party’s organizational form shapes the emphasis parties put on the one or the other. Giving a say to party members leads to policy positions which are more extreme than vote-maximizing policy platforms and hence, “the less power the members of a party have, and the stronger the leadership, the better its electoral chances” (Robertson 1976: 43). More hierarchical organized parties should hence be able to put more emphasis on the electoral market and be more likely to react to changing environments (see also Walgrave and Nuytemans 2009: 201).

Case studies also prove the plausibility of the argument (see Share 1999; Maravall 2008): In 1979, the leader of the Spanish Social Democrats (PSOE), Felipe González, aimed at abandoning the party’s Marxist image because he knew the fear it raised among centrist voters. At that time, the center-right UCD was the dominant party and González advocated a centrist party position shift to make the PSOE competitive. Yet, the Party Congress rejected his proposal. After González refused to run for re-election as the party’s leader, however, the party elite was able to implement new intra-party rules leading to a more centralized party structure. As a consequence, González was able to shift the party’s policy position to the right and attracted a sufficient share of voters to win the general election in 1982.

In sum, I postulate

Hypotheses O3:

The more hierarchical a party's decision-making process, the higher its ability to shift the policy platform.

### 9.3 Sources of income and their effect on party policy shifts

Finally, I consider a party's financial sources as a potentially factor determining its ability to shift policy positions. Financial resources are important for maintaining the party organization and activities. Actors controlling the party revenues hence constitute "veto players" whose preferences party leaders are likely to satisfy (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Mass parties primarily rely on membership fees and contributions of labor unions. Party leaders hence not only need to consider the rank-and-file's willingness to provide manpower but also their motivation to supply financial contributions. In the second half of the last century, the parties' sources of income have changed. Instead of private money coming from membership fees and donations of special interests (e.g. churches, labor unions, and employers' associations), parties increasingly draw on public money. Public funding of political parties is one, if not the central indicator of what is called the cartelization of political parties (Katz and Mair 1995; Mair 1997: chapter 6; but also Kitschelt 2000; van Biezen 2003; 2004; Detterbeck 2005; Bolleyer 2008; Mair 2008; van Biezen 2008; Mair 2009).

Cartel parties "become entrenched within the state and employ resources of the state in order to guarantee their own survival" (van Biezen 2004: 706). It is argued that the emergence of cartel parties has many implications for modern democracies. The introduction of public funding made parties more depend on the state (van Biezen 2008: 346).<sup>74</sup> At the same time, the emergence of cartel parties affects the relationship between parties and their members. Public subsidies reduce the leaders' (financial) dependence on the members and hence provide them with the opportunity to disregard their preferences. With public money being available, party leaders can substitute capital for labor inputs and deemphasize policy-seeking (Strøm 1990; see also Strøm and Müller 1999: 21). Instead, parties adopt an electoral strategy. Even from the financial perspective this is a rewarding strategy as maximizing a party's vote

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<sup>74</sup> The drawbacks of this dependence are obvious. In particular, parties have fewer incentives to keep their membership and are hence said to deviate from civil society. But public funding also ensures the survival of political parties, avoids corruption, and protects the independence of political actors (Nassmacher 2001a; van Biezen 2008: 348).

share is associated with maximizing its funding from the public purse (van Biezen 2003: 40; 2004).

As a consequence, public funding reduces the parties' incentives to represent their members' interests. In the words of van Biezen (2003: 40) "the development of structural and more permanent relationships between party organization and society" becomes less likely. Moreover, Mair (2008) states that parties nowadays tend to follow a "mainstream consensus" (2008: 212) and are therefore more "coalitionable" and less partisan (2008: 216). Hence, parties "govern but no longer represent" (Mair 2009). The electoral market shows the same patterns. Parties nowadays face an amorphous electorate with decreasing tendencies in turnout, party membership and identification accompanied by increasing volatility scores. In sum, the emergence of cartel parties and public funding leads to an increasingly volatile political market. Parties refrain from policy-seeking behavior pleasing the interests of their members and "special interests" on which contributions they depend. Rather, parties compete for votes because votes ensure public funding and hence the party's survival. The electoral market allows for this because the number of floating voters increases and the share of voters with party identification declines. In maximizing their vote share, parties follow the electoral market, that is, they adapt their policy positions to the changing environment. This leads to

#### Hypotheses O4:

The larger the share of public subsidies in a party's income, the higher is its ability to shift its policy platform.

## 9.4 Summary

This chapter is devoted to the theoretical expectations of how intra-party factors affect party position shifts. In deciding on their policy positions, parties do not focus exclusively on rival parties and voters receiving and accepting policy shifts. Rather, they pay tribute to the way they are organized. In particular, I identify three factors shaping a party's ability to shift its policy position.

Parties differ in their membership figures. The better equipped parties are with activists providing information on the electorate's preferences, running electoral campaigns, ensuring vivid intra-party competition for office, and safeguarding the party's revenues by contributing membership fees, the higher their abilities for shifting party platforms (Hypothesis O1). Yet, the advantage derived from mass organizational strength diminishes

over time. Political competition changes with electoral campaigns becoming more capital-intensive and oriented towards the general mass media. Public funding allows parties to substitute lacking manpower by the services of professionals such as pollsters and mass media communication. Therefore, I expect that the advantage of parties having strong mass organizations for their ability to shift policy platforms diminishes once public funding is in place (Hypothesis O2).

I also expect that a party's internal decision-making processes are relevant. Party members delegate competences to the party elite but parties differ in the level of discretion granted to these selected agents. The more leeway party leaders have, the higher the likelihood of party policy changes. In contrast, less hierarchical parties involve more veto players when making intra-party decisions so that moves away from the status quo are not likely (Hypothesis O3).

Finally, I argue that public subsidies decrease the party leaders' dependence on the rank-and-file. As long as parties raise their funds mainly from donations and fees of their members, party leaders are likely to orient their positions on the members' policy preferences. The emergence of public subsidies introduces a new incentive: Because public money is usually tied to vote share, party leaders who aim at maximizing their party's vote share are also maximizing party income. So doing, parties are more likely to adapt their policy platforms to floating voters rather than sticking to their members' preferences. Consequently, publicly funded parties are thus more likely to shift their policy positions (Hypothesis O4).

## **10 How parties' internal structures affect party policy shifts: Data and methods**

In the previous chapter, I have outlined my expectations of how a party's intra-party structure affects its ability to shift policy positions. In this chapter, I present the data used to test the hypotheses. I start by presenting my sample of parties (and party position shifts). The selected cases are "most similar" keeping additional variables constant. Simultaneously, the case selection allows for sufficient variance on the key independent variables of interest. As a more practical issue, the case selection was driven by the availability of data on intra-party variables. Next, I describe the variables used to measure a party's policy shift, its mass organizational strength, internal decision-making rules, and its sources of income. I also present the control variables used in the analyses. Finally, I present descriptive patterns of the data and outline the statistical models before I briefly conclude.

### **10.1 Case selection**

As for the previous analyses on the effect of voter perceptions on party position shifts (see Chapters 7 and 8), I test my theoretical expectations on a sample of ten West European countries. Specifically, I study the effects of intra-party variables on a party's ability to shift its policy platform for Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The reasons for this case selection are similar to those stated above and I briefly recapitulate them here.

I aim for most similar cases to keep as many additional variables as possible constant. So doing, differences in the parties' ability to shift their policy positions are due to differences in the key independent variables (Mill 1846; Przeworski and Teune 1970). It may therefore be appropriate to sample one specific party or several parties within one country. Yet, such a strategy has two shortcomings: First, the number of observations does not allow for testing the proposed effects quantitatively. Second, some of the key independent variables do not show sufficient variance within countries. Therefore, I have to include different countries to let key independent variables vary.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> As an alternative strategy, one may aim for Mill's method of agreement. So doing, one may select cases for which the key independent and the dependent variable are (nearly) constant while additional (control) variables vary. Such a case selection strategy makes the selection of several parties within one country unfeasible because institutional factors are constant in those instances. A proper case selection would therefore require the



Nevertheless, case selection is as close as practically possible to a most similar systems design. The countries are in the same world region and show relatively high similarity on various measures of socio-economic development (like growth, education level, and life expectation). Moreover, all countries are parliamentary systems and thus share a central role of political parties in backing (coalition) governments in parliament. Furthermore, the selected countries are long-established democracies and thus provide a long time series of party policy positions. To obtain the same number of observations for new democracies, it is necessary to substitute shorter time periods by increasing the number of countries. This, in turn, further increases the number of alternative explanations. Finally, longer time series also allow for increasing the variance on the key independent variables. To take the example of party finance, the countries under consideration witness periods without and with public funding to political parties. Therefore, it is possible to trace the effect of public subsidies on party position shifts. Newer democracies, especially Spain and Hungary, adopted the relatively high levels of public funding from their very beginning (van Biezen 2003: chapter 8). Relying on such a sample would therefore reduce the variance on the key variables of interest.

Case selection is also guided by more pragmatic reasons, namely data availability. Systematic data on intra-party factors like membership figures, decision-making rules, and the parties' revenues (including those from direct public funding) is scarce. The first systematic account of collecting intra-party data for several countries is Katz and Mair's (1992) edited data collection on *Party Organizations*. In that, country experts report data on various intra-party characteristics like financial accounts, membership figures, decision-making rules and many more for a period of thirty years (1960-1990). The data is used in a number of publications (see e.g. Katz and Mair 1994; Krouwel 1999; Pierre et al. 2000; Bille 2001; Mair and van Biezen 2001) and is, up to now, the only available systematic data collection on political parties. Similar data for other countries and a comparable time span is not available. This also holds for countries serving as alternative cases like newer Southern European and Eastern European democracies. Data on membership figures and public funding are only available for selected countries (van Biezen 2003), only in binary form (for public funding) (Walecki 2001; van Biezen 2004; Birnir 2005), or not at all. I hence rely on the time series data collected by the country experts in Katz and Mair's (1992) *Party Organizations*. Except for the United States (because of its presidential system) and Italy (because of the lacking

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researcher to sample individual parties from a number of different countries (and institutional backgrounds) which is difficult because of data availability problems.

validity of CMP data (Pelizzo 2003)), I use all countries for which data on intra-party factors is available. This leads to a sample of party policy shifts in ten West European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom).

## 10.2 The dependent variables

To measure the location of party policy platforms, I rely on data collected by the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006). It is therefore identical to the data used in Chapter 7. Using hand-coding, the research team coded election programs of all major parties in 24 OECD countries plus Israel for the whole post-war period (or democratization) until 1998 (Budge et al. 2001). The sample was extended over time and space now covering 51 countries and more recent elections (Klingemann et al. 2006). The data suffers from weaknesses already discussed in Chapter 7. Yet, I am able to avoid some of them by neglecting cases for which CMP data does not produce valid estimates of the “true” party positions (see e.g. Pelizzo 2003; Benoit and Laver 2007b: Figure 4 and Table 2). Moreover and despite the discussions on the data’s quality (Benoit and Laver 2007a; Budge and Pennings 2007a; 2007b; see also Appendix A), CMP data is up to now the only available data source measuring party policy positions for various countries and over several decades. Alternative methods for estimating policy preferences of political actors (see e.g. Laver et al. 2003; Slapin and Proksch 2008) have yet not been used to create similar comparative databases.

In the following analyses, I use the left-right scale from the CMP dataset (see also Laver and Budge 1992: 26-27). *Party policy shifts* are measured as the differences in the parties’ left-right policy positions in two subsequent elections. This variable is used in a large number of studies dealing with the dynamics of party competition (e.g. Budge 1994; Adams et al. 2004; Adams, Clark et al. 2006; Tavits 2007; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009a; Somer-Topcu 2009c). Although the hypotheses on intra-party factors deal with the magnitude of party policy shifts, I refrain from using the absolute values for the *party policy shift* variable. Rather, I recode the covariates (and the constant) as described in Chapter 7. I do so because using absolute values of the party policy shift estimates leads to distributions which are skewed to the right and hence violate one of the Gauss-Markov assumptions for linear regression models. Note, however, that the interpretation of the coefficients’ direction and

size is (due to their transformation) similar to that applied to regression models including the magnitude of party policy shifts as a dependent variable.

### 10.3 Covariates

Table 10.1 provides an overview of the concepts presented in the previous chapter and how they are measured in the analyses. In addition to the variables of interest (mass organizational strength, intra-party decision-making, and public funding), I outline how I measure additional control variables.

**Table 10.1: Independent variables for the data analyses**

	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Indicators and measurement</b>
<b>Key covariates</b>	Mass organizational strength	Number of members divided by maximal number of party votes in the last two elections
	Intra-party decision-making	Inclusion of party members in the selection of candidates <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No say: party leader or non-selected agency chooses candidates</li> <li>- Some say: selected party agency decides</li> <li>- Full say: party members personally decide on candidates</li> </ul>
	Public subsidies (dichotomous)	Direct public subsidies to a party's central organization <sup>76</sup> 0 = No 1 = Yes
	Public subsidies (continuous)	Share of a party's income from public subsidies
<b>Control variables</b>	Party size	Vote share in percent – Keman's (1994) threshold for dominant parties
	Time	Number of elections since World War II
	Niche party	Dummy variable measuring whether a party is mainstream or niche; Coding following Meguid (2005; 2008) 0 = Mainstream party 1 = Niche party
	Left- and right-wing parties	Dummy variables indicating whether parties are left-wing, centre, or right-wing parties; coding following the trichotomous measure of party policy positions (see Chapter 7)

*Mass organizational strength* indicates a party's ability to draw on strong membership organizations. Using a party's membership figures is a simple way to measure organizational resources. Yet, absolute numbers are not comparable across countries because the potential pool of party members hinges on the size of the electorate. In other words, a German party with 50.000 members does not have the same organizational resources as a Danish party with the same membership figures. Therefore, previous research uses standardized membership figures dividing the number of party members by the size of the national electorate (see e.g.

<sup>76</sup> For Ireland and the United Kingdom, data on public subsidies to the parliamentary groups is taken.

Katz et al. 1992). The argument is that parties aim at representing the electorate's interests so that the share of organized members relative to the electorate is a reasonable estimate for a party's organizational strength. In fact, this measure is appropriate comparing the parties' aggregate organizational strength across countries (see e.g. Mair and van Biezen 2001). So doing, we are able to judge how the countries' party systems differ. Furthermore, using a ratio of party members divided by the size of the electorate is useful when comparing mass organizational strength of parties which are similar in size and ideology (see e.g. Kitschelt 1994a).

Yet, the measure suffers from a severe drawback. Parties differ in size, history, and organizational type. Electorally large parties tend to have more members than smaller ones so that calculating a party's organizational strength as a ratio of party members and the size of the electorate results in a measure highly depending on a party's vote share. In other words, we find that larger parties are "better organized" than smaller ones. The same bias occurs for younger parties which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Green parties). Their vote shares are usually much smaller than those of long established major parties. As a consequence, measuring mass organizational strength as a ratio of party members and the size of the electorate results in estimates discriminating small and young parties.

I argue that using a common denominator is not a good option. The implicit assumption of using a ratio of party members divided by the size of the electorate is that all parties aim at representing the whole electorate and the assumption is likely to be wrong. As Katz and colleagues (1992: 330) state: "[T]he most obvious single determinant of raw numbers of members is the size of the available membership pool". I argue that this number differs across parties because smaller ones do not aim at reaching larger parts of the society. Literally, the name "party" implies that they represent a part of the electorate (see also Sartori 1976: chapter 1) and the share (or part) to be represented differs across parties. This is most obvious for regional parties (e.g. the Swedish Peoples' Party in Finland) that explicitly aim at representing *parts* (usually minorities) of the electorate. But the same holds nearly all parties because each party represents specific policies and interests thus excluding parts of the electorate from its target population.

I hence opt for a party-specific denominator to measure a party's mass organizational strength. The best way to capture the group of potential party members is to define the group of *potential* party voters. A party's potential vote share may be measured as the share of the electorate with a moderate chance of ever voting for that party. One way of doing so is using

“propensity to vote” questions asking whether voters would ever vote for a particular party (see e.g. van der Eijk et al. 1999). As a result, mass organizational strength hinges on the number of a party members and a “target group” it aims to represent. Even parties with moderate membership figures may have strong organizations if the number of potential voters is reasonable small. Unfortunately, “propensity to vote” questions are scarce in election surveys.

I therefore rely on an alternative measure using the maximal number of party voters in the last two elections as a proxy for a party’s voter potential. Although the measure is inferior to directly estimating a party’s target group, it outperforms using the whole electorate as a common denominator for all parties. Moreover, using the maximal number of party voters in the last two elections is a reasonable estimate of what parties aim to achieve. In addition, it avoids the problems involved when using the *actual* party votes as denominator (because losing elections results in an increase of mass organizational strength; see also Katz et al. 1992: 331). To be sure, the party-specific measure of mass organizational resources does not characterize a party’s actual presence in society. Rather, it may be seen as an “indicator of the respective subcultural implantation of the parties” (Bartolini 1983: 189) and that is what mass organizational strength aims to measure.

For data on party membership figures until the end of the 1980s, I mainly rely on Katz and Mair’s (1992) data collection on party organizations. For later time periods, I use several sources including literature on party organizations, political yearbooks, and financial accounts of parties (including data on their party membership). More specifically, I use data for Austria (Müller 1992; Mair and van Biezen 2001; Dachs 2006; Liegl 2006; Luther 2006; Müller 2006; Ucakar 2006), Belgium (Res Publica 1988; 1989; Deschouwer 1992; Res Publica 1992; 1993; 1997; 1998; 2001; 2002; 2004; 2005), Denmark (Bille 1992; Mair and van Biezen 2001), Finland (Sundberg and Gylling 1992; Mair and van Biezen 2001), Germany (Poguntke and Boll 1992; Scarrow 2002; Niedermayer 2009), Ireland (Farrell 1992; King and Gillespie 1998; Totten and MacCárthaigh 2001; Murphy and Farrell 2002), the Netherlands (Koole and van de Welde 1992; Voerman 1996; de Boer et al. 1999; Deschouwer 2002; Hippe et al. 2003; 2004), Norway (Svåsand 1992; Mjelde 2009), Sweden (Pierre and Widfeldt 1992; Widfeldt 1999), and the United Kingdom (Webb 1992; 2002; Labour Party 2006; Liberal Democrats 2006). Data on party votes stems from the country chapters in Katz and Mair (1992). For parties and elections after 1990, I mainly rely on data from online data bases

(Election Resources on the Internet 2010; Interparliamentary Union 2010) and secondary literature (Mitchell 1993; Plasser et al. 2000).

*Intra-party decision rules* may be measured in various ways. Hypothesis O3 states that the more hierarchical a party's way of making decisions, the higher its ability to shift the policy platform. It is therefore necessary to have a measure for intra-party rules indicating the members' say in decision-making processes. In principal, such a measure could deal with the members' intra-party influence studying their effect on policy decisions or – more indirectly – on personnel decisions which, in turn, influence policy choices.

Studying the members' influence on party position shifts, it is preferable to measure the members' involvement in policy decision-making. Specifically, the data should capture the members' role in formulating and deciding on party policies. Members involved in the development of party policies set the agenda for election programs, coalition negotiations, and campaign issues. In contrast, if a party leadership presents proposals which may be amended and finally put to a vote on party congresses, members' influence decreases. But even if party members merely check proposals coming from the party leadership, intra-party rules regarding amendments, voting rules (accepting/rejecting proposed election programs as a whole or in parts), and timing affect the members' effective intra-party power.<sup>77</sup>

Research on the development of party policy platforms is rather scarce. Most scholars concentrate on the changes and perils when using party manifestos as data sources for estimating party policy positions. Only recently, some case studies delve into intra-party affairs showing how manifestos actually emerge. Yet, apart from case studies such as the ones by Shaw (2002) on the British Labour Party and by Pettitt (2007) on the Danish and British left parties at specific points in time, there is not much systematic research on the members' impact on party policy platforms. Given the constraints of a dissertation project, it is unfeasible to collect this data for a large-n analysis.

As an alternative, I propose to use the members' role in making personnel decisions. Like voters in representative democracies, members do not necessarily need to decide on policies in order to have an impact on party policies. Rather, members elect representatives who then formulate the party's policies and remain accountable to the members. Hence,

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<sup>77</sup> Empirically, members' direct effect on party policies is rather weak (Carty 2004: 19). This is partly due to the parties' organizational structure that typically limits the influence of individual members (see, e.g., Michel's (1915) "iron law of oligarchy"). The perception of party members conforms to this expectation. Surveys show that ordinary party members complain about the lack of influence on intra-party policy decisions (Young and Cross 2002).

members indirectly affect party policies by electing party leaders or selecting parliamentary candidates (Crotty 1968: 260). Supporting this statement, Schattschneider (1942) states:

“The nominating process [...] has become the crucial process of the party. The nature of the nominating procedure determines the nature of the party; he who can make the nominations is the owner of the party. This is therefore one of the best points at which to observe the distribution of power within the party.” (Schattschneider 1942: 64)

Because personnel decisions are crucial, it is not surprising to observe intra-party conflict over the choice of candidates signifying conflict over specific policies (Ranney 1981: 103; Gallagher 1988a: 1-4). In that sense, the members’ impact on personnel decisions serves as a proxy for their say on policy issues. The more democratic the selection of candidates, the more power party members have within their party. Yet, it is not entirely clear what a “democratic” candidate selection entails. It ought to measure how “democratically the parties conduct their internal affairs” (Bille 2001: 365).

There are at least two different dimensions of candidate selection processes. First, *inclusiveness* indicates which actors are members of the selectorate (see Ranney 1981; Rahat and Hazan 2001; Rahat 2007). On one end of the continuum, party leaders may decide on the selection of candidates. Although rarely observed in Europe, this practice is sometimes applied in parties of the extreme right (Rahat 2007: 160). From that endpoint, the selection process becomes more inclusive as the number of actors deciding on the candidate selection increases. Candidate selection may be made by a (unelected) small group of party elites. Inclusion increases if the selecting party agencies themselves are elected by party members. In that case, party members elect delegates who, in turn, decide on the candidates. Next, party members may directly choose candidates by membership ballots. The most inclusive mechanism to choose candidates for office is primaries. Although practically non-existent in Europe, primaries are used in the United States.<sup>78</sup> In this case, the selectorate entails party members as well as non-members.

Second, the selection of candidates may be distinguished according to its *centralization* (see Ranney 1981; Rahat and Hazan 2001; Rahat 2007): In its most centralized form, parties choose candidates at the national level. National and sub-national party units may also share in the selection of candidates for higher offices. Usually the process involves one side proposing a list of candidates and the other one deciding on the proposals. Finally,

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<sup>78</sup> For more information on the various forms of primaries including open, closed, and blanket primaries, see Ranney (1981: 86).

the selection process may be decentralized with sub-national (i.e. regional or local) units deciding on the selection of candidates.

Although inclusiveness and centralization are conceptually different, research on party organizations sometimes mixes both dimensions up. Bille (2001) states that “[t]he less *centralized* the authority making the final decisions in a party [...], the better are the possibilities for a greater number of people to participate in the process, i.e. the process will be more *inclusive*” (Bille 2001: 365; emphasis added). In general, the statement is not wrong since decentralization and inclusiveness should correlate (see also Epstein 1967: 202). The more decentralized the candidate selection, the more inclusive the selection tends to be. Theoretically, however, the two concepts are conceptually different and should be treated as such.

What is puzzling is that recent research concentrated on the centralization rather than the inclusiveness of candidate selection (Bille 2001; Lundell 2004). I see no reason for doing so. In contrast, I argue that inclusiveness is more appropriate to measure the members’ say on intra-party decision-making. The measurement is closer to the theoretical concept of the (policy motivated) members’ say in intra-party decision making. Furthermore, the centralization of candidate selection may also be due to country-specific factors that are beyond a party’s power. For example, a country’s size or its nature as either a federal or unitary state may affect the parties’ centralization (Thorlakson 2009). It is therefore reasonable to rely on inclusiveness to measure the members’ intra-party influence.

I distinguish three categories to measure the inclusiveness of a party’s candidate selection process: First, the selection process is highly exclusive if party members have no (direct) influence in the selection process. In other words, party leaders or unelected party agencies decide on the candidates. Second, the selection process is partly inclusive if party members have an indirect say on the selection process. Party members elect delegates who, in turn, decide on candidates and party lists. Third, the selection process is fully inclusive if party members directly elect their candidates.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Although more fine-grained measurements may be feasible (see Rahat and Hazan 2001; Rahat 2007), it is empirically difficult to distinguish the various selection methods. Put differently, more fine-grained measurements entail a higher risk of coding errors.



For the coding, I mainly rely on secondary literature. For the period until 1990, I use Katz and Mair's (1992) data handbook on party organizations<sup>80</sup> and Gallagher and Marsh's (1988) edited volume on candidate selection.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, I use descriptions of country experts from Katz and Mair's (1994) edited volume for Belgium (Deschouwer 1994), Germany (Poguntke 1994), Ireland (Farrell 1994), the Netherlands (Koole 1994), Norway (Svåsand 1994), and the United Kingdom (Webb 1994). Data on the selection processes also stems from additional journal publications (Obler 1973; 1974; Pennings 1999; Hopkin 2001; Lundell 2004; Hazan and Voerman 2006; Rahat 2007) and book sections in edited volumes (Leijenaar 1993; Sainsbury 1993; Helander 1997; Müller et al. 1999; Scarrow et al. 2000; Kuitunen 2002; Pedersen 2002; Valen et al. 2002; Dachs 2006; Luther 2006; Müller 2006; Ucakar 2006). I also rely on electoral laws and party statutes (German Federal Elections Act 1993 [amended 2008]; Finnish Ministry of Justice 1998 [amended 2004]; Die Grünen 2005).

I have hypothesized above that *public subsidies* affect a party's ability to shift its policy platform. Public funding allows for compensating labor by capital-intensive means thus diminishing the effect of a party's mass organizational resources (Hypothesis O2). Moreover, public subsidies decrease the party leaders' dependence on their rank-and-file allowing for an orientation towards the electoral market and more substantial party platform changes (Hypothesis O4). I use two different measures for public subsidies: First, I use a dichotomous variable indicating whether parties receive public subsidies or not. Specifically, I use the year when public subsidies to the parties' central organizations were introduced. Here, the countries in the sample differ widely (see also Pierre et al. 2000). In Germany, political parties already received public funding in 1959. Belgium was rather late introducing public subsidies to the parties' central organizations in 1989. Most of the remaining countries introduced public subsidies in the 1970s.<sup>82</sup> Second, I use a more fine-grained measure to indicate the importance of public funding for political parties. Following research on party funding (see, e.g., Wiberg 1991b; Pierre et al. 2000; Nassmacher 2001b; van Biezen 2003), I measure the relevance of public funding as its share in a party's total income. The higher the share, the lower a party's dependence on other income sources such as donations and membership fees.

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<sup>80</sup> Specifically, I use data from the various country chapters (Bille 1992; Deschouwer 1992; Farrell 1992; Koole and van de Welde 1992; Müller 1992; Pierre and Widfeldt 1992; Poguntke and Boll 1992; Sundberg and Gylling 1992; Svåsand 1992; Webb 1992).

<sup>81</sup> In detail, I draw data from the country chapters on Belgium (De Winter 1988), Germany (Roberts 1988), Ireland (Gallagher 1988b), the Netherlands (Koole and Leijenaar 1988), Norway (Valen 1988), and the United Kingdom (Denver 1988).

<sup>82</sup> For Ireland and the United Kingdom, I take the subsidies to parliamentary groups (the Irish "Oireachtas grant"; introduced in 1973 and the British "Short Money"; introduced in 1975) into account.

Data on party income and the amount of public subsidies is difficult to obtain. In some countries (e.g. Belgium and Germany), parties are obliged to publish their financial accounts on a yearly basis. In others, similar regulations have been implemented lately. In Norway, for example, parties are committed to report their annual incomes since 1999 but precise numbers are only available since the Political Parties Act (The Ministry of Government Administration and Reform 2005) came in force in 2006.<sup>83</sup> In general, these country differences heavily bias the case selection of researchers studying public funding. Most often, researchers concentrate on countries and time periods for which data is available leaving other countries and time periods aside. The same problems also affect the present study (see above).

For data on party finance until 1990, I mainly rely on Katz and Mair's (1992) data handbook on party organizations. In addition, I collect data on party income and the amount of public subsidies using additional literature, financial accounts of parties, web pages of oversight agencies (e.g. statistical bureaus and commissions) and documents from various ministries as well as parliamentary libraries. Specifically, I collect data on party income and the amount of public subsidies for Austria (Sickinger 2000; 2009), Belgium (Belgische Senaat en Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers 1993; Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers en Senaat 1997; 2000a; 2000b; 2004a; 2004b; 2004c), Denmark (using financial accounts received from the Folketinget), Germany (Deutscher Bundestag 1992; 1995; 2000; 2004), Ireland (Standards in Public Office Commission 2010), the Netherlands (Koole 1997; Gidlund and Koole 2001; Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations undated), Norway (Statistics Norway [Statistisk sentralbyrå] 2010), Sweden (using financial accounts received from the Riksdag), and the United Kingdom (Koole 2001; Gay et al. 2007).<sup>84</sup>

For the analyses in the next chapter, I also use control variables that may affect the relationship between the key covariates and the parties' abilities to shift their policy positions. More specifically, I add control variables which may have an effect on both the key covariates and the dependent variable thus leading to spurious correlations (Sieberer 2007). For that purpose, I include *party size*. The size of parties may affect their mass organizational strength, internal decision-making rules, and the share of public funding in the total revenues. One may argue that larger parties aim at representing larger segments of the electorate and face more

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<sup>83</sup> The Norwegian Ministry of Government Reform and Administration which is responsible for the public funding of political parties was unable to provide precise numbers on the public subsidies individual parties obtained before 1999 (email response September 2, 2008).

<sup>84</sup> I was not able to obtain any data for Finnish parties after 1990.

problems to recruit a reasonable proportion of it than smaller parties with smaller target populations. Moreover, larger parties are also expected to be more hierarchically organized than smaller parties. Party size also affects the effect of public subsidies. Larger parties usually mainly draw on membership fees so that subsidies are less relevant for their revenues than for smaller ones.

Because the estimates for intra-party factors are biased if party policy shifts depend on party size, I include a party's size as a control variable. Yet, simply using a party's vote share is not appropriate because these are not comparable across countries. Whether a vote share of 25% indicates a large or a rather small party depends on the number of competitors. Therefore, I use a measure taking the party system's features into account. Following Keman (1994), I use a party system-specific constant (i.e.  $100/N$  with  $N$  indicating the number of competing parties) as a parameter for party system-specific party size. I then measure a party's size as the difference between a party's vote share and Keman's factor (i.e.  $100/N$ ). As a result, party size depends on the number of competitors: A party with a vote share of 25% and three competitors, for example, has the same size as a party with 50% of the votes in a two-party system. Data on party vote shares and the number of competitors is drawn from the Comparative Manifestos Project (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006).

I also control for *time effects* in the data. Because West European parties are quite resistant to vote changes while simultaneously losing members (Mair and van Biezen 2001), it is reasonable that the parties' mass organizational resources have decreased over time. Furthermore, intra-party decision-making processes may evolve over time and newer parties are likely to choose more inclusive ways of decision-making (Katz and Mair 1995; Carty 2004). Finally, the relevance of public funding has increased over time. If party policy shifts are also time-dependent, these time trends may lead to spurious correlations. In the following analyses, I measure time effects using a count variable indicating the number of post-war parliamentary elections.

Different party types may also drive the results. *Niche parties* (Meguid 2005; 2008) share characteristics which distinguish them from their mainstream rivals. First, niche parties reject the traditional class-based (left-right) orientation of politics. Second, niche parties raise new issues which are, furthermore, not in line with classical division lines of the political system. Third, niche parties concentrate on specific issues putting emphasis on their core topics simultaneously neglecting others (Meguid 2005: 347-348). Using Meguid's notion of *niche parties*, recent research shows that mainstream and niche parties differ in their reactions

to public opinion shifts (Adams, Clark et al. 2006; Ezrow et al. 2009; Ezrow 2010). In addition, mainstream and niche parties may also differ in their membership organizations, decision-making rules, and their sources of income. I expect that niche parties have less mass organizational resources and a larger share of public subsidies in their party's income.<sup>85</sup> I therefore introduce a dummy variable indicating whether parties are mainstream or niche parties.<sup>86</sup> For the coding, I mostly rely on Meguid's distinctions (Meguid 2005; 2008). For those parties not mentioned in Meguid's work, coding follows the definition criteria mentioned above. So doing, I avoid coding according to party families as done by Adams and colleagues (Adams, Clark et al. 2006; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009b). A complete list of niche parties in the ten West European democracies under investigation can be found in Appendix E. Note that most of the niche parties have party codes identifying them as Green, nationalist, ethnic, or regional parties.

Finally, I also test whether parties are *left-wing* or *right-wing* parties. Previous research (Adams, Haupt et al. 2009) shows that left-wing parties are less likely to respond to public opinion shifts and changes of economic conditions. It may be argued that left-wing parties are ideologically inflexible relative to center and right-wing parties (Kitschelt 1994b) and are thus less likely to shift their policy positions. Because left-wing parties are also likely to differ from other parties with respect to their internal decision-making rules, mass organizational resources, and the share of their income from public funding, I include two dummy variables in the subsequent analyses indicating whether a party is left- or right-wing. To distinguish left-, center, and right-wing parties, I use the trichotomous measure introduced in Chapter 7.

## 10.4 Number of observations, data structure and model choice

### 10.4.1 The covariates

Table 10.2 summarizes the covariates used in the analyses and reports their number of observations and summary statistics. In total, the dataset contains 920 party policy shifts of 99

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<sup>85</sup> For the parties' decision-making rules, the expectation is less clear: Some niche parties (especially Green parties) are likely to have more inclusive intra-party decision-making rules. Yet, others (e.g. nationalist parties) are expected to show more hierarchical decision-making processes. In fact, the niche party concept is not appropriate to distinguish niche and mainstream parties on an organizational dimension.

<sup>86</sup> I further assume that the mainstream/niche party distinction is dichotomous. Previous research (see, e.g., Adams, Clark et al. 2006; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009b) implicitly makes the same assumption coding niche parties using dummy variables. Nevertheless, the niche party definition (Meguid 2005: 347-348) does not explicitly preclude the existence of further party types.

parties in ten West European countries. For the key covariates, data for the parties' mass organizational strength and intra-party decision-making rules is available for roughly two-thirds of the total sample. There are no missing values when studying public funding using a dichotomous measure. Yet, applying the share of party income from public subsidies, the number of observations drops to 464.

Data on membership resources is available for all ten countries. Due to restrictions in data availability, observations with available data start in the 1950s leading to a small bias across time: Around 85% of the observations with data on party membership are party position shifts from 1970 onwards. In the total sample, only 70% of the observations are placed in that period. In other words, missing values are more likely for earlier time periods and in fact around 55% of the missing values are due to party position shifts in the 1940s and 1950s.

**Table 10.2: Independent variables: number of observations and mean values**

	<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Key covariates</b>	Mass organizational strength	639	0.124
	Intra-party decision-making rules	647	- Members have no say: 40 - Members have some say: 248 - Members have full say: 359
	Public subsidies (dichotomous)	920	- No public funding: 436 - Public funding: 484
	Public subsidies (continuous)	464	0.303
<b>Control variables</b>	Party size	920	-0.146
	Time	920	10.8
	Niche party	917	- Mainstream party shifts: 828 - Niche party shifts: 89
	Left- and right-wing parties	791	- Left-wing party shifts: 278 - Center party shifts: 290 - Right-wing party shifts: 223
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>920</b>	

Similarly, data on the parties' internal rules is also more likely to be available after 1960. About 80% of the observed party policy shifts where data on candidate selection rules is available stems from 1970 onwards while only 70% of all party position shifts fall in the same period. Again, about 50% of the missing values are due to lacking data on the parties' candidate selection rules in the 1940s and 1950s. For the remaining time period, the missing values distribute evenly over time not creating any time gaps.

For data on public subsidies, the number of observations drops to 464. Nevertheless, data is available for parties in all ten countries and across time. The variable also suffers from missing values in the 1940s and 1950s. But the higher number of missing values is mainly due to missing data from the 1960s onwards so that the total sample is more balanced than for mass organizational strength and intra-party decision-making.

Turning to the control variables, data availability is less of a problem. Data on party size over time is available for all observations. The coding of parties as left-, center, and right-wing and niche parties causes some missing values that are, however, negligible compared to the missing data for the key independent variables.

#### 10.4.2 Data structure and model choice

The data structure and the related problems are identical to the ones already discussed in Chapter 7. I therefore restrict myself to a brief description of the problems and how the statistical models take them into account.

Simply pooling the data of party policy shifts in different countries and across time assumes that the observations are not correlated with country-, party-, or time-specific factors. If this assumption does not hold, the model estimates violate the Gauss-Markov assumptions for OLS regressions (Beck and Katz 1995; 1996; Beck 2001) and the results may be biased. Thus, it is necessary to consider potential violations of the model assumptions and to integrate this knowledge into the model specifications.

More specifically, the data may suffer from three problems. First, there may be *heteroskedasticity across countries, parties and elections*. The observed party position shifts may differ due to unobserved country-, party-, or election-specific factors which are not explicitly modeled. Simply pooling the observations using OLS regression models hence violates the homoskedasticity assumption. Second, the observations are not independent of one another. It is reasonable to argue that parties and their platform changes are influenced by their rival parties' position shifts. In that case, the error terms are *contemporaneously correlated*. Third, party position shifts are not independent over time. It is likely that party position shifts are influenced by prior party position shifts so that the error terms are *serially correlated*.

Each of the three problems is known in research on time-series (Beck and Katz 1995; 1996; Beck 2001) and hierarchical data analysis (Steenbergen and Jones 2002; Rabe-Hesketh

and Skrondal 2005; Gelman and Hill 2007). Yet, there is no statistical model solving all problems at the same time. While multilevel models are good at dealing with heteroskedasticity across countries, elections, and parties, OLS regressions using panel-corrected standard errors are superior in dealing with contemporaneous correlation. Serial correlation is also covered in different ways with some models allowing for a Prais-Winsten transformation capturing time effects while other model specifications have to rely on using the lagged dependent variable. The former solution is preferable because lagged dependent variables may cover substantially interesting effects of the key covariates. In other words, each model specification has advantages and weaknesses and none of them is superior to its rivals.

For that reason, I calculate regression models assuming different structures of the error term. In particular, I apply three model specifications testing the robustness of the regression results.<sup>87</sup> First, I use a linear three-level regression clustering party position shifts in countries and elections. The main advantage of this specification is that it allows for heteroskedasticity across elections which is (empirically) the most crucial form of heteroskedasticity. Yet, it cannot deal with contemporaneous correlation and uses the less preferable lagged dependent variable to take serial correlation into account. In that sense, the second model specification is superior because it allows for using the Prais-Winsten transformation dealing with serial correlation. However, the assumed three-level data structure clustering the observations in countries and parties does not capture heteroskedasticity across elections. Moreover, the model specification is vulnerable to contemporaneous correlation. For that reason, I also use a third model specification allowing for correlated error terms for parties competing in the same election. Linear regression models using panel-corrected standard errors are able to deal with contemporaneous correlation and also allow for using Prais-Winsten transformation instead of using the lagged dependent variable to control for serial correlation. As a major drawback, however, it neglects heteroskedasticity across time that is found to be the most crucial form of heteroskedasticity for the present dataset. Robust regression results across all three model specifications strengthen the confidence in the substantial effects.

## 10.5 Summary

This chapter describes the data and the methods used to test the hypotheses on intra-party factors and their proposed effects on party policy shifts. Some variables and associated

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<sup>87</sup> For more details on the regression equations of the model specifications, see Table 7.3.

problems are similar or identical to those already discussed in Chapter 7. Therefore, I restrain myself to a brief discussion of the main issues.

I justify my case selection arguing that given the data constraints the selected sample is the optimal choice. It allows for sufficient variance on the key variables and simultaneously holds alternative explanatory factors constant. Next, I presented the dependent variable to be used for testing the hypotheses on intra-party factors and their consequences for party policy shifts. In short, I use data collected by the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) and test whether parties shift their policy positions on the left-right axis. I then turned to the covariates presenting how I measure mass organizational strength, intra-party decision-making rules, and the share of public subsidies in party income. I also described the control variables to be used in the following analyses. Afterwards, I turned to the empirical patterns presenting first descriptive results and the number of observations for which data is available. Thereafter, I outlined the data structure and the problems involved when calculating linear regression models. I presented three model specifications used to cope with the specifics of the data structure. In the next chapter, I present the empirical results for the hypothesized effects.



## **11 How parties' internal structures affect party policy shifts: Results**

In the previous chapters, I postulated how intra-party factors impact on a party's ability to shift its policy platform (Chapter 9) and described the data and the methods to test the hypothesized effects (Chapter 10). I now turn to the empirical analysis. The first section studies the effect of mass organizational strength on party platform changes. I test the hypothesized linear relationship (Hypothesis O1) and thereafter examine whether the introduction of public funding changed the positive relationship between a party's manpower and its ability to shift policy platforms (Hypothesis O2). Then, I turn to intra-party decision-making processes testing whether parties with hierarchically organized decision-making processes are more likely to shift their policy positions (Hypothesis O3). Finally, I turn to public funding and its impact on party position changes (Hypothesis O4) before I briefly conclude.

### **11.1 Mass organizational strength and its effect on party position shifts**

I argue that party activists offer important resources for political parties. The more numerous a party's rank-and-file, the better its entrenchment in society and hence, the higher its legitimacy. Parties with strong organizations can draw on their members' manpower to advertise policy shifts. Members also serve as feedback loops, providing information on voter demands (and which policy shifts voters accept). In addition, party members constitute the main pool of potential candidates. The more members a party has, the better are the chances of recruiting eligible candidates for higher office. Competent candidates and public office holders in turn increase the acceptance of party policy shifts. Finally, party members contribute to the funding of election campaigns and other party activities and hence provide the capital necessary to advertise party position shifts. In total, parties with strong organizations have more leeway to shift to shift their policy positions (Hypothesis O1).

Table 11.1 presents the regression results for the proposed positive effect of a party's mass organizational resources on the magnitude of its party policy shifts. As for the following regression analyses, I estimate regression models using the three model specifications described above. The first model is a linear three-level regression using elections at the

second level and a lagged dependent variable to control for serial correlation. Model specification 2 is a three-level regression model with parties at the second level and applying a Prais-Winsten transformation to take the serial error structure into account. The third regression model presented in Table 11.1 is a linear regression with panel-corrected standard errors.

**Table 11.1: Mass organizational strength and its effect on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Mass organizational strength	12.67** (3.21)	12.19** (3.09)	13.94** (3.36)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.205** (-7.72)		
Constant	10.16** (15.38)	10.22** (16.04)	10.57** (15.84)
$\rho$		-0.212	-0.066
Observations	603	639	639

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

The regression results reported in Table 11.1 support the hypothesized effect: The higher a party's mass organizational resources (i.e. the larger the members per vote ratio), the larger are its policy shifts. The effect is positive and statistically significant for all three model specifications.<sup>88</sup> Increasing a party's membership resources by one standard deviation (SD = 0.127) increases a party policy shift by 1.5 points on the CMP left-right scale. From its minimal to its maximal value, party shifts increase by 7.7 points.<sup>89</sup> As a reference, parties in the ten West European countries under consideration on average shift their policy position by about 12 points on the CMP left right scale. Compared to that (and to the effects presented in Chapter 8), the effect size is moderate.

For further robustness tests of the effect, I consider additional control variables. Specifically, I include factors that may influence the independent as well as the dependent variable and hence lead to a spurious correlation between the two (Sieberer 2007: 169). In particular, I study whether the effect of mass organizational strength on the magnitude of

<sup>88</sup> Note that the number of observations differs between the first model specification (N = 603) and the remaining two (N = 639). As in the analyses presented in Chapter 8, this is due to the different modeling of serial correlation. While the Prais-Winsten transformation allows for keeping all cases with available data, using a lagged dependent variable requires knowledge on previous party position shifts. As a consequence, some cases are dropped from the analysis.

<sup>89</sup> Estimates based on model specification 1 (N = 603).

party policy shifts may also be due to party size, the time period in which the position shift takes place, whether a party is a niche party, and whether it belongs to the left-, the centre, or the right-wing spectrum of the policy space. I use these covariates to account for differences in the parties' organizational resources. The results are shown in Table 11.2.

**Table 11.2: Explaining mass organizational strength**

	Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)
Party size	-0.00913** (-3.35)
# of national election	-0.0580** (-5.53)
Niche party	-1.595** (-5.03)
Left-wing party	-0.112 (-0.45)
Right-wing party	0.0555 (0.21)
Constant	-1.882** (-7.81)
$\rho$	0.953
Observations	586

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 11.2 shows the effect of several covariates on the log-transformed membership ratio.<sup>90</sup> As can be seen, party size and time affect a party's mass organizational resources. Moreover, niche parties tend to have lower members per vote ratios. Yet, a party's status as left-, centre, or right-wing party does not affect a party's membership resources.

Small parties tend to have more members per vote than larger ones. A one percent increase in a party's vote share results in a 1% decrease in the members per vote ratio.<sup>91</sup> The time period is also of importance. Parties have nowadays less members per vote than they had in the post-war period. With each election, the parties' organizational resources decrease by about 6%. Manpower of niche parties also significantly differs from that of mainstream parties. Compared to the latter, niche parties have membership figures which are about 80% smaller than those of comparably sized mainstream parties. The finding suggests that niche parties build less on party members. Even controlling for their later appearance and their

<sup>90</sup> I use the log transformation because the membership ratio has a skewed distribution. The resulting probability distribution is closer to the normal one.

<sup>91</sup> Because the dependent variable is log-transformed, the regression coefficients cannot be meaningfully compared. Rather, for  $y = b \cdot x + c$ , a unit increase in  $x$  results in a  $100 \cdot [\exp(b)-1]$  percent increase of  $y$ .

smaller party size, niche parties are less organized and should therefore mainly rely on capital-intensive means to run their campaigns. Thus, public funding is expected to be of major importance for niche parties (see Table 11.9).

**Table 11.3: Mass organizational strength and its effect on party policy shifts – including control variables**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Mass organizational strength	7.763 <sup>+</sup> (1.76)	7.411 <sup>+</sup> (1.67)	8.708 <sup>+</sup> (1.85)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.204 <sup>**</sup> (-7.68)		
Party size	0.0433 (1.07)	0.0345 (0.85)	0.0475 (1.11)
# of national election	-0.183 (-1.55)	-0.149 (-1.29)	-0.152 (-1.14)
Niche party	-2.169 (-1.46)	-2.577 <sup>+</sup> (-1.77)	-2.594 <sup>+</sup> (-1.95)
Constant	13.17 <sup>**</sup> (7.65)	12.91 <sup>**</sup> (7.60)	13.36 <sup>**</sup> (6.86)
Constant		-0.208	-0.057
Observations	603	639	639

*z* statistics in parentheses

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

I include the factors with significant effects on a party's mass organizational resources in the analysis predicting the magnitude of party policy shifts. If a party's size, niche party status, or time effects affect the relationship between organizational strength and party policy shifts, the positive and significant effect found in Table 11.1 may disappear. Table 11.3 reports the regression results. For all three model specifications the effect of organizational resources on party position shifts remains positive and statistically significant at conventional levels. Compared to the estimates reported in Table 11.1, the coefficients diminish in size by about 4 points. Using the estimates of model specification 1 as a reference, increasing the member per vote ratio by one standard deviation increases party position shifts by 0.9 points. From the minimal to the maximum value, the effect size amounts to 4.7 CMP points. Compared to the results excluding control variables, the effect size diminishes by about 50%. Yet, in relation to the average magnitude of party policy shifts (about 12 points on the CMP scale), the effect size is still moderate. I hence conclude that the empirical results support the positive effect postulated in Hypothesis O1.

Note that the control variables are mostly insignificant. Only the coefficient for niche party status reaches a significant level in two of three model specifications: Niche parties tend to shift less than mainstream parties. On average, niche party policy shifts are about 2.5 points smaller than those of mainstream parties. This finding holds although the model considers time effects and party size and supposes that niche parties are rather dull in the sense that they “stick” to their policy positions instead of “hunting” for votes or “predating” rival parties (Laver 2005). How exactly these differences can be explained is an interesting topic for future research.

As a refinement of Hypothesis O1, I argue that the activists’ manpower is especially beneficial if parties cannot substitute it by other means. In former times, parties heavily relied on their members’ workforce during campaigns and their financial contributions to ensure the party’s revenues. If parties have alternative sources of income, they can also draw on capital-intensive means to fund election campaigns and are therefore less dependent on their rank-and-file’s good will. The emergence of public funding provides parties access to such alternative sources. As a consequence, the advantage of parties with large mass strong organizations diminishes once public subsidies serve as substitutes for the members’ manpower. Table 11.4 reports the regression results testing this expectation. The models 1 to 3 display the results for party policy shifts without public funding for three different model specifications. Models 4 to 6 show the regression results if public funding is in place.

The regression results of models 1 to 3 show a positive effect of a party’s mass organizational strength on the magnitude of party policy shifts. If parties cannot substitute lacking organizational resources by public funding, parties with strong organizations have an advantage over less organized parties. In fact, the effect sizes are considerably larger than in the previous (non-interacting) model (see Table 11.3) and statistically significant in two of the three model specifications. Using model specification 1 as a guideline, increasing a party’s member per vote ratio by one standard deviation, the magnitude of party position shifts increases by 1.9 points on the CMP scale. This effect is considerably larger than the increase of 0.9 points reported in the linear model (see Table 11.3).

**Table 11.4: Mass organizational strength and its effect on party policy shifts – depending on public funding**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression	(4) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(5) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(6) PCSE regression
	Without public funding			Public funding		
Mass organizational strength	18.09 <sup>*</sup> (2.01)	12.34 (1.38)	14.13 <sup>+</sup> (1.66)	3.974 (0.79)	6.106 (1.20)	7.096 (1.37)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.190 <sup>**</sup> (-3.81)			-0.218 <sup>**</sup> (-6.94)		
Party size	-0.0617 (-0.82)	-0.0567 (-0.75)	-0.0519 (-0.72)	0.0864 <sup>+</sup> (1.79)	0.0718 (1.49)	0.0927 <sup>+</sup> (1.82)
# of national election	-0.120 (-0.51)	-0.0847 (-0.36)	-0.0558 (-0.25)	-0.170 (-1.07)	-0.162 (-1.07)	-0.178 (-0.94)
Niche party	-4.042 <sup>+</sup> (-1.65)	-4.382 <sup>+</sup> (-1.77)	-4.452 <sup>*</sup> (-2.40)	-0.947 (-0.49)	-0.937 (-0.50)	-1.312 (-0.72)
Constant	11.68 <sup>**</sup> (3.73)	12.19 <sup>**</sup> (3.88)	12.13 <sup>**</sup> (3.98)	13.21 <sup>**</sup> (5.68)	12.96 <sup>**</sup> (5.78)	13.82 <sup>**</sup> (5.03)
$\rho$		-0.156	-0.042		-0.245	-0.039
Observations	202	216	216	401	423	423

z statistics in parentheses

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ , <sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.01$

The size of the coefficient decreases once public subsidies are introduced (models 4 to 6). The regression coefficients for party policy shifts without public funding (models 1 to 3) are considerably larger than those for cases where parties can draw on public money (models 4 to 6). Comparing models 1 and 4, the size of the regression coefficient decreases from 18.1 to roughly 4. This is also reflected in the substantive effect size: Increasing the member per vote ratio by one standard deviation increases party policy shifts by 1.9 (without public funding) and 0.5 (with public funding) points on the CMP scale. In addition, none of the regression coefficients in models 4 to 6 reaches statistical significance. In sum, then, party manpower increases a party's ability to shift its policy position but *only if* parties cannot compensate lacking resources by public subsidies. The findings hence support the effect postulated in Hypothesis O2.

## 11.2 Intra-party decision-making and its effect on party position shifts

I also argue that a party's internal decision-making rules affect its ability to change policy positions. Simply put, the more veto players are involved in making intra-party decisions, the less likely are shifts away from the status quo. This particularly holds for changes of the policy program. I therefore expect that platform changes are more likely to occur if the intra-party decision-making process is rather hierarchical (Hypothesis O3). I measure intra-party decision-making processes using the members' voice in the candidate selection for parliament. Specifically, I distinguish whether party members have no say, some say, and full say in the selection process. Using the middle category as the reference category, Table 11.5 presents the effect of intra-party decision-making processes on party policy shifts.

In two of the three model specifications, the difference between the most hierarchical party structure (with members having no say in candidate selection) and the moderate inclusion of candidates is significantly different at conventional levels. Party policy shifts of hierarchically organized parties are about 3.5 points larger than those of their most inclusive rivals. Compared to the average magnitude of party policy shifts (about 12 points on the CMP left-right scale), the effect size is considerably large. In contrast, parties granting their members full say in the selection process do not differ significantly from those giving members some decision-making competences in the selection process. Although the coefficients point in the expected negative direction in all three model specifications, the effects are not statistically significant. Moreover, the difference (below 1 point on the CMP left-right scale) is much smaller than the one between moderately inclusive and most

exclusive decision-making processes. This can also be seen in Figure 11.1. The graph shows the average magnitude of party policy shifts depending on the members' say in the selection process. The bars indicate 90% confidence intervals.

**Table 11.5: Intra-party decision-making processes and their effect on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Party members: no say	3.818 <sup>+</sup> (1.94)	3.477 <sup>+</sup> (1.76)	3.506 (1.55)
Party members: full say	-0.763 (-0.81)	-0.408 (-0.43)	-0.120 (-0.12)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.212 <sup>**</sup> (-8.27)		
Constant	12.05 <sup>**</sup> (16.54)	11.79 <sup>**</sup> (16.24)	12.03 <sup>**</sup> (16.41)
$\rho$		-0.227	-0.105
Observations	610	647	647

*z* statistics in parentheses

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

As can be seen, parties giving their members no say shift more than their rivals with more inclusive internal decision-making rules. Increasing the members' role in the selection of candidates, policy shifts on average decrease from 15.9 over 12.1 to 11.3 points on the CMP left-right scale. The graph also shows that the effect is not monotonically decreasing. Rather, parties granting their members no say in the selection process significantly shift more than their more inclusive rivals. Yet, parties granting some and full say to their members show no significant differences in their shifting patterns.

The differences in the shifting behavior of parties with different internal decision-making rules may also be due to third factors impacting on the way parties organize and how they shift their policy positions. Hence, I test for factors that determine the party members' inclusion. Because internal decision-making rules are rather constant over time, I create a new database with the 99 parties in the sample and their organizational forms.<sup>92</sup>

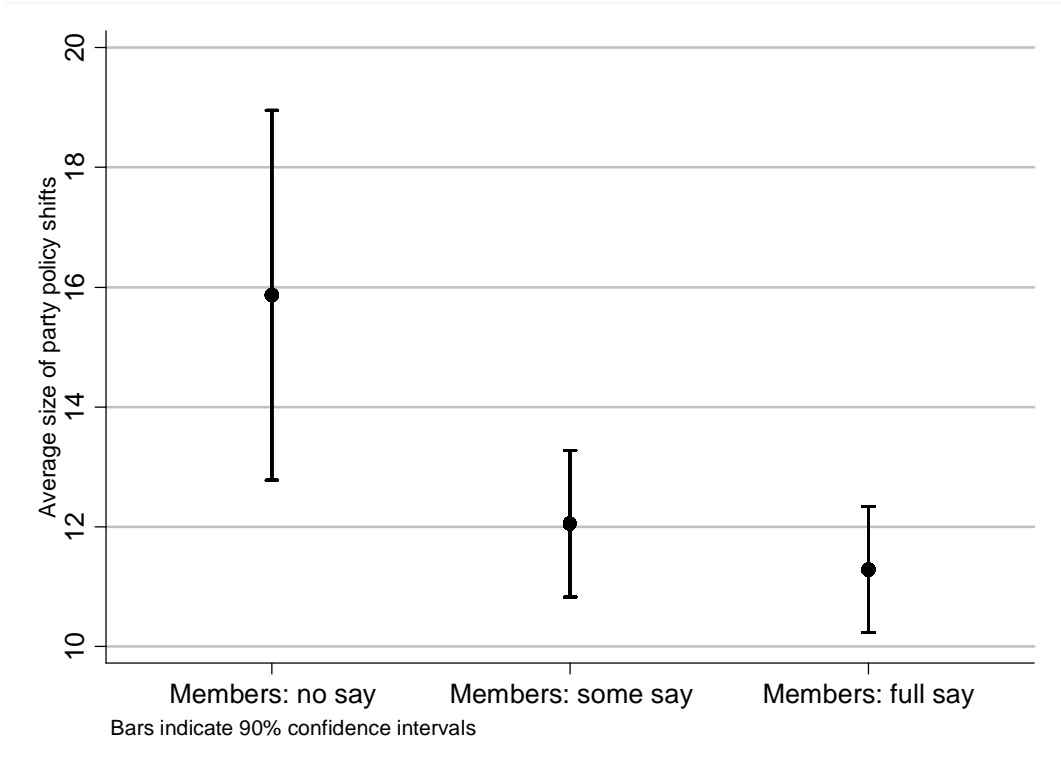
The number of observations and the character of the dependent variable do not allow for an appropriate statistical analysis. For the present dataset, an ordered logistic regression (either as a multilevel model or using country fixed effects) would be the appropriate choice.

<sup>92</sup> In case decision-making processes changed over time, I use the most frequent type of organizational form over the whole sample period.



Yet, 99 observations are not sufficient to estimate complex models with the asymptotic model assumptions. I therefore restrict myself to a descriptive analysis. Specifically, Table 11.6 presents the parties' levels of inclusion of party members in the candidate selection process depending on their mean size and age. In addition, I report the share of niche, left- and right-wing parties within each category and for the total sample.

**Figure 11.1: Mean magnitude of party policy shifts depending on the inclusion of party members in the candidate selection process**



Regarding party size, there is a clear negative trend indicating that small parties (i.e. those with negative values in Table 11.6) are more likely to give their members a say in the selection process. Larger parties, in contrast, tend to rely on more exclusive selection procedures. This finding is hardly surprising because parties that receive more votes also tend to have higher membership figures. Hence, larger parties have to deal with more members and consequently delegate tasks to higher (elected or unelected) party offices. Table 11.6 also reveals a time effect. On average, the most hierarchical form of party organization emerged in the early 1960s. Parties granting more influence to their members on average entered party competition later than their more hierarchical rivals.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Yet, the effect is rather small. In addition, the finding could also be due to alternative factors such as party size or the niche party status. This assumption is at least reasonable thinking of Green, regional, and nationalist

**Table 11.6: Explaining intra-party decision-making rules – descriptive patterns**

	Party members: no say	Party members: some say	Party members: full say	Total	N
Mean party size (relative to Keman's (1994) dominant party)	1.0	-2.4	-4.8	-3.8	99
Mean age (date of first election)	November 1961	March 1963	September 1964	February 1964	99
% of niche parties	25	23	16	19	97
% of left-wing parties	33	33	40	37	70
% of right-wing parties	33	25	26	26	70

We can also observe a modest effect of niche parties. On average, 19% of the parties (i.e. 18 out of 97) are coded as niche parties. We find niche parties overrepresented in the group of parties granting their members no say in the selection process (25%). In contrast, niche parties are rather rare in the group of parties being most inclusive (16%). I hence conclude that niche parties tend to organize more hierarchically.<sup>94</sup> In contrast, there is no clear tendency of left- or right-wing parties to organize in particular ways. Their distributions across groups roughly match with the total share of left- and right-wing parties.

With those findings at hand, I estimate models predicting the magnitude of party position shifts controlling for party size, time effects, and niche party status. The results for the three model specifications are shown in Table 11.7. The differences of the party members' say in the selection process are only statistically significant in one model specification. Compared to the reference category (i.e. some say to party members), models 2 and 3 report that parties giving no or full say to their members do not significantly differ in their shifting patterns.

That is not to say that there are no significant differences between parties with varying internal decision-making rules. For models 1 and 2, the differences between parties giving no say to their members and those granting full say is statistically significant even with control variables included in the model. Taking model 2 as a guideline, differences in the organizational form allow more hierarchical parties to make policy shifts which are about 3.5

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parties entering parliament in the 1970s and 1980s. Again, controlling for alternative explanations is desirable but unfortunately not feasible with the available (small) number of observations.

<sup>94</sup> The result may be surprising for Green niche parties. Yet, it appears reasonable for nationalist parties that are expected to have party organizations which are tailor-made for strong party leaders. As outlined in Chapter 10, the niche party concept combining various party ideologies may not show clear-cut divisions to the mainstream party type in terms of the members' role for making decisions. Due to space restrictions, I refrain from a more detailed discussion here. Note, however, that the niche party concept may need some refinement when it comes to explaining differences in intra-party decision-making.

points larger than their most inclusive rivals ( $2.947 + 0.540 = 3.487$ ;  $p = 0.076$ ). At least for two of the three model specifications, the empirical results therefore support the theoretical expectation put forward in Chapter 9.

**Table 11.7: Intra-party decision-making processes and their effect on party policy shifts – including control variables**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Party members: no say	3.430 <sup>+</sup> (1.72)	2.947 (1.48)	2.979 (1.29)
Party members: full say	-0.815 (-0.85)	-0.540 (-0.56)	-0.281 (-0.28)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.208 <sup>**</sup> (-8.15)		
Party size	0.0730 <sup>*</sup> (2.00)	0.0721 <sup>+</sup> (1.93)	0.0776 <sup>*</sup> (2.06)
# of national election	-0.0859 (-0.79)	-0.0555 (-0.52)	-0.0643 (-0.60)
Niche party	-2.301 (-1.24)	-3.387 <sup>*</sup> (-2.02)	-3.328 <sup>*</sup> (-2.06)
Constant	13.15 <sup>**</sup> (9.33)	12.77 <sup>**</sup> (9.20)	13.11 <sup>**</sup> (9.34)
$\rho$		-0.223	-0.102
Observations	610	647	647

*z* statistics in parentheses

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ , <sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.01$

Regarding the control variables, the results in Table 11.7 show that party size and niche party status also affect the magnitude of party policy shifts. In all three model specifications, a party's vote share has a positive effect on its shifting abilities. Large parties also tend to have more hierarchical structures (see Table 11.6) so that party size has a positive impact on both hierarchy in party organization and party policy shifts. Thus, a party's size soaks up parts of the organizational effect. We also see that niche parties are less likely to change their policy platforms. This finding is in line with the regression results presented in Table 11.3. Again, the finding is a potentially rewarding topic for further research explaining how and why niche party behavior differs from that of mainstream parties.

### 11.3 Public funding and its effect on party position shifts

Parties financially dependent on their rank-and-file have incentives to satisfy the needs and preferences of their members. Once this dependence diminishes, party leaders are less likely

to take the activists' preferences seriously. Party elites seeking votes and office are hence more flexible because the members' "exit" option (Hirschmann 1970) is no longer a credible threat. Moreover, the allocation of public money is usually tied to a party's vote or seat share. Therefore, party leaders have incentives to increase a party's vote share even at the price of membership losses. Public subsidies hence increase vote-seeking incentives simultaneously reducing a party's stickiness to its members' policy preferences. I therefore expect that increasing the share of a party's income from public funding increases its ability to shift policy positions (Hypothesis O4).

**Table 11.8: Public funding and its impact on party policy shifts**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Public subsidies: share of income	-1.041 (-0.49)	-0.913 (-0.44)	-1.403 (-0.68)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.226** (-6.77)		
Constant	11.93** (13.55)	12.00** (13.97)	12.53** (14.68)
$\rho$		-0.210	-0.098
Observations	446	464	464

z statistics in parentheses

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01

Table 11.8 presents regression models for the three model specifications testing whether public subsidies affect party policy shifts. The empirical results support the postulated effect if the regression coefficient is positive and statistically significant. Yet, the coefficients are negative and insignificant. Increasing the share of revenues from public funding actually decreases the magnitude of party policy shifts. However, the effect is very small: Increasing public funding of parties by one standard deviation, the magnitude of party policy shifts decreases by 0.3 points on the CMP left-right scale. From its minimum (0) to its maximum value (0.973), the magnitude of party policy shifts diminishes by about 1 unit.<sup>95</sup> Compared to the effects reported above and the average magnitude of party policy shifts (around 12 points on the CMP left-right scale), the effect size is rather small. I therefore conclude that the amount of party revenues from public funding does not affect party policy shifts.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Estimates based on model specification 1 (N = 446).

<sup>96</sup> In addition to the regression results reported in Table 11.8, I also calculate additional models (not reported) to test for potential model misspecifications: Public funding was not in place for various countries and time periods so that its effect on party revenues is often zero. Because this "zero inflation" may bias the results, I restrict the

Besides the effect of public funding on party policy shifts, I study the factors impacting on the share of a party's income from public subsidies. As for the previous covariates, I aim at ruling out potential third variable effects on both the share of a party's income from public funding and party policy shifts. Specifically, I test whether party size, time, niche party status, and its belonging to the left-, the centre, or the right-wing spectrum of the policy space affect the share of public subsidies in a party's income. The regression results are shown in Table 11.9.<sup>97</sup>

**Table 11.9: Explaining the varying relevance of public funding for party income**

	Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)
Party size	0.0000761 (0.08)
# of national election	0.0303** (9.32)
Niche party	0.160** (3.08)
Left-wing party	-0.0243 (-0.76)
Right-wing party	-0.0459 (-1.30)
Constant	-0.0372 (-0.46)
$\rho$	0.514
Observations	431

*z* statistics in parentheses

+  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

The size of parties has no significant effect on the share of party revenues from public subsidies. Put differently, small and big parties equally benefit from the taxpayers' money. Not surprisingly, we see a positive effect of time. Parties increasingly experience income gains from public money while other sources lose significance. Furthermore, the effects of left- and right-wing parties are insignificant.

The niche party effect deserves further attention. Niche parties show a higher share of party income from public subsidies than mainstream parties do. Niche parties emerged in

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sample to those policy shifts where public funding is in place. Yet, the effects are still small and insignificant. I also use the alternative dichotomous measure indicating whether public funding exists or not. Again, the findings are insignificant.

<sup>97</sup> I also estimate a regression model dropping the cases where public funding is not in place. The number of observations drops from 431 to 332 but the regression results do not substantially differ from the ones reported here.

times when party membership figures have already been in decline. In contrast to some of their mainstream rivals, niche parties cannot build on historically large membership organizations and therefore mainly rely on public money. So far, research mainly highlights the perils of public funding for political parties (see, e.g., the literature on cartel parties (Katz and Mair 1995)). Yet, the introduction and existence of public subsidies is – among other reasons – justified by the provision of fair competition (see e.g. Nassmacher 2001a). It would therefore be interesting to see whether public subsidies indeed leveled the monetary disadvantages by backing up parties lacking donors and large membership organizations. Yet, the role of public funding for providing a fair basis for competition is not in the focus of this work so that I leave it for future research.

**Table 11.10: Public funding and its impact on party policy shifts – including control variables**

	(1) Multilevel model (Level 2: elections)	(2) Multilevel model (Level 2: parties)	(3) PCSE regression
Public subsidies: share of income	0.0796 (0.04)	0.685 (0.32)	0.266 (0.13)
Party policy shifts (t-1)	-0.222 <sup>**</sup> (-6.71)		
# of national election	-0.356 <sup>**</sup> (-2.66)	-0.377 <sup>**</sup> (-2.83)	-0.382 <sup>**</sup> (-2.76)
Niche party	-1.591 (-0.69)	-2.277 (-1.00)	-2.208 (-1.08)
Constant	16.01 <sup>**</sup> (9.29)	16.26 <sup>**</sup> (9.61)	16.80 <sup>**</sup> (9.28)
$\rho$		-0.209	-0.107
Observations	446	464	464

*z* statistics in parentheses

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Including the significant effects of Table 11.9 (i.e. time and niche party status) into the analysis of party policy shifts leads to the effects reported in Table 11.10. Note that the regression coefficients for public funding remain insignificant for all three model specifications. In addition, the size of the effect further diminishes being practically zero: Using the estimates reported in model 1, increasing the share of public subsidies in the party's income by one standard deviation increases party policy shifts by 0.02 points on the CMP left-right scale. The conclusion that public funding does not affect party policy shifts therefore still holds.

## 11.4 Summary

I argue that intra-party factors affect party behavior. Mass organizational strength, intra-party decision-making processes, and the composition of party revenues affect the likelihood of observing party position shifts. In the previous chapters, I derived hypotheses (Chapter 9) and outlined the data and the methods used to test the proposed effects (Chapter 10). In this chapter, I presented the empirical results. Table 11.11 gives an overview reporting the hypotheses as well as the direction and the strength of the effects.

**Table 11.11: How intra-party structure affects party policy shifts**

Variable	Hypothesis	Finding	Effect size (CMP points) <sup>98</sup>
Mass organizational strength: Linear effect	O1	✓	0.9
Mass organizational strength: Depending on public funding	O2	✓	Without public funding: 1.9 With public funding: 0.5
Intra-party decision-making process	O3	(✓)	No say for members: 3.4 Some say for members: ref. Full say for members: -0.8
Public funding	O4	0	0.02

- ✓ Finding in line with expectation.
- 0 No significant effect.
- ✗ Finding contradicts hypothesized effect.
- ( ) Mixed findings.

I find moderately strong effects of mass organizational resources on the magnitude of party policy shifts: Organizationally strong parties are better equipped to shift their policy platforms. Increasing the members per vote ratio by one standard deviation increases the magnitude of party policy shifts by 0.9 points on the CMP left-right scale. Moreover, the effect of organizational resources depends on the availability of substitutes for the benefits provided by the party's rank-and-file. If public funding is available allowing for capital-intensive election campaigns and the services of pollsters, less organized parties can compensate lacking manpower with public money. Therefore, the effect of mass organizational resources diminishes over time once public party subsidies are introduced. The empirical results support this hypothesis. The effect of mass organizational resources on party position shifts is only significant if public funding is not in place. Increasing organizational resources by one standard deviation entails party position shifts which are 1.9 points larger. In contrast, the effect is insignificant and much smaller (0.5) if public subsidies are present.

<sup>98</sup> For mass organizational strength and public funding, the effect size indicates the change in the magnitude of party policy shifts if the respective covariate increases by one standard deviation. For the candidate selection mechanisms, the reported effects are changes on the CMP left-right scale compared to the reference category "some say for members". All estimates based on the first model specification reported in the previous Tables (including control variables).

Intra-party decision-making rules also show the expected patterns: More hierarchical parties are more likely to shift their policy positions. The more members are involved in intra-party decision-making (i.e. the more intra-party veto players exist), the less likely are shifts away from the status quo. I distinguish three levels of members' involvement (no say, some say, and full say for party members in the selection process) showing that the most hierarchical organized parties shift their policy positions by 3.4 points more than their moderately hierarchical rivals. Moreover, there is no significant difference between moderate (some say) and the least hierarchical parties (full say) in their shifting patterns. Yet, not all empirical findings hold when including control variables. The significant effects partly vanish and significant differences occur only in two of the three model specifications. Hence, I conclude that the models show mixed empirical patterns.

Public funding has no significant effect on party policy shifts. Neither in the initial models nor when including control variables the share of party revenues from public money matters for party policy shifts. This also holds when dichotomous measures are used or if the sample is restricted to instances where public funding is available. In addition, the effects are very small. The effect size for an increase by one standard deviation virtually equals zero. Thus, I conclude that public funding has no effect on party position shifts.

**Table 11.12: Explaining mass organizational strength, intra-party decision-making rules, and sources of income**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mass organizational strength</b>	<b>Party structure: Hierarchy</b>	<b>Share of public subsidies in party income</b>
Party size	-	+	0
Time	-	-	+
Niche party	-	+	+
Left- and right-wing parties	0	0	0

+ Positive effect.  
0 No effect.  
- Negative effect.

In addition to the core findings connected to party policy shifts, I also show which factors can account for the differences in the parties' mass organizational strength, internal decision-making processes, and their sources of income. Although the presented patterns are merely byproducts with no intense theoretical backing, they shed light on intra-party politics and point to potentially rewarding topics for future research. Table 11.12 summarizes the results of how party size, time, a party's niche party status and its left-, centre or right-wing placement affect intra-party factors.



The findings reveal that larger parties have a lower member per vote ratio than smaller ones and are more hierarchically structured. Yet, a party's size has no effect on the share of its income from public money. Regarding time effects, membership figures decrease over time and parties emerging more recently are likely to choose more inclusive decision-making rules. Not surprisingly, the relevance of public funding increases over time.

Yet, the most interesting results relate to niche parties: Compared to their mainstream rivals, niche parties have a lower member per vote ratio, more hierarchical decision-making rules, and show a higher share of income from public money. For mass organizational strength and the significance of public money (for which multivariate analyses were feasible), the findings also hold controlling for party size and time effects. Niche parties differ significantly from their mainstream rivals in several ways. These intra-party differences can actually account for niche party effects found in previous research (see e.g. Adams, Clark et al. 2006; Ezrow et al. 2009). Hence, the findings suggest a potentially rewarding avenue for further research.

## **12 Do voters and intra-party structure affect party policy changes? Conclusions and directions for future research**

The present study differs from previous research on party competition in several ways. Rather than predicting party policy positions, my main goal is to extract how parties can reach optimal policy positions. I criticize previous models of party competition for their ignorance of the parties' past policy positions. At each point in time, static models assume a "tabula rasa" situation with parties freely choosing policy platforms. Yet, in practice parties do hold policy positions and choosing optimal policy platforms may involve a party policy shift. I therefore consider the time dimension and argue that parties face constraints when moving away from the status quo.

I further argue that constraints systematically differ across parties. Whereas some parties have severe problems shifting their party platforms, others adapt their policy positions more easily. These systematic differences lead to different party behavior in terms of position shifting. Neglecting these differences is a form of omitted variable bias that may result in attributing variation across parties to differences in motivation. For instance, scholars may infer that parties sticking to their policy platforms prefer their traditional positions. Yet, a party's stickiness may also stem from constraints preventing it from shifting away from the status quo. Although the parties' lacking willingness and ability to change their party policy platforms lead to the same empirical outcome, the causes for the observed party behavior are fundamentally different.

Most of the present dissertation identifies factors that account for the differences in the constraints parties face when shifting their policy positions. I argue that the constraints originate from the key actors with which parties and party leaders interact. I therefore start by deriving these actors from various party definitions. Specifically, I identify three groups of actors: rival parties, voters, and a party's rank-and-file. Incentives for party change arise from competition with rival parties and shifts of public opinion. Recent research has begun to acknowledge the importance of the time dimension and included it in models of party competition (see, e.g., Kollman et al. 1992; Adams et al. 2004; Laver 2005; Adams, Clark et al. 2006; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009a; Somer-Topcu 2009c). They study the dynamics of party policy changes resulting from shifts in public opinion, rival parties' shifts, and past

election results. Yet, the models mostly assume that parties are not constrained in changing their policy positions. Reviewing the literature reveals that constraints are most likely to derive from the voters' perception of political information (such as party policy changes) and the parties' internal structures.

## 12.1 Voters and their perception of party policy changes

Previous research shows that voters differ in their perception of party policy positions and I extend this research studying the perception of party policy shifts. I show that voters vary in their perception of party position shifts and explain the variance taking voter-, party-, and party system-specific factors into account.

Using a pooled sample of several panel election studies in the United Kingdom, I find that the average perception of party policy shifts is low. For the policy shifts between 1974 and 2001, around 40% of the electorate perceived the parties' shift messages. In other words, a majority of voters do not perceive position shifts as signaled in election programs. As I show for Labour's policy shift in the 1997 election, some party policy shifts are more visible than others. Around 60% of the voters perceived Tony Blair's "New Labour" shift to the right. Although the perception is around 20% higher than the average of all party position shifts, it is evident that a large share of the electorate did not perceive Labour's shift message. My theoretical model aims at explaining whether voters are able and willing to perceive party policy changes.

I adapt Zaller's (1992) Receive-Accept-Sample (RAS) model to party position shifts. I argue that the perception of party policy shifts is a two-stage process in which voters first receive information on the parties' claims and then decide whether the claims are credible (i.e. whether they accept them). Voters only perceive a party's position shift if they both receive and accept the party's shift message. Whereas the first step is a cognitive process, the latter is a function of the party's credibility.

Because surveys typically confine themselves to asking questions on the voters' perception of party policy positions, it is not possible to directly observe the reception and acceptance of party policy shifts. I therefore formulate hypotheses how covariates affect the reception and acceptance of party policy shifts. If the proposed effects hold empirically, then the covariates should also affect the voters' overall perception of party policy shifts. Using

data from British national election studies, I estimate two-stage logistic regression models to test the hypothesized effects.

I test six hypotheses dealing with voters' incentives and difficulties receiving political information and their effect on the perception of party position shifts. In particular, I state that political awareness, education, and the magnitude of voter policy shifts influence the reception of party position shifts. At the party and party system level, the magnitude of a party's policy shift, the number of relevant parties, and their governmental status affect whether or not voters receive party shift messages. With the sample restricted to British politics, I am not able to test a hypothesis on party system effects (Hypothesis V5). The empirical results are mixed. Only the results of the voters' political awareness conform to the theoretical expectations and reach statistical significance in all model specifications. For the remaining effects, some models support the proposed effects while the hypothesized effects find no supportive or even contradicting empirical evidence in other model specifications.

The empirical results are more in line with the theoretical expectations for the voters' acceptance of party position shifts. I postulate six hypotheses of how changes in party leadership and the leader's prestige, the magnitude of past policy shifts, party identification, voter position shifts, and voter expectations of party policy positions affect the perception of party platform changes. With the relatively small sample of British parties, I am not able to test the hypothesized effect of voter expectations in a multivariate model (Hypothesis V12). Three of the five remaining hypotheses find empirical support in various model specifications. Voters are more likely to accept a party's policy shift if the leader's prestige is high and if the shift is in the same direction as shifts of their personal policy preferences. Moreover, voters with party identification are more likely to accept shifts towards and less likely to accept shifts away from their individual policy preferences. The results for the magnitude of past party policy shifts and changes in the party leadership show mixed empirical results.

In sum, the analysis of voter perceptions of party policy shifts reveals that there are differences across voters (and parties) which can be explained by covariates that affect the likelihood of receiving and accepting information on party position shifts. Findings contradicting the postulated effects are rare and solely due to factors located at the party level for which the number of observations is quite low. At the very least, four out of ten tested effects strongly support the hypothesized effect.

## 12.2 How voter perceptions affect party policy shifts

Voters differ in their perception of party policy shifts and the variation can be explained by covariates that affect the voters' reception and acceptance. To study how parties react to the systematic differences, I study party policy shifts in ten West European countries from 1945 until 2005.

Using the two-stage model how voters perceive party position shifts, I draw conclusions which parties face higher constraints when shifting their policy platforms. The results are summarized in Axioms 2 and 3 outlined in Chapter 3. As for the analysis at the voter level, the proposed effects are not directly testable. I therefore use the covariates expected to affect the voters' perception to formulate hypotheses how these factors affect the parties' abilities to shift their policy positions. Specifically, I postulate eleven hypotheses of which I test ten.<sup>99</sup> Four hypotheses deal with covariates derived from the voters' reception of party position shifts. The remaining six hypotheses relate to acceptance variables. In addition, I formulate modified hypotheses on the direction of party policy shifts for two covariates.

The empirical results support most of the postulated effects. Only one of the ten proposed effects runs counter to the theoretical expectations. Whereas the regression coefficients are insignificant for three variables, the remaining six covariates show empirical results supporting the hypothesized relationships in most of the model specifications. The findings are especially robust for the proposed effects of political interest, the parties' status as government parties, and the complexity of the political market. In particular, higher political interest increases the likelihood of party policy shifts. As expected, I also find that the effect of political interest depends on the direction of the parties' platform changes: For shifts towards the majority of voters, the positive effect of voters' interest in politics is larger than for shifts away from the majority of voter preferences. In addition, I find that government parties are more visible and hence more likely to change their policy platforms. The complexity of the political market (as indicated by the number of effective parties) has a negative impact on the magnitude of party position shifts.

Turning to the variables affecting the voters' acceptance of policy shifts, party leader prestige affects the magnitude of party policy shifts. If voters positively evaluate the leaders' competence, sympathy, and skills, parties have a higher ability to shift their policy platforms.

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<sup>99</sup> This is due to the fact that I was not able to collect time-consistent data on the voters' education across countries.

In contrast, parties with leaders lacking strong support of the electorate are more likely to stay put. Furthermore, the regression results show a strong effect of voter expectations affecting party policy shifts: If party policy positions are not in line with expectations derived from the parties' ideologies, parties react by shifting their policy platforms to policy locations that conform to the ideological expectations.

In sum, the findings show that voters constrain party policy shifts. Because systematic differences exist in the voters' evaluation of party policy shifts, some parties are more constrained in shifting their party platforms than others.

### 12.3 Intra-party structure and its effect on party policy shifts

Beyond voters and their perceptions of party position shifts, parties are also constrained by their respective intra-party structures. I therefore study the consequences of the members' role within political parties and how the intra-party distribution of power affects party position shifts.

For that purpose, I study three intra-party factors: First, I look at a party's mass organizational strength. I argue that parties benefit from having members who spread party information and increase the voters' acceptance of party position shifts. The larger a party's workforce, the higher is its ability to shift the policy position. Yet, the benefits derived from party membership decrease once additional means substitute the members' contributions. Public funding allows parties to compensate lacking mass organizational resources. The new forms of political communication rely on general news mass media and involve a shift from labor-intensive to capital-intensive campaigning. As a result, the positive effect of mass organizational strength diminishes once public subsidies are in place.

The formal decision-making rules also determine whether parties can adapt their policies. If important decisions are left to party leaders, parties are more flexible and hence more likely to shift their policy platforms. In contrast, inclusive parties give their rank-and-file a say in decision-making processes thus increasing the number of intra-party veto players. As the number of veto players increases, shifting policy positions does (at least) not get more likely.

I also emphasize the role of financial resources parties and their leaders depend on. Drawing on resource dependence theory, I argue that party leaders are likely to serve the interests of actors whose contributions are critical for the party's income. Mass parties hinge

on financial contributions of their members and are hence more likely to stick to their members' policy preferences. In contrast, the increasing significance of public funding enhances the appeals to hunt for votes. Consequently, party leaders have incentives to follow the electoral market. I therefore argue that increasing relevance of public funding for a party's income makes parties more likely to change their policies.

The empirical results support the hypotheses on the parties' mass organizational strength: Parties are more likely to shift policy positions if they can draw on large membership organizations. Moreover, the results also support the hypothesis that this positive effect diminishes once public funding is in place. Regarding the role of intra-party decision-making rules, the empirical results support the hypothesized effect although the regression coefficients are not significant for all model specifications. Finally, the statistical models show no significant effect with regard to the share of public subsidies in party income. I hence conclude that party policy shifts are not affected by public funding.

In sum, the relevance of party members as workforce and intra-party decision-making rules determine whether parties are able to move away from the status quo. Although I find no empirical evidence that sources of party income affect the parties' policy behavior, I conclude that a party's internal structure affects its ability to shift policy positions.

## 12.4 Directions for future research

This work has concentrated the parties' constraints when shifting policy positions. Along the way, however, I touched upon several potentially rewarding topics for future research. In particular, I explain why my results partly differ from those of previous research and how the differences can be explained. At a more substantive level, I point out potential consequences of the voters' lacking perception of party policy shifts. Furthermore, I outline differences in party behavior which are not the focus of the present research project. These include party reactions to "shocks" in the party system, the behavior of newly elected party leaders, differences between mainstream and niche parties, and the effects of public funding on political parties and party systems. Although I was not able to devote much time and space to these topics, the initial findings suggest that future research on these issues may be rewarding.

#### 12.4.1 Perception of party policy shifts and the evaluation of parties, governments, and democratic systems

A potential field for future research is looking at the consequences of voters not perceiving party position shifts. The present study has shed light on the voters' reception and acceptance of party policy shifts but only for drawing conclusions at the macro level. Yet, the voters' perceptions also have severe consequences for their evaluations of political parties, governments, and politics in general. If voters do not perceive the parties' platform shifts, the official party policy platforms and the voters' perceptions of party positions do not match. The mismatch may be due to the lacking reception of voters because voters do not care or do not understand what is going on in politics. Moreover, differences in the parties' official policy platforms and voter perceptions may also arise from party policy shifts which are not accepted (i.e. considered credible) by the electorate. In this case, parties have not been able to convince voters of their credibility. Irrespective of whether voters or parties are to blame, the lacking reception and acceptance of party position shifts result in a mismatch of the parties' official policy platforms and the voters' perceived party policy position.

There are severe consequences for misperceived party policy positions. First, voters base their vote choices on biased information. In the worst case, a voter does not vote for the best alternative (e.g. the party closest to his or her policy preferences) but casts the ballot for a party which actually shifted its policy position away from the voter's policy preferences (see also Lau and Redlawsk 1997; Lau et al. 2008). As a result, voters not perceiving party policy shifts should be less satisfied with their vote choices. The discrepancy between a voter's perception of his or her vote choice and the official party position should also affect its evaluation of parliament and government. Party policies and the voter's expectations thereof do not match so that voters misperceiving a party's policy position should be less satisfied with leading politicians, party performance, and perhaps even the democratic system.

#### 12.4.2 Future research on party behavior

##### Party reactions to "shocks" in the party system

Turning to political parties, I outline how "shocks" in the party system affect party policy behavior. Specifically, I argue that "shocks" require parties to react to the new demands irrespective of their past behavior. For example, the emergence of the Progress Party in the Danish 1973 "earthquake" election made parties to react to the new rival: Parties shifted their policy positions massively to adapt their policy platforms to the upcoming new competitor. So



doing, they chose policy positions relative to each other that did not conform to the expectations derived from their respective ideologies. In that sense, the emergence of the Progress Party put the party system “out of equilibrium”. In the elections following 1973, parties corrected for this by shifting their policy platforms to positions that conformed to the ideologically expected locations vis-à-vis their competitors.

The empirical results suggest that a party is more likely to make large consecutive policy shifts if rival parties shift their policy platforms massively and if its policy position is not in line with its expected policy position relative to those of its rivals. Yet, the empirical results presented here are only first insights suggesting in which ways “shocks” in the party system affect party policy shifts. Studying the conditions for party policy shifts to reach a normal level again or those creating a permanent chaotic market is a potentially rewarding topic for future research.

#### Public opinion shifts: Changing preferences or measurement error?

I also present a non-finding that has repercussions for future research on how parties respond to shifts in public opinion. In line with recent research (Adams et al. 2004; Ezrow et al. 2009; Somer-Topcu 2009a), I argue that parties are likely to follow shifts in public opinion. Yet and in contrast to previous research, my empirical findings do not support the hypothesized effect. This leads to the question how the discrepancy can be explained.

I argue that measurement error can account for the different results: Rather than measuring substantive shifts of the voters’ preferences, the differences are likely to indicate pure measurement error. Relying on a single dataset, previous research interpreted the deviations as substantive shifts in public opinion. As my findings show, the results are not replicable using alternative data sources. A closer look at the data reveals that voter policy shifts are rather small. About 50% of “shifts” in public opinion have a magnitude smaller than 0.2 on a 1 to 11 scale. Using a two-sample t test and reasonable estimates for the number of voters in the sample and the standard deviation of the mean voter’s policy position, these differences are not statistically significant. The measured “shifts” in public opinion hence reflect noise rather than substance and public opinion that is rather stable cannot account for changes of party positions.

If the results reported in previous research (Adams et al. 2004) are due to measurement error, there is no empirical evidence that parties react to voter position shifts.

Future research on “dynamic representation” (Stimson et al. 1995; Stimson 1999) should hence aim at taking measurement errors of voter position shifts into account.

Consequences of party leader changes: Do new leaders lack willingness or ability to shift their party’s policy platform?

In my theoretical model, I argue that changes in the party leadership affect policy position shifts. Party leaders become identified with policies they represented in the past. In contrast, new leaders are likely to (and perhaps also expected to) change policies. Although the argument is in line with previous research (Downs 1957: 111; Gilmore 1988; Harmel and Janda 1994; Harmel et al. 1995), I do not find empirical evidence in support of the hypothesized effect. In fact, some model specifications show that new party leaders are less likely to change party policies than leaders who are in office for a longer time.

Future research should focus on explaining this result. In Chapter 8, I have presented two potential explanations. First, new party leaders may not be willing to shift the party’s platform. Turnovers in party leadership may reflect a generational change rather than a change in policies. Especially if a new party leader belongs to the predecessor’s intra-party faction or is a known foster-son or daughter of the previous leader, leadership changes are not likely to result in large-scale party policy changes. Second, new party leaders may also lack power to move away from the status quo. Important actors within the party may doubt the new leader’s ability to run successful election campaigns and thus hinder him or her from adapting the party’s policy position. At the same time, new leaders may refrain to provoke intra-party opposition in their early years in office. Party policy changes hence only occur after a party leader has been in office for some time and thus proven to survive politically.

I present some preliminary results indicating that new party leaders lack resources rather than willingness to shift their party’s policy platform. Yet, testing more fine-grained models requires better data, especially on the leaders’ past career, factional membership, and intra-party (s)election processes. Future research which aims at narrowing this data gap is likely to enlighten our understanding of the consequences of party leader changes for party (policy) change.

### Are niche parties really different? More substantive explanations accounting for differences between mainstream and niche parties

Previous research (see e.g. Adams, Clark et al. 2006; Ezrow et al. 2009) highlights differences in the behavior of mainstream and niche parties. Yet, “niche party effects” do not carry a substantive meaning. It is unclear why niche parties differ from their mainstream rivals. They could be different in their behavioral incentives and party goals. Niche parties may, for example, put more emphasis on policy goals and have fewer incentives to enter office than their mainstream rivals. If this is the case, theories on political parties should take the varying motivational assumptions into account. However, the observable differences may also result from different constraints mainstream and niche parties face. In other words, both party types may value the same goals but different environmental factors make parties to choose different strategies. If this is the case, then distinguishing mainstream and niche parties does not contain a substantive meaning. Future research should therefore concentrate on theoretically justified effects explaining differences in mainstream and niche party behavior.

In Chapter 11, I provide a first analysis showing that mainstream and niche parties’ intra-party structures differ: Niche parties have fewer members per vote, choose more hierarchical intra-party decision-making processes, and rely more heavily on public funding than their mainstream rivals. If intra-party structure affects party behavior, then differences between mainstream and niche parties are due to differences in intra-party structures. Yet, more research is needed to find further explanations for why mainstream and niche parties differ. Research entailing explanatory factors with a substantive meaning is preferable to “explanations” based on party “types”.

#### 12.4.3 Consequences of public funding: How public subsidies affect party competition

Research on public funding mainly emphasizes the perils of public subsidies. Most prominently, the literature on cartel parties (Katz and Mair 1995; 2009) suggests that modern parties get detached from civil societies and become agents of the state. This turn away from civil society and towards the state is hypothesized to lead to changes in party behavior. In my empirical analysis, I study the importance of public subsidies on the parties’ income and its consequences for party position shifts. The effect in the regression models is substantially small and insignificant. I therefore conclude that public funding does not affect party policy

changes. Nevertheless, studying the consequences of public subsidies in other areas is promising line of future research.

I opt for a shift of perspectives turning the attention to the party system level. Forming cartels is a party system- rather than a party-specific phenomenon (see also Detterbeck 2005). Moreover, the introduction of public subsidies for political parties is often justified by the claim that this would ensure fairer competition by providing equal opportunities for all competing parties (Nassmacher 2001a; van Biezen 2008: 348). It is hence worthwhile to study whether party subsidies are capable of decreasing political corruption, facilitating the emergence of new parties, and providing opportunities for a fair political competition among otherwise dissimilar rivals. Answering these questions would shed light on relatively neglected research topics. Empirical results giving affirmative answers to the questions above provide a (normative) justification for giving public money to political parties.

## 12.5 Final conclusions

This work contributes to theories of party competition. Introducing the time dimension, I show how voter perceptions and intra-party structures constrain parties when changing their policy platforms. So doing, I contribute to research on public opinion, political parties, and party systems. I show that parties cannot simply choose optimal party platforms. Rather, parties are constrained by their past. Voter-, party- and party system-specific factors systematically affect the parties' likelihood of sticking to the status quo. These results, I claim, deepen and extend our knowledge on political parties and party competition.

## **Appendix A: Criticism and modifications of CMP data**

Many scholars have raised valuable points researchers should keep in mind when using data from the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006). Researchers tested the validity of the data (Benoit and Laver 2007b), criticized the scaling procedure of the parties' left-right positions (Pelizzo 2003; Franzmann and Kaiser 2006; Lowe et al. 2009), and produced estimates for systematic (Mikhaylov et al. 2010) and non-systematic (Benoit et al. 2009) error in the data.

I agree with most of the criticism raised in these papers: There are cases for which CMP data lacks validity. Moreover, using a common left-right scale over time and across space may be inappropriate in some instances. Furthermore, I agree that researchers should aim at providing estimates for the uncertainty of their inferences (see also King et al. 1994: 152). *However, I want to emphasize that modifications of the CMP estimates are not costless.* All of the papers discussed below which aim at improving the data quality add additional assumptions. These, in turn, are themselves seldom testable. It is, for example, preferable to have uncertainty estimates for the party policy positions derived from the party manifestos. However, nearly all manifestos have only been coded *once*. Avoiding costly additional hand-coding, uncertainty estimates can only be based on additional assumptions about the data-generating process. If the assumptions are correct, the modifications lead to more precise estimates of party policy positions. Yet, wrong assumptions lead to estimates that are worse than the initial CMP "raw data".

In this appendix, I show that no "gold standard" exists how CMP estimates have to be used. CMP data is noisy and sometimes biased – as all datasets and estimates are. *Yet, I argue that adding additional assumptions does not necessarily improve data quality.* I start by briefly presenting Benoit and Laver's (2007b) comparison of CMP left-right positions and expert judgments. Next, I turn to three papers which argue for different interpretation (Pelizzo 2003) and measurement of party left-right positions (Franzmann and Kaiser 2006; Lowe et al. 2009). Finally, I discuss research introducing estimates for systematic (Mikhaylov et al. 2010) and nonsystematic (Benoit et al. 2009) measurement error.

## **CMP estimates do not always match with expert judgments on party positions (Benoit and Laver 2007b)**

Benoit and Laver compare party policy positions derived from the CMP project with data gathered from expert judgments. Although the estimates on average concur, there are cases where CMP estimates and expert judgments differ. The authors argue that expert judgments are more accurate than CMP estimates (Benoit and Laver 2007b: 103) and that differences in the CMP estimates and the experts' judgments may be due to the fact that the CMP left-right scale does not vary over time and across space.

I agree that the assumption of a time-invariant cross-national left-right scale is problematic. Using data from their expert survey (Benoit and Laver 2006), the authors show that left-right scales have different meanings in different countries. One problem is that there is no systematic way to account for this. Attempts used to create time-variant left-right scales that also differ across space have (as I argue below) severe weaknesses. Fortunately, the varying meanings of left-right scales are less of a problem for my sample of party policy shifts in Western Europe: Benoit and Laver (2007b: 92-93) state that differences in the meaning of left-right scales is most crucial between Western and Eastern Europe. Thus, restricting the sample to ten West European countries, the problem is at least kept at bay.

Regarding the concurrence of CMP estimates and expert judgments, I agree with the authors that CMP estimates are more error-prone than expert judgments. It is therefore advisable to refrain from using CMP data if the estimates have low face validity and do not match with expert judgments.<sup>100</sup> Overall, Benoit and Laver (2007b: 98) name parties for which CMP and expert surveys diverge most (i.e. one estimator places the party being “left”, the other one as “right”). In total, 20% of their sample (23 out of 114) falls in this category. The number is considerably smaller (9%; 5 out of 56) in my sample of ten West European countries. In addition, four of the five “deviant cases” can be explained by the different yardsticks experts and hand-coding of party manifestos use: Country experts compare party policy platforms *within* countries whereas the CMP left-right scale is cross-national. For example, Benoit and Laver (2007b: 97) report that two Austrian parties – the Greens and the Social Democrats – are deviant in the sense that experts place them on the left while CMP places both parties on the right. Yet, the CMP placements of both parties (19.7 and 20.8, respectively) are only right of the CMP zero point. Their national rivals, the Christian

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<sup>100</sup> In fact, this is one reason for excluding Italy from my sample (see Pelizzo 2003).

Democrats (40.4) and the Freedom Party (55.7), hold policy positions right of the two left-wing parties. Hence, the CMP rank-order of party positions is plausible. In fact, CMP party placements and expert judgments of party positions on an ordinal scale perfectly match (see Benoit and Laver 2007b: Table 3). For the countries under consideration, Kendall's tau ranges from 0.52 (Finland) to 1 (Austria, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) therefore revealing quite similar results of party rankings. Only Belgium (Kendall's tau = 0) stands out which is, however, only due to *one* misperceived party placement (Ecolo) while the ranking among the remaining parties is consistent.

In sum, I agree with the authors that researchers should question the data quality of CMP estimates if the left-right placements raise the doubt of country experts. *Yet, for my research project and its sample of ten West European countries measurement problems are kept at bay so that the CMP estimates of party policy positions are fairly valid.*

### **Party manifesto data indicates direction of policy changes (i.e. shifts) rather than policy positions (Pelizzo 2003)**

Pelizzo (2003) argues that CMP left-right scores do not indicate party policy positions. Rather, the scores signal party policy *change*. For instance, parties which aim at shifting their positions to the left emphasize “left” issues.

Pelizzo's research is motivated by the flawed estimates of Italian parties' policy positions. I agree that the Italian party policy positions lack face validity and Pelizzo's suggestions are worthwhile. Yet, I argue that the position comparisons of CMP estimates and expert judgments (see, e.g., the Laver/Benoit comparison discussed above) show that his proposed interpretation of manifestos as signals for policy position *change* does not travel across countries. Pelizzo himself compares voters' left-right estimates of political parties and CMP left-right scores. The data matches quite well: For five of the ten elections (in Germany and the Netherlands), the rankings perfectly match. Deviations are mainly due to *one* party for which the rank-order of the respective other scale does not fit (Pelizzo 2003: Tables 6A and 6B). *Hence, Italian data should be treated as an outlier rather than generalizing the odd Italian estimates for a new interpretation of party policy positions.*

In addition, I have doubts that Pelizzo's theoretical reasoning is correct. I agree that parties use their manifestos as signals for voters. But manifestos indicate what parties stand for rather than the direction of the change itself. Imagine a party (with a party policy position)

that wants to shift its policy platform. Following Pelizzo, a party drafts a manifesto containing “left” issues if the intended shift is to the left. In the next election, it drafts another manifesto to indicate another shift. But what if parties use identical claims in two subsequent elections? Pelizzo’s logic implies that a party makes two successive shifts in the same direction. They do so, however, using the *same* signals, content, claims, and perhaps even wording, as they did in the last election. If the *same* claims (e.g. income tax reforms or the endorsement of minimum wages) are raised in the next election, does the party shift its position *further* in the respective direction? I rather argue that it re-emphasizes its postulates and that its claims are still valid. *Repetition hence indicates policy stability rather than policy change.*

### **The classification of left, right and valence issues varies over time and across space (Franzmann and Kaiser 2006)**

Franzmann and Kaiser (2006) argue that the content of the policy space varies over time and space. The authors propose a re-analysis of the 56 CMP categories distinguishing “left”, “right” and “valence” issues.<sup>101</sup> So doing, political scientists arrive at left-right scales that contain different issues for the various countries and time periods.

As mentioned above, I agree with the need to obtain more specific left-right scales varying over time and across space. Yet, such scales need an algorithm to distinguish issues that are relevant for the left-right scale and this algorithm in turn rests on additional assumptions. If the assumptions are wrong, then the resulting policy scales are biased. *I criticize Franzmann and Kaiser’ proposed algorithm and argue that it results in systematic estimation differences across countries and is partly tautological.* Moreover, the “smoothing procedure” is not applicable for most research questions dealing with party positions.

To distinguish valence and position issues, Franzmann and Kaiser use regressions with party fixed effects to explain differences in the usage of policy issues. The authors argue that significant differences across parties indicate position issues.<sup>102</sup> However, whether differences across parties become significant depends on the selected reference category: The more “extreme” the selected reference party, the higher the likelihood of significant differences in

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<sup>101</sup> Following Stokes (Stokes 1963), the authors distinguish position and valence issues. As discussed in Chapter 2, position issues separate parties – they can be in favor or against specific policies. Valence issues, in contrast, do not follow the position logic. Rather, all political actors agree that an issue is positively or negatively valued. For instance, no party or voter is in favor of higher corruption or promotes unemployment.

<sup>102</sup> That may not be necessarily the case. Taking the logic of valence issues (Stokes 1963), parties could only differ in the emphasis they put on, for example, environmental topics. In other words, differences across parties do not have to be positional in nature.



the parties' policy platforms. In contrast, the same policy differences between parties may not reveal significant regression coefficients when being compared to a moderate party. Franzmann and Kaiser use a country's major left-wing party as a reference category. Yet, that involves center-left Social Democrats (as in Austria or Germany) as well as Communist parties (as in France or Italy). These parties are hardly comparable. The French Communists are the major party furthest to the left while the German Social Democrats are expected to have more centrist policy positions than the Greens or the Socialists (PDS). All else being equal, countries with more centrist reference parties (such as Germany) have less position issues than countries with more extreme reference points.<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, the number of valence and position issues also differs across party systems, and hence, across countries: All else being equal, the higher the number of parties, the more likely are significant differences between them and therefore, the higher the number of position issues. The empirical data provided by the authors support this statement: The United Kingdom with three major parties shows 31 valence issues but only 22 position issues. For Germany, the number of position issues raises to 28 (28 valence issues). Sweden with slightly more parties shows 34 position issues and 22 valence issues. Finally, Italy with its numerous parties reveals 34 position issues and only 20 valence issues.<sup>104</sup>

The separation of valence and position issues hence systematically varies across countries. Even worse, however, the method becomes tautological when it comes to distinguishing "left" and "right" position issues. The authors assume that "a party to the right of the ideological center will emphasize certain right position issues and vice versa for parties on the left" (Franzmann and Kaiser 2006: 171). For that purpose, Franzmann and Kaiser *ex ante* distinguish parties as being "left" and "right". Position issues which are emphasized by left-wing parties are "left" issues and vice versa for "right" issues and parties. Yet, the "left" and "right" issues are used to calculate a left-right scale for party policy positions. Here the whole measurement gets tautological: Assumed party policy positions (e.g. Social Democrats as left and Conservatives as right parties on a socio-economic scale) distinguish "left" from "right" issues which are, in turn, used to measure party policy positions as being "left" or

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<sup>103</sup> The authors furthermore select a party "that, assumingly, has the highest saliency value on an issue" (Franzmann and Kaiser 2006: 171), that is, the party assumed to emphasize an issue most often. So doing, the authors intentionally select the most extreme party what increases the likelihood that an issue becomes positional.

<sup>104</sup> The numbers are not directly comparable because the number of estimated issues differs across countries. Using a ratio of position and valence issues, however, a similar pattern emerges. Position issues seldom occur in the British system (0.7), showing balanced patterns in Germany (1.0), and the index further increases with the number of parties in Sweden (1.55) and Italy (1.7).

“right”. Such an algorithm inevitably provides “better” left-right estimates because the intended result already rest in its assumptions.

I also note that Franzmann and Kaiser’s “smoothing procedure” of party policy positions (Franzmann and Kaiser 2006: 173) is inapplicable to most research questions dealing with party policy positions. The authors state that “position scores we get at a single point in time cannot be taken at face value” so that a party’s policy position at time  $t$  is smoothed by using the average of its prior (at  $t-1$ ) and its *future* policy position at  $t+1$ . For research questions dealing with party reactions to their rivals’ platforms, voter perceptions of party policy positions, or party position shifts such a smoothing procedure is unfeasible. Decisions on whether to vote for a party, whether parties react to the emergence of a new rival, raises in vote shares, or policy position shifts of rival parties cannot rest on information that is only available in the *future*.<sup>105</sup>

I hence conclude that although the idea of having country- and time-specific left-right policy scales is preferable, producing such a scale is difficult. Franzmann and Kaiser’s algorithm rests on assumptions that are partly implausible. It creates systematic differences across countries and is partly tautological. In addition, the proposed smoothing procedure furthermore is inapplicable for most research questions. I hence refrain from using the proposed modification of the “raw” CMP data.

### **CMP left-right estimates should be based on log-transformed ratios (Lowe et al. 2009)**

Lowe, Benoit, Mikhaylov and Laver (2009) advocate another way to measure party policy positions. The authors advocate a log ratio of “left” and “right” sentences. Instead of using additive scales (such as the CMP left-right scale), the resulting scale hinges on the relative balance of “left” versus “right” sentences. In order to demonstrate the plausibility of their scale, the authors present the following example:

“If the party’s previous platform contained 50 sentences in favour of increased European integration, and 20 emphasising its disadvantages, then a new manifesto containing 50 sentences in favour and 21 against would barely register as an indicator of policy change. But if the previous platform had contained 10 and 4 sentences for and against the EU, and the new platform 10 and 5 then a policy change is more plausible.” (Lowe et al. 2009: 8-9)

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<sup>105</sup> Even worse, in the weighted version of the smoothing procedure, a party’s policy position at time  $t$  additionally depends on the length of the *upcoming* legislative term.

In other words, the effect of one additional sentence in the “against” category should depend on what the manifesto entailed so far. The more information an additional sentence entails (compared to the information which is already given in the party’s manifesto), the larger the marginal effect of the additional sentence should be.

I agree with this statement but also note that the additive CMP left-right scale (RILE) already takes this characteristic into account. It calculates the difference between “right” (R) and “left” (L) sentences and divides the result by the total number of sentences:<sup>106</sup> If all sentences either deal with “left” or with “right” issues, the formula is given by

$$(R-L)/(R+L) \tag{1}$$

The marginal effect of adding one “left” (or “right”) sentence depends on the number of already existing “right” and “left” sentences: The higher the number of already existing “left” or “right” sentences, the smaller the effect of adding an additional one. This can be seen in the derivatives of (1) given by

$$f'(L) = \frac{-2R}{(R+L)^2} \tag{2}$$

and

$$f'(R) = \frac{2L}{(R+L)^2} \tag{3}$$

Holding the number of “right” (“left”) sentences constant, the effect of adding one additional “left” (“right”) sentences decreases (and converges to zero) as the number of already existing coded as “left” (“right”) increases. In addition, the marginal effect of one additional “left” or “right” sentence depends on the number of sentences in the respective other category. To take an extreme example, the marginal effect of “left” sentences (L) is zero if the number of “right” sentences (R) equals zero. With regard to equation (1), this results in parties with left policy positions irrespective of the number of “left” sentences in the manifesto (see also Lowe et al. 2009: 8).

The authors state that this characteristic of the additive scale is problematic. As an alternative, they propose a measure of party policy positions using the logarithmized ratio of

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<sup>106</sup> Specifically, the RILE scale is equal to  $(R-L)/(R+L+N) \cdot 100\%$  and N indicates the number of neutral sentences in the party manifesto (i.e. those not appointed to socio-economic left or right issues).

“left” and “right” sentences. Table A.1 shows an example comparing policy shifts of two parties,  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ , on the additive CMP scale and the authors’ proposed log ratio of “left” and “right” sentences. Party  $P_1$ ’s manifesto at time  $t$  is considerably longer (30 sentences) than the one of party  $P_2$  (3 sentences). Yet, both parties have moderate right-wing positions with twice as much “right” than “left” sentences. Both parties are modeled as shifting their policy positions towards the center of the policy space. So doing, both parties keep the number of “right” sentences constant and increase the number of “left” sentences. Yet, party  $P_1$ ’s manifesto is longer so more sentences are needed to outweigh its emphasis of “right” issues at time  $t$ . Therefore, party  $P_1$  increases its number of “left” sentences by 10 while party  $P_2$  only adds one additional “left” sentence. Therefore, both parties shifted their right-wing policy positions with a 2 to 1 ratio in favor of “right” sentences at time  $t$  to a balanced relation between “left” and “right” sentences at time  $t+1$ .

**Table A.1: Measuring party policy shifts using an additive scale and log ratios (Example 1)**

	$P_1$		$P_2$	
	Time $t$	Time $t+1$	Time $t$	Time $t+1$
<b>R</b>	20	20	2	2
<b>L</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
$100*(R-L)/N^{107}$	33.3	0	33.3	0
$\log(R/L)$	$\log(2)$	$\log(1)$	$\log(2)$	$\log(1)$
<b>Shift(RILE)</b>	<b>-33.3</b>		<b>-33.3</b>	
<b>Shift(log ratio)</b>	<b><math>-\log(2)</math></b>		<b><math>-\log(2)</math></b>	

Table A.1 shows that the authors’ proposed log ratio scale assigns the same values to the parties’ policy shifts. Both parties shifted their policy positions from a policy position on the right (with a 2 to 1 ratio in favor of “right” sentences) to a centrist policy platform with a balanced allocation to “left” and “right” issues so that both policy shifts are equally large ( $\log(2)$ ). In other words, party  $P_2$ ’s manifesto is shorter so that adding one additional “left” sentence has the same effect than adding 10 “left” sentences in party  $P_1$ ’s manifesto. Yet, the same holds for the additive RILE scale so that both measures produce similar results.

Table A.2 shows additional examples of party policy shifts and the measurement using the additive RILE scale and the authors’ proposed log ratio of “left” and “right” sentences. The first party policy shift is identical to the one of party  $P_2$  in Table A.1 (i.e.  $P_2$  increases the

<sup>107</sup> Assuming that only left and right sentences exist, this formula is equivalent to the RILE scale in the manifesto dataset.

number of “left” sentences from 1 to 2). Its manifesto is very short with only two “right” sentences so that we would expect to see a rather large effect of the additional “left” sentence on its policy shift. In contrast, the effect of adding one additional “left” sentence should be lower if a party puts more emphasis on right-wing issues. Table A.2 shows two additional parties emphasizing “right” issues in 20 (party P<sub>2</sub>’) and 2000 sentences (party P<sub>2</sub>’’) in their manifestos.

**Table A.2: Measuring party policy shifts using an additive scale and log ratios (Example 2)**

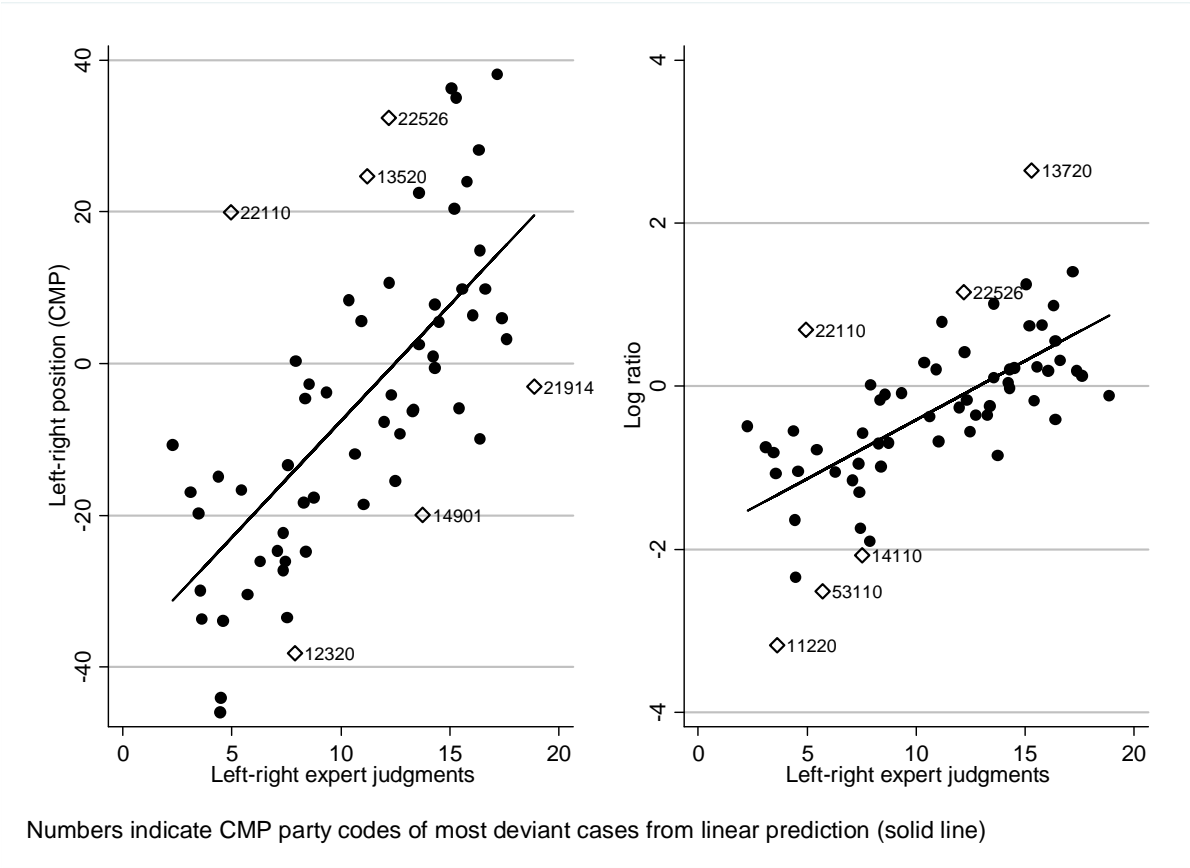
	P <sub>2</sub>		P <sub>2</sub> ’		P <sub>2</sub> ’’	
	Time t	Time t+1	Time t	Time t+1	Time t	Time t+1
<b>R</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2000</b>
L	1	2	1	2	1	2
100*(R-L)/N	33.3	0	90.5	90.9	99.9	99.8
log (R/L)	log(2)	log(1)	log(20)	log(10)	log(2000)	log(1000)
<b>Shift(RILE)</b>	<b>-33.3</b>		<b>-0.5</b>		<b>-0.1</b>	
<b>Shift(log ratio)</b>	<b>-log(2)</b>		<b>-log(2)</b>		<b>-log(2)</b>	

The examples presented in Table A.2 show that the log ratio fails to account for its proposed property: Independent on how many sentences are dedicated to “right” issues (ranging from 2 to 2000), the marginal effect of one additional “left” sentence is constant (= log(2)). This is due to the fact that the effect of increasing the number of “left” (“right”) sentences in the manifesto only depends on the number of already existing “left” (“right”) sentences but not on the number of “right” (“left”) sentences. Thus, the effect of one additional sentence on the left, for example, is independent on the number of “right” sentences in the manifesto. This is not what the authors want (see the example presented above) and may lead to odd results. In contrast, the additive RILE scale takes the decreasing shift effect into account: The effect is large for short manifestos (party P<sub>2</sub>), diminishing for right-wing manifestos of moderate length (party P<sub>2</sub>’), and is practically zero if the manifesto contains many sentences which are overwhelmingly “right” (party P<sub>2</sub>’’).

In sum, then, the authors’ proposed measure using log ratios may produce odd results. *In contrast to the authors’ claim (Lowe et al. 2009: 21), I hence conclude that (at least for the left-right scale) the log ratio of “left” and “right” sentences is not superior to additive left-right scale.*

So far, I have only discussed the theoretical properties of the two measures. We may also want to know which of them empirically outperforms the other in measuring party left-right positions. For that purpose, Figure A.1 displays comparisons of expert judgments (Benoit and Laver 2006) and the CMP estimates of party left-right positions using the additive scale (left) and the log ratio proposed by Lowe and his colleagues (right).<sup>108</sup> The solid line indicates the linear prediction. The hallow diamonds indicate the most deviant cases (and their CMP party codes).

**Figure A.1: Comparing additive RILE estimates and log ratio with expert judgments**



At first sight, the left-right placements of RILE (left) and the log ratio (right) do not differ substantially. In fact, there is merely no difference between the two graphs. Readers who claim that the observations in the right-hand graph are closer to the regression line should note that the adjusted R-squared of the OLS regression is slightly higher for the additive RILE scale (0.45 compared to 0.42 for the log ratio).

In sum, the log ratio is a valuable alternative to additive left-right scales. For more fine-grained policy scales, using the log transformed ratio of “left” and “right” sentences may

<sup>108</sup> Specifically, I match the expert judgments with the CMP party positions in the most recent election as indicated in Benoit and Laver’s dataset.

outperform additive indices (Lowe et al. 2009: 17-20). *Yet, I show that the proposed log ratio scale suffers from theoretical shortcomings.* In addition, the empirical results of the additive scale and the log-transformed ratio are similar for the sample used in this dissertation project. I therefore conclude that a log transformation is feasible but not necessarily superior to the additive CMP scale.

### **CMP estimates should be used with uncertainty estimates (Benoit et al. 2009)**

Benoit, Laver, and Mikhaylov rightfully emphasize a major shortcoming of CMP data: Although social scientists should always aim at providing uncertainty measures for their inferences (see also King et al. 1994: chapter 5), the CMP data does not provide such information. Most of the party manifestos were only coded once so that there is no information on the uncertainty of the derived saliencies and policy positions. Neglecting measurement error may result in measuring policy “shifts” which are only due to measurement error.

I agree with the authors’ concern but I emphasize that all attempts to create uncertainty estimates ex post involve costs: Indicators for the researcher’s uncertainty can be obtained by repeating the measurement several times. One or several coders repeat the coding process so that researchers can calculate means and standard deviations of the coding process. The larger the standard deviation, the less precise is the measurement. However, repeating the coding procedure increases the costs in terms of time and required financial resources. Moreover, repeating the coding process ex post entails unequal coding conditions because previous research has already highlighted the most likely cases for coding errors (see e.g. Pelizzo 2003 for Italy).

Benoit and colleagues propose an alternative approach. Instead of re-coding the manifestos, the authors make additional assumptions on the data-generating process. So doing allows for estimating standard errors for each of the 56 issues in the CMP coding scheme<sup>109</sup> and additive scales like the CMP left-right scale. Specifically, the authors assume that the data-generating process is stochastic following a multinomial distribution (Benoit et al. 2009: 500). Although plausible, this approach also involves costs because we cannot test whether the assumptions hold true. If they are correct, the process increases the data quality. If they are wrong, researchers add additional error to the data.

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<sup>109</sup> In addition, the authors also provide uncertainty estimates for the uncoded sentences leading to 57 categories.

Assume for a moment that the authors' assumptions are correct. In this case, the uncertainty estimates improve the quality of the data. However, it is not entirely clear how the uncertainty estimates can be used when studying party policy *shifts*.<sup>110</sup> Table A.3 helps to illustrate this point. Let  $H_0$  indicate the null hypothesis that a party shifts its policy position. There is a true (and unobserved) value whether a party sticks to ( $H_0$ : false) or shifts ( $H_0$ : true) its policy position and a measure indicating whether we observe a policy shift or not. If the measure correctly captures party position shifts, there is no measurement problem. Yet, two types of error may occur: First, the measure may reject the null hypothesis although it actually holds (familiar as the Type I error). For party policy shifts, that means that we measure a party sticking to its policy position although it actually shifted away from its prior platform. In addition, researchers may measure policy shifts although the party in fact sticks to its policy position (known as Type II error). Good measures minimize both Type I and Type II errors.

**Table A.3: Type I and Type II error for measuring party position shifts**

		True value	
		$H_0$ : false	$H_0$ : true
Observed party behavior	No shift	Correct	Type I error
	Shift	Type II error	Correct

Using CMP left-right positions to indicate party policy shifts clearly risks making Type II errors because changes in the parties' policy platforms may also be due to measurement error. This is the point the authors criticize. Using the estimated standard errors, they show that only 38% of the policy shifts reported in CMP data are substantive policy shifts (Benoit et al. 2009: 504). Yet, these estimates risk making Type I error (i.e. underestimating the true proportion of party policy shifts): The authors aim at a 95% probability that a party really shifts its policy platform ending up with critical cases coded as parties sticking to their policy platforms. In other words, they reduce Type II error (common in CMP data) but simultaneously increase Type I error.

This raises two questions: First, which method can be used to obtain “appropriate” estimates of party position shifts which minimize both errors of Type I and Type II? And second, how large is the error using the original CMP left-right estimates? To answer the first question, I propose a “mixing strategy”: coding policy shifts as statistically significant if the probability of having a real party position shift is larger than 0.5. So doing, coding errors are

<sup>110</sup> I am aware of the SIMEX algorithm proposed by the authors. Yet, my concern is more fundamental.



randomly distributed between Type I and Type II errors. For my sample of ten West European countries, the number of significant changes using the authors' proposed method is 38% and hence similar to the authors' estimate based on a larger sample. Using the "mixing strategy" leads to different results: 72% of all policy shifts are coded as substantive shifts of party policy positions. Therefore, the Type II error of the CMP estimates to measure party policy shifts is much smaller than the authors suggested.

How crucial is the error using CMP estimates and neglecting the estimates' uncertainty? With the "mixing strategy" to distinguish insignificant from significant party policy shifts, the average magnitude of insignificant shifts is 2.3 while significant shifts are considerably larger (about 17.0 points on the CMP left-right scale). In other words, insignificant shifts have values close to zero indicating that the results of linear models using the magnitude of party policy shifts as dependent or independent variable are not very likely to be error-prone. Assuming that the authors' proposed data-generating process is correct, the Type II error of the initial CMP estimates is only 2.3 points on the left-right scale which is, as I argue, rather small.

#### Unintended consequences of the assumed data-generating process

Apart from the question how the proposed error estimates should be used (and how large the benefits are compared to the costs of using additional assumptions), it is also valuable to study the consequences of the authors' assumptions. Specifically, which elements impact on the size of the uncertainty estimates? For individual issue categories, the error variance depends on two factors: (1) the number of (quasi-)sentences in the manifesto and (2) the (observed) probability that a (quasi-)sentence falls in the selected issue category (Benoit et al. 2009: 502). The first property is intended by the authors who argue that additional information (i.e. sentences) reduces the uncertainty of the estimates. The second property states that errors are least likely if the issue category covers no or all sentences in the manifesto. In contrast, the uncertainty is highest if a category covers 50% of all sentences. Although this property has severe consequences for the uncertainty estimates, the authors devote no attention to it. Let me therefore elaborate on it.

Assume a fixed number of quasi-sentences and a coding scheme which only distinguishes three issue categories: "left", "right" and "neither left nor right". The first two categories are used to build a left-right scale. Let further  $p_l$  and  $p_r$  denote the share of sentences coded as "left" or "right". According to the data-generating process, the error

variance depends on  $p_l$  and  $p_r$ : The closer  $p_l$  ( $p_r$ ) are to 0.5, the higher the error variance within each category. Combining both categories has two implications:<sup>111</sup>

1. Parties with extreme policy positions to the left or the right have smaller uncertainty estimates than centrist parties *if* the centrist parties emphasize topics on the left-right dimension.
2. Centrist parties emphasizing left-right issues have *larger* standard errors than centrist parties putting less emphasis on the left-right dimension.

Note that both conclusions derive from the assumed data-generating process and have no theoretical backing. Yet, the first expectation theoretically makes sense: Centrist parties mix “left” and “right” issues and hence coding is more difficult than for “extreme” parties mainly expressing their preferences in either the “left” or the “right” category. I therefore concentrate on the second property: The standard errors of parties with centrist policy positions differ according to the emphasis they put on “left” and “right” issues. Yet, the stated direction is somewhat odd: The more (quasi-)sentences centrist parties use for left-right issues, the larger are the standard errors of a party’s left-right position. This expectation is counterintuitive and – as I suppose – unintended by the authors. I therefore test whether the standard errors (as derived by the authors) also have empirical repercussions.

Table A.4 shows the regression results of several regression models predicting the (simulated) standard deviation of CMP left-right positions.<sup>112</sup> The key variable of interest is the percentage of a party manifesto devoted to “left” and “right” issues. Because the length of a manifesto negatively affects the size of the uncertainty estimates, I control for the number of quasi-sentences. In Models 1 to 3, I measure centrist parties as those with policy platforms between the 40<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> percentile of the CMP left-right positions. Models 4 to 6 use a broader (30<sup>th</sup> to 70<sup>th</sup> percentile) measurement leading to a higher number of observations. To show the robustness of the results, I estimate three different model specifications including OLS regressions (models 1 and 4), OLS regressions with clustered standard errors (by elections; models 2 and 5), and linear two-level regressions using countries at the second level (models 3 and 6). The sample consists of party policy shifts in ten West European countries used in this dissertation (see Chapter 7 for more details).

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<sup>111</sup> The following discussion is rather illustrative and therefore not mathematically correct. Yet, the reasoning only serves to come up with observable implications that can be tested afterwards.

<sup>112</sup> I use a log transformation of the dependent variable.

**Table A.4: Explaining size of standard errors by centrist party emphasis on left-right issues**

	(1) OLS regression	(2) OLS regression (clustered SEs)	(3) Two-level regression	(4) OLS regression	(5) OLS regression (clustered SEs)	(6) Two-level regression
	Centrist parties: 40 <sup>th</sup> to 60 <sup>th</sup> percentile			Centrist parties: 30 <sup>th</sup> to 70 <sup>th</sup> percentile		
<b>% of manifesto dealing with l-r issues</b>	<b>0.0563<sup>**</sup></b> (3.62)	<b>0.0563<sup>**</sup></b> (2.85)	<b>0.0523<sup>**</sup></b> (3.31)	<b>0.0582<sup>**</sup></b> (6.42)	<b>0.0582<sup>**</sup></b> (5.24)	<b>0.0575<sup>**</sup></b> (6.14)
# of (quasi-)sentences	-0.00169 <sup>**</sup> (-7.47)	-0.00169 <sup>*</sup> (-2.20)	-0.00138 <sup>**</sup> (-6.02)	-0.00211 <sup>**</sup> (-12.95)	-0.00211 <sup>**</sup> (-2.90)	-0.00165 <sup>**</sup> (-9.66)
Constant	3.277 <sup>**</sup> (4.52)	3.277 <sup>**</sup> (3.15)	3.350 <sup>**</sup> (4.01)	3.261 <sup>**</sup> (7.71)	3.261 <sup>**</sup> (5.48)	3.031 <sup>**</sup> (5.51)
Observations	184	184	184	367	367	367

*t* and *z* statistics in parentheses

<sup>+</sup>  $p < 0.1$ , <sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.01$

The results show the odd effect that the supposed data-generating process entails: The more emphasis centrist parties put on issues on the left-right scale, the *higher* the uncertainty of its estimated policy position. The result is robust and statistically significant in all model specifications. The counterintuitive implication derived from the assumed data-generating process hence indeed has empirical repercussions. But because this property is not intended, it adds (systematic) error to the data. Instead of improving the data quality, researchers thus end up with even more error-prone estimates.

### Challenging the assumed data-generating process

Finally, we may also ask whether the authors' assumptions of the data-generating process are correct. Specifically, modeling sentences in party manifestos as draws from a multinomial distribution assumes that longer manifestos provide more information and hence more confidence on the party position estimates (Benoit et al. 2009: 502). The assumption that longer texts entail more information is plausible and also used in previous research (see e.g. Huber et al. 2001). Yet, longer manifestos may also mirror divergent intra-party policy stances.<sup>113</sup> Manifestos express a party's policy goals. Intra-party factions representing divergent policy preferences want to see their policy goals in the party manifesto and cohesive parties face fewer difficulties to express these statements than incoherent ones. Thus, the length of party manifestos increases with the number of groups with divergent policy preferences to be represented by the party label.<sup>114</sup>

As noted above, there is no direct way to test the contradicting hypotheses because researchers do not know the "true" uncertainty of party policy positions. It is, however, reasonable to argue that parties use the manifestos to signal their policy stands. Experts on parties can therefore use a party's manifesto to assess its policy position on the left-right scale. The more precise the party manifesto, the less problems experts should face when estimating party policy positions. Because experts can rely on various sources to obtain information (such as news stories, law proposals, and speeches), vague manifestos do not necessarily lead to imprecise expert judgments. Precise manifestos hence decrease the uncertainty of the experts' judgments while imprecise party manifestos do not necessarily lead to imprecise expert judgments.

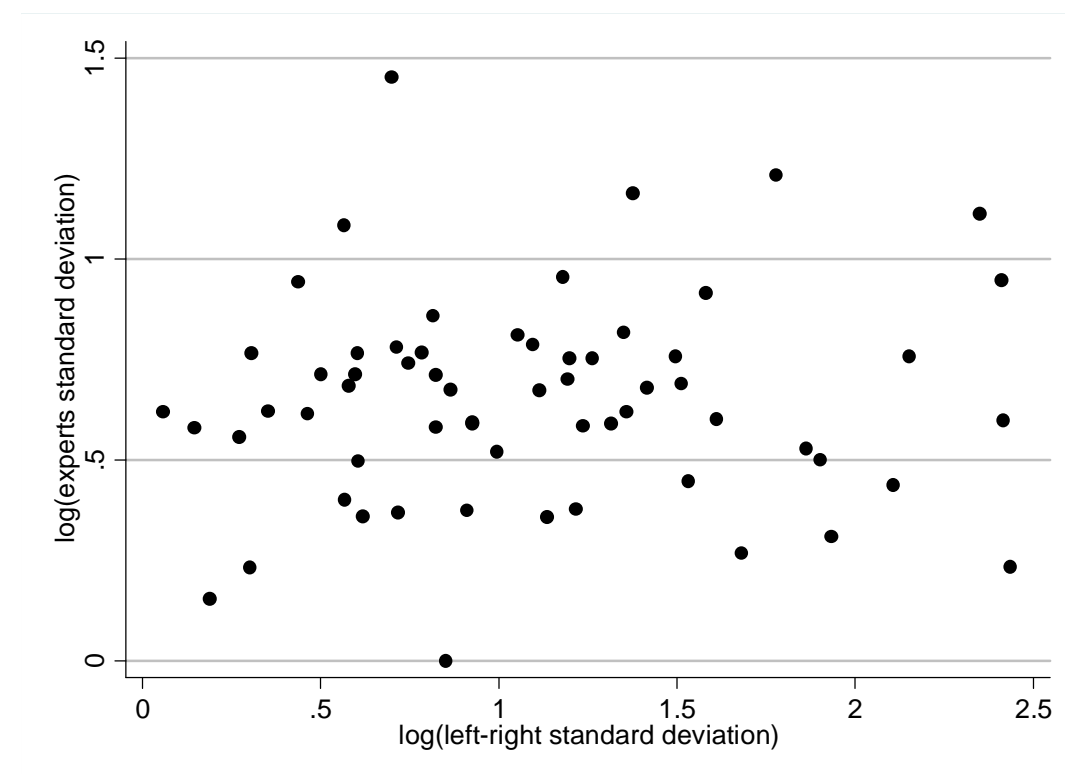
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<sup>113</sup> I owe this potential explanation to Ulrich Sieberer.

<sup>114</sup> Empirical evidence that the length of a party manifesto does not necessarily lead to more precise policy positions comes from the British Conservatives' 2010 election manifesto which *The Economist* calls the "longest betting-slip in history" (The Economist 15 April 2010). Despite of its length, the stated policy goals are too vague to predict the party's government policies.

Figure A.2 compares the uncertainty estimates of the CMP left-right scale using the authors' proposed method (x-axis) with the deviation of expert judgments when placing party policy positions (y-axis) using data from Benoit and Laver's (2006) expert survey.<sup>115</sup> If the authors' assumptions on the data-generating process are correct and if experts use information derived from party manifestos, we expect to see a lower triangular scatter plot: Manifestos with smaller measurement error (i.e. low values on the x-axis) lead to precise expert judgments. In contrast, imprecise party manifestos (i.e. large values on the x-axis) *may* lead to imprecise expert judgments or they are compensated by additional information sources.

**Figure A.2: Comparing the standard deviation of left-right positions using election manifestos and uncertainty of expert judgments (log-transformed estimates)**



The scatter plot shown in Figure A.2 does not support the statement. There is no lower triangular form indicating less deviation for smaller values on the x-axis. The correlation ( $r = 0.07$ ;  $N = 62$ ;  $p=0.58$ ) is practically zero which means that the uncertainty involved in expert judgments and the authors' derived standard deviation are independent of each other. This is, of course, no direct evidence that the authors' assumptions are wrong. Yet, the negative findings cast doubts whether their derived uncertainty estimates are correct.

<sup>115</sup> Note that the standard *deviation* (not the standard *error*) is shown which does not depend on the number of observations.

In sum, I agree with the authors that it is preferable to measure the uncertainty associated with CMP data. *Yet, the authors' proposed method for obtaining uncertainty measures suffers from several drawbacks:* First, it is not entirely clear how to apply the proposed uncertainty estimates because reducing Type II error in the original CMP estimates may simultaneously add Type I error. Second, the assumed data-generating process has (intended and unintended) consequences on the size of the uncertainty estimates. I show that centrist parties differ according to their salience they put on left-right issues. The higher the parties' salience on the left-right dimension (i.e. the more information they provide), the *larger* are the uncertainty estimates (see Table A.4). From my point of view, this implication is counterintuitive. Third, it is difficult (if not impossible) to test whether the authors' assumptions of the data-generating process hold. The authors argue that longer text documents entail more information so that the uncertainty of the position estimates reduces as the number of quasi-sentences increases. I present an alternative hypothesis stating that longer text documents indicate intra-party tensions and should thus *increase* the uncertainty of a party's true policy position. Both explanations are plausible but not directly testable. I therefore test an observable implication using uncertainty of expert judgments but no clear pattern emerges. Hence, I am not able to show that the authors' proposed algorithm is wrong or misleading. But the suggested modifications should be treated as an alternative to rather than improvements of the original CMP data.

### **CMP estimates are systematically biased due to lacking coder reliability (Mikhaylov et al. 2010)**

Apart from unsystematic sources of error, CMP estimates may suffer from systematic coding errors (Mikhaylov et al. 2010). Using a coding experiment where participants were asked to recode two CMP "gold standard" texts, Mikhaylov, Laver and Benoit demonstrate that the overall reliability (i.e. the probability of classifying a quasi-sentence in one category) is rather low.

I agree with the authors' statement that systematic errors are likely to occur because the Party Manifesto Project coded most party manifestos only once. In fact, biased estimates are most problematic using individual categories. For "aggregate" data of additive scales (like the RILE scale used in this dissertation project), the errors occurring in the individual policy categories may cancel each other out.

Regarding party policy positions on the CMP left-right scale, the authors show two things: First, low reliability increases the (unsystematic) noise in the data. Second, the systematic error component is more critical for parties with extreme policy positions. Systematic miscoding is less severe for centrist parties because they balance “left” and “right” topics. In contrast, extreme parties mainly put their emphasis on either “left” or “right” issues. Thus, incorrect coding leads to “centrist bias” with more moderate policy positions than the “true” value. Let  $P^*$  denote a party’s “true” policy position, then the erroneous measure  $P$  is given by

$$P = a \cdot P^* + c + \varepsilon \quad (4)$$

with  $0 < a < 1$  (because of the “centrist bias”) and  $\varepsilon$  reflecting non-systematic “noise”.

Let  $P_t^*$  and  $P_{t-1}^*$  the “true” policy positions of party  $P$  at time points  $t$  and  $t-1$ . With

$$P_t = a \cdot P_t^* + c + \varepsilon_t \quad (5)$$

and

$$P_{t-1} = a \cdot P_{t-1}^* + c + \varepsilon_{t-1} \quad (6)$$

we get the observed policy *shift*:

$$P_t - P_{t-1} = a \cdot (P_t^* - P_{t-1}^*) + (\varepsilon_t - \varepsilon_{t-1}) \quad (7)$$

For policy shifts, the constant term  $c$  disappears thus canceling out parts of the systematic error. Yet, the policy shift still hinges on the slope  $a$  and because of this “centrist bias”, large policy shifts are likely to be underestimated. This finding has consequences for research on party policy shifts because the bias reduces the variance of the dependent variable. With decreasing variation on the dependent variable, however, explaining differences in the dependent variable becomes less likely (see also King et al. 1994: 147-149).

This poses two additional questions: First, how large is the systematic bias? And second, are there reliable estimates which allow correcting for it? To answer the first question, the authors only provide graphs but  $a = 0.6$  seems to be a reasonable estimate. Using that estimate, the observed average policy shift (roughly 12 points) is considerably smaller than the “true” values (around 20 points). This leads to the second question: Are there reliable estimates to correct for the systematic bias? In my eyes, the answer is “not yet”. The authors *demonstrate* that systematic bias exists. But up to now, there is no way to circumvent it: The

authors use coding experiments based on a mixed sample of former CMP coders and inexperienced ones. The authors contact a (biased) sample<sup>116</sup> of 172 subjects and get a response rate of roughly 23%. To be fair with the CMP estimates, the authors discard the least reliable coding results leading to a sample of 24 coders and 2 texts with (in total) 144 quasi-sentences. Yet, the very small sample of coders, lacking incentives (which were in place for the original coding), and the non-random selection of subjects may bias the reliability estimates. *Therefore, I see no clearly valid and reliable way to correct for biased CMP estimates.* Future research may, however, solve this problem.

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<sup>116</sup> The research team was not able to obtain e-mail addresses of all coders.



## **Appendix B: Expected party positions (all CMP parties)**

### Austria:

Communists – Greens – Social Democrats - Liberal Forum<sup>117</sup> – Christian Democrats – FPÖ

### Belgium:<sup>118</sup>

Communists – Social Democrats – Green parties – Christian Democrats – Liberals – far right (Vlaams Bloc, FN)

### Denmark:

Communists (including small left parties) – Social Democrats – Radical Liberals – centre (Centre Democrats, Christian Democrats, DF, Justice Party) – right (Conservatives and Liberals)<sup>119</sup> – Progress Party

### Finland:

Communists (Socialists) – Greens – Social Democrats – Centre parties (KESK and SMP) – Liberals – Christian Democrats – Swedish People's Party - Conservatives

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<sup>117</sup> For the placement of the Liberal Forum see also Jenny (2006).

<sup>118</sup> No distinction between Flemish and Walloon parties within party families; no left-right positions for VU, FDF and RW because clear ideological expectations are missing.

<sup>119</sup> According to Damgaard (2000: 236), Liberals and Conservatives switched their policy positions over time. As in other north European countries, party families are not as decisive as in other countries. Rather, party systems are 'best understood in terms of five major *groupings* of parties' (Damgaard 2000: 233; emphasis added). According to this, I distinguish party groupings rather than party families.

Germany:

Communists (KPD and PDS) – Greens – Social Democrats – Liberals – Zentrum – Christian Democrats – DSU – GB/BHE - DP

Great Britain:

Labour – Liberals (Liberals, Social Democratic Party, and Liberal Democrats) - Conservatives

Ireland:

Socialists (WP/DL) – Greens – Labour – Fianna Fail – Fine Gael – Progressive Democrats

Netherlands:

Socialists (including the PPR) – Greens – Social Democrats – D66 – DS70 – Christian Democrats – Liberals (VVD) – List Pim Fortuyn

Norway:

Communists (Left Socialists) – Labour – Liberals – Christian Democrats – Centre Party – Conservatives – Progress Party

Sweden:

Communists (Left Party) - Social Democrats - Greens - centre (including Centre Party and Liberals)<sup>120</sup> - Christian Democrats – Conservatives

Notes:

Data from country experts and experts (Huber and Inglehart 1995; see country chapters in Müller and Strøm 2000b; Benoit and Laver 2006)

Note that not all parties exist at all points in time (e.g. Green parties)

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<sup>120</sup> According to Berman (2000: 195), both parties occupy the centre of the policy space. Left-right distances between these two parties are marginal.

## Appendix C: Expected party positions (restricted sample)

### Parties with at least 5% of the votes in two subsequent elections:

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Parties</b>	<b>Party codes (CMP)</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>Parties</b>	<b>Party codes (CMP)</b>
Austria	GA (Greens)	42110	Great Britain	Labour (Soc. Democrats)	51320
	SPÖ (Social Democrats)	42320		Social Democratic Party	51330
	FPÖ (Liberals)	42420		(Social Democrats)	
	LF (Liberals)	42421		Liberal Party (Liberals)	51420
	ÖVP (Christian Democrats)	42520		Liberal Democratic Party (Liberals)	51421
		Conservative Party (Conservatives)		51620	
Belgium	BSP/PSB (Social Democrats)	21320	Ireland	Labour (Social Democrats)	53320
	SP (Social Democrats)	21321		PD (Progressive Democrats)	53420
	PS (Social Democrats)	21322		Fine Gael	53520
	PVV/PLP (Liberals)	21420		Fianna Fail	53620
	VLD (Liberals)	21421			
	PRL (Liberals)	21422			
	PSC/CVP (Christian Democrats)	21520			
	CVP (Christian Democrats)	21521			
	PSC (Christian Democrats)	21522			
	RW (Rassemblement Walloon)	21911			
	VU (De Volksunie)	21913			
VB (Vlaams Blok)	21914				
Denmark	DKP (Communists)	13220	Netherlands	GL (Greens)	22110
	Socialistisk Folkeparti (Socialists)	13230		SP (Socialists)	22220
	SD (Social Democrats)	13320		PvdA (Social Democrats)	22320
	RV (Radical Party)	13410		D66 (Democraten'66)	22330
	Venstre (Liberals)	13420		VVD (Liberals)	22420
	KF (Conservatives)	13620		CDA (Christian Democrats)	22521
	DF (Danish People's Party)	13720		KVP (Christian Democrats)	22522
	FP (Progress Party)	13951		ARP (Christian Democrats)	22523
	RF (Justice Party)	13952		CHU (Christian Democrats)	22525
				LPF (List Pim Fortuyn)	22720

(continued)

Finland	VL (Greens)	14110	Norway	NKP (Communists)	12220
	SKDL (Socialists)	14221		Sosialistisk Folkeparti (Socialists)	12221
	VL (Socialists)	14223		DNA (Social Democrats)	12320
	SSDP (Social Democrats)	14320		V (Venstre)	12420
	LKP (Liberals)	14420		KrF (Christian Democrats)	12520
	KK (Conservatives)	14620		Hoyre (Conservatives)	12620
	Suomen Keskusta (Centre Party)	14810		Senterpartiet (Centre Party)	12810
	SMP (Centre Party)	14820		FrP (Progress Paety)	12951
Germany	RKP/SFP (Swedish People's Party)	14901	Sweden	Communist Party	11220
	Die Grünen (Greens)	41111/41112/41113		SdaP (Social Democrats)	11320
	SPD (Social Democrats)	41320		FP (Liberals)	11420
	FDP (Liberals)	41420		KdS (Christian Democrats)	11520
	CDU/CSU (Christian Democrats)	41521		MSP (Conservatives)	11620
		CP (Centre Party)		11810	

**Left-right expectations:**Austria:

Greens – Social Democrats – Liberal Forum<sup>121</sup> - Christian Democrats – FPÖ

Belgium:<sup>122</sup>

Social Democrats – Christian Democrats – Liberals – far right (Vlaams Bloc)

<sup>121</sup> For the placement of the Liberal Forum see also Jenny (2006).

<sup>122</sup> No distinction between Flemish and Walloon parties within party families; no left-right positions for VU and RW because clear ideological expectations are missing. FDF and FN do not reach the threshold

Denmark:<sup>123</sup>

Communists (including small left parties) – Social Democrats – Radical Liberals – centre ([Centre Democrats], [Christian Democrats], DF, Justice Party) – right (Conservatives and Liberals)<sup>124</sup> – Progress Party

Finland:<sup>125</sup>

Communists (Socialists) – Greens – Social Democrats – Centre parties (KESK and SMP) – Liberals – Swedish People's Party - Conservatives

Germany:<sup>126</sup>

Greens – Social Democrats – Liberals – Christian Democrats

Great Britain:

Labour – Liberals (Liberals, Social Democratic Party, and Liberal Democrats) - Conservatives

Ireland:<sup>127</sup>

Labour – Fianna Fail – Fine Gael – Progressive Democrats

Netherlands:

Socialists (SP) – Greens – Social Democrats – D66 – Christian Democrats – Liberals (VVD) – List Pim Fortuyn<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> The Centre Democrats and the Christian Democrats do not reach the threshold

<sup>124</sup> According to Damgaard (2000: 236), Liberals and Conservatives switched their policy positions over time. As in other north European countries, party families are not as decisive as in other countries. Rather, party systems are 'best understood in terms of five major *groupings* of parties' (Damgaard 2000: 233; emphasis added). According to this, I distinguish party groupings rather than party families.

<sup>125</sup> Christian Democrats do not reach the threshold

<sup>126</sup> The Socialists (PDS) do not reach the threshold

<sup>127</sup> Workers' Party, Democratic Left and Greens do not reach the threshold

<sup>128</sup> List Pim Fortuyn placement according to Laver/Benoit expert study.

Norway:

Communists (Left Socialists) – Labour – Liberals – Christian Democrats – Centre Party – Conservatives – Progress Party

Sweden:

Communists (Left Party) - Social Democrats - centre (including Center Party and Liberals)<sup>129</sup> - Christian Democrats – Conservatives

Notes:

Data from country experts and experts (Huber and Inglehart 1995; see country chapters in Müller and Strøm 2000b; Benoit and Laver 2006)

Note that not all parties exist at all points in time (e.g. Green parties)

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<sup>129</sup> According to Berman (2000: 195), both parties occupy the centre of the policy space. Left-right distances between these two parties are marginal.

## **Appendix D: Expected party positions as left-wing; right-wing and centre parties**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Left-wing parties</b>	<b>Centrist parties</b>	<b>Right-wing parties</b>
Austria	Greens Social Democrats	Christian Democrats Liberal Forum	FPÖ
Belgium	Social Democrats	Christian Democrats	Liberals Vlaams Bloc
Denmark	Communists (including left parties) Social Democrats	Radical Liberals Centre Party DF Justice Party	Conservatives Liberals Progress Party
Finland	Communists (Socialists) Greens Social Democrats	Centre parties (KESK and SMP) Liberals	Swedish People's Party Conservatives
Germany	Greens Social Democrats	Liberals	Christian Democrats
Great Britain	Labour	Liberals Social Democrats Liberal Democrats	Conservatives
Ireland	Labour	Fianna Fail Fine Gael	Progressive Democrats
Netherlands	Socialists (SP) Greens Social Democrats D66 <sup>130</sup>	Christian Democrats	List Pim Fortuyn Liberals

<sup>130</sup> D66 coded as left-wing party because of party family indicated in the CMP dataset.

(continued)

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Norway	Communists (Left Socialists) Labour	Liberals Centre Party Christian Democrats	Conservatives Progress Party
Sweden	Communists (Left Party) Social Democrats	Centre Party Liberals Christian Democrats <sup>131</sup>	Conservatives

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<sup>131</sup> The Christian Democrats could be classified as a “centrist” or a “right-wing” party.



## **Appendix E: List of niche parties in the sample**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>CMP party code</b>
Austria	GA Greens	42110
Belgium	Agalev	21112
	Ecolo	21111
	FDF	21912
	RW Walloon rally	21911
	VB Flemish Block	21914
	VU Flemish Peoples Union	21913
	VU-ID21 People's Union-ID21	21915
Denmark	FP Progress Party	13951
	DF People's Party	13720
Finland	VL Greens	14110
Germany	Alliance 90-Greens	41113
	Greens	41111
	Greens-Alliance 90	41112
Ireland	Greens	53110
The Netherlands	GL Greens	22110
	LN Livable Netherlands	22430
	LPF List Pim Fortuyn	22720
Norway	FrP Progress Party	12951
Sweden	Green Ecology Party	11110
	NyD New Democracy	11951
United Kingdom	NA	NA

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