

How aspiration to office conditions the impact of government participation on party platform change*

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Abstract

Considerable ambiguity exists regarding the effect of government/opposition status on party platform change. Existing theories' predict that: (1) it has no effect, (2) opposition parties change more, (3) opposition parties change more after several spells in opposition and (4) parties' responses vary because of different goal orientations. We propose that a party's aspiration to office, measured by its historical success or failure in entering office, determines a party's reaction to being in opposition or government. We hypothesize that, because of loss aversion, parties with low office aspiration change more when they are in government than when they are in opposition. Conversely, parties with high office aspiration change more as opposition party than as government party. We find evidence for these hypotheses through a pooled time-series cross-sectional analysis of 1,686 platform changes in 21 democracies, using the Comparative Manifesto Data and an innovative measure of party platform change.

Do opposition parties change their platform, i.e. their *position on issues* (e.g. become more favorable of immigration) or *attention to issues* (e.g. finding the immigration issue more important), more than government parties? The literature has conflicting, and largely untested, predictions about the effect of a party's *government/opposition status* on party platform change. First, some studies assume that public opinion shifts (Adams, Haupt, and Stoll 2008; Adams et al. 2004, 2006), rival party shifts (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009) and party voter shifts (Ezrow et al. 2011; Schumacher, de Vries, and Vis 2013) drive party platform change and that, consequently, government/opposition status is irrelevant (Downs 1957; Krehbiel 1988). Second, other studies argue that opposition parties are more likely to change their platform than government parties because the former clearly are on the wrong side of public opinion (Bendor et al. 2011; Carmines and Stimson 1986, 1989; Riker 1982, 1986). Often this argument is evaluated by analyzing the effect of electoral defeat on party platform change (Budge, Ezrow, and McDonald 2010; Budge 1994; Somer-Topcu 2009). Third, because parties are conservative organizations, it may take several electoral defeats before opposition parties change (Harmel and Janda 1994). Fourth, parties vary in their response to their opposition/government status because parties differ in how much they pursue office versus other goals (Harmel and Janda 1994; Müller and Strøm 1999). We propose a new, behavioral theory that predicts that some government parties change more than opposition parties and that this depends on their aspiration to office. Our new theory consists of two components.

First, due to loss aversion (e.g. losses hurt more than equal gains please) (Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1990; Kahneman and Tversky 1979) – triggered by the cost of governing (Bawn and Somer-Topcu 2012; Nannestad and Paldam 2002; Powell and Whitten 1993) – government parties are more likely than opposition parties to take the risk of changing their platform. However, and *second*, this mechanism works differently for parties with different levels of

office aspiration. The aspiration level is a level of performance against which parties benchmark their current performance (Bendor et al. 2011; Simon 1955). It adapts dynamically to parties' performance: in case of success in getting into office, parties' aspiration to office increases; in case of failure, aspiration decreases (Bendor et al. 2011). If a party with a low aspiration to office – a party that has never, or rarely, governed – becomes a government party its expectation of remaining in office is very low. Facing these expected losses, parties become loss averse and take risks. We thus hypothesize that government parties with low aspiration change their platform to ensure long-term access to office. Alternatively, we predict that for high aspiration parties – parties that almost always govern — opposition comes as a shock, motivating party platform change. For these parties, their past success of getting into office minimalizes their expectation to end up in opposition, which reduces the effect of loss aversion.

Our new behavioral theory echoes Harmel and Janda's (1994) prediction that opposition parties only change more than government parties if they are office-seeking. As we explain below, the concept of office-seeking (Harmel and Janda 1994; Müller and Strøm 1999) relates to office aspiration. However, the latter is continuous rather than dichotomous and dynamic – thereby capturing empirical reality better – and easier to operationalize. The aspiration level also allows us to make a more fine-grained distinction between parties, thereby advancing the argument that there are important behavioral differences between niche or challenger parties and mainstream parties (Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow et al. 2011; Meguid 2008; De Vries and Hobolt 2012). By proposing a way to establish parties' aspiration level regarding office our paper demonstrates how behavioral insights can be fruitfully applied to political science questions.

We test our hypotheses by analyzing 1,686 party platform changes in 191 parties in 21

democracies¹ (1950-2013) using the Comparative Manifesto Data (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006; Volkens et al. 2013). Our dependent variable, party platform change, is a count variable that indicates on how many issues a party's issue attention and issue position differs at election t compared to election $t-1$. By calculating standard errors of issue attention and issue position (Benoit, Laver, and Mikheylov 2009) and by separating issues into attention scales and position scales, we avoid important conceptual and measurement issues with the CMP data (Benoit, Laver, and Mikheylov 2009; Lowe et al. 2011; Volkens 2007).

Contrary to a current stream in the literature, we demonstrate that, in general, opposition parties change less than government parties do. In line with our new theory's predictions, parties with high office aspiration change their platform more when in opposition compared to when in government. Conversely, parties with low office aspiration change their platform more when in government than when in opposition. We replicate these findings in a large number of robustness checks. The findings have important implications for studies about the influence and behavior of parties and representation in general.

Opposition parties change more than government parties

Spatial models of elections (Black 1958; Davis, Hinich, and Ordeshook 1970; Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1984; Krehbiel 1988; Roemer 2001) were the first to systematically address the questions why and when parties change their platform. Spatial models assume that utility-maximizing and office-seeking politicians select a platform – a position on a spatial representa-

¹ Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain and the United Kingdom.

tion of policy preferences – that maximizes sincere voters’ electoral support.² Assuming full information, parties choose a position based on the spatial distribution of voters’ preferences and the spatial position of rival parties. Consequently, changes in public opinion or in the position of a rival party cause a party to shift position. Even with uncertainty about voter preferences and rival parties’ strategies, politicians sense the public’s mood by deriving information from polls, commentaries and discussions and use this for crafting a winning strategy (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002). Empirical research demonstrates that parties respond to changes in public opinion (Adams, Haupt, and Stoll 2008; Adams et al. 2004, 2006) and rival party shifts (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009).³ Because public opinion changes dynamically – and often moves in response to government policies (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Soroka and Wlezien 2005; Wlezien and Soroka 2012) – opposition parties and government parties are equally likely to change their platform.

Other models assume it is uncertain what the public wants and what position a rival party will move to. Therefore it is unlikely that public opinion and rival party change cause party position change (Budge 1994). Instead parties rely on proxies such as their current status as opposition party or government party (Bendor et al. 2011; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Harmel and Janda 1994; Riker 1982, 1986). Opposition parties have evidently failed to choose a platform that

² Voting for the party closest to your policy preference.

³ Parties respond to different subconstituencies. Ezrow and colleagues (2010) find that niche parties respond to the party voter and that mainstream parties respond to the mean voter. Similarly, Schumacher and colleagues (2013) find that activist-dominated parties respond to the party voter and that leadership-dominated parties respond to the mean voter. Also, Adams and Ezrow (2009) demonstrate that mainstream parties are responsive to opinion leaders.

maximizes electoral support, whereas government parties have clearly succeeded. Riker (1982, 1986) theorizes that to gain an electoral majority, opposition parties introduce new issues that change the dimensionality of political competition and possibly divide the electoral majority of the governing party (for a similar view see Carmines & Stimson, 1989). '(N)ew issues offer the opportunity for converting old losers into new winners (Carmines 1991: 75)'. A governing party, however, knows that its current platform works – otherwise it would not have gained office – but is uncertain about whether changing the platform will strengthen or weaken its electoral standing. To consolidate its current position, it is likely that governing parties stick to their platform (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Riker 1982, 1986).

Bendor and colleagues (2011) provide the same hypothesis but deduce it from Simons' model of bounded rationality and the aspiration-based updating of strategies (Simon 1955). This model posits that – under uncertainty – individuals (or parties) search for information and adopt new strategies if they are performing below their aspiration level. They terminate their search and stick to their strategy once an acceptable solution is found, that is when the option's payoff is at least as good as the aspiration level (Simon 1955). Assuming that all parties seek office, Bendor and colleagues (2011) argue that governing parties – who always perform equal to their aspiration level – likely stick to their platform. Opposition parties – who always perform below their aspiration level – likely change their platform. Government parties are also considered less flexible in bringing up new issues, because when they do, they are expected to implement policies addressing the issue (Walgrave and Nuytemans 2009). Opposition parties, by contrast, are not held responsible for policies, making them more flexible in emphasizing an issue that has electoral advantages for them (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010). From these different models, we derive the hypothesis that:

H1: Opposition parties are *more* likely to change their platform than government parties are.

An alternative to H1 is that opposition parties change with a time delay, because most parties are a conservative hodgepodge of diverging interests, goals and characters (Harmel and Janda 1994; Panebianco 1988). Many parties contain institutional veto players, for example in the form of a party council or a delegate conference (Katz and Mair 1995). Party-strategists also typically have sticky ideas about what platform will generate the most pay-offs, and party members are committed to an ideological program and therefore may oppose party platform change. In other words, institutions and ideas make parties stick to their platform rather than change it after one spell in opposition. Because of space constraints, we discuss this alternative hypothesis in the Supporting Information (SI, section 1). The results do not support the hypothesis that opposition parties change more after several spells in opposition.

Opposition parties change less than government parties

Parties endowed with office and the rents and prestige associated with it, may also be affected by a behavioral mechanism called the *endowment effect* (Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1990; Thaler 1980). Individuals endowed with a certain good demand more (monetary) compensation to give up the good than they are willing to pay to acquire the same good. Based on a review of over 40 studies, Horowitz and McConnell (2002) find that the negative effect of losing something is about two-and-a-half times higher than the positive effect of obtaining it. Loss aversion explains this endowment effect; in possession of the good, forgoing it is registered as a loss. Because the individual wants to hold on to the good, loss aversion motivates her to become risk-acceptant (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1981).

In our case, governing parties are endowed with office whereas opposition parties are not. Consequently, we propose that it is likely that government parties become loss averse and risk-taking. The cost of governing offers an explanation hereof. On average governments lose between 1 and 3.15 percentage points of the vote in elections (Nannestad and Paldam 2002; Powell and Whitten 1993). Hence, governments face the prospect of having to forego their endowment, while opposition parties are confronted with the prospect of *becoming* a government party. Several mechanisms explain the cost of governing. First, voters tend to blame governments for poor (economic) performance (Duch and Stevenson 2008; Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000), also because opposition parties will blame the government and governing parties have less control over their reputation (Greene 2014). Second, the thermostat model of dynamic representation predicts that public opinion shifts in the opposite direction of the governments' public policy agenda (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Soroka and Wlezien 2005; Wlezien and Soroka 2012). Therefore, governments should expect to lose votes at the next election if they do not adjust their platform to these public opinion shifts. Third, and applicable only to coalition governments, voters discount the position of parties in coalition governments, because these parties need to compromise on their policy stances. This makes coalition government parties more alike, enabling opposition parties to steal votes away from the governing parties. Therefore, Bawn and Somer-Topcu (2012) report that government parties have a better electoral performance if they propose a more radical policy platform.

In sum, owing to these different mechanisms, governing parties are likely to lose votes. The cost of governing puts governing parties into a situation where losing their endowment becomes a realistic possibility. Similar to individuals' responses to loss aversion, we expect that this induces risk-taking among governing parties. Conversely, opposition parties may expect to win the next election because they profit from the cost of governing. This could be because (1) public

opinion shifts favorably in the direction of opposition parties due to government policy, (2) the government is punished for poor performance and the opposition reaps the rewards and (3) governing parties in a coalition become more alike in the perspective of the voter and therefore it is easier for opposition parties to stand out. Hence, even though opposition parties' current endowment is unsatisfactory, their prospects of future endowments are promising. Following this reasoning, opposition parties may be in a situation of potential gains, which induces risk-averse behavior (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1981).

We conceptualize party platform change as risk-taking since this involves changing the current platform of which the effects are known for a new platform with an unknown popularity. Alternatively, sticking to the party platform equates risk-averse behavior. Based on the various negative incumbency effects and the consequent endowment effect, we expect government parties – fearing to lose their endowment – to act risk-acceptant, while opposition parties behave risk-averse. This leads to H2, which is the opposite of H1.

H2: Opposition parties are *less* likely to change their platform than government parties are.

Party platform changes are in most parties not based on an individual decision but a decision by a group such as a party conference, the parliamentary group or a party committee. Can we use individual-level insights from psychology, like loss aversion and the endowment effect, to explain group decision-making (Levy 1997; Mercer 2005)? The short answer to this question is *yes*. While there are studies finding that groups are less likely to fall prey to decision-making biases like loss aversion than individuals are, the dominant finding of the literature is that the decision-making behaviour of groups does not deviate from individuals' behaviour (see Kugler, Kausel, and

Kocher 2012 for a review). Experimental work has for instance found that groups and individuals behave similarly (e.g., Bone, Hey, and Suckling 1999; see Kuhberger 1998 for a meta-analysis), or that groups' decisions are even more in line with for instance prospect theory than individuals' decision are (Whyte 1993). A recent observational study of acquisition premium decisions by boards of Fortune 500 companies corroborates this latter finding (Zhu 2013). Zhu demonstrates that the groups' (boards') decisions are a more extreme version of the average pre-group position of the individual group members. This finding is in line with a large body of literature in social psychology on group polarization (Myers and Lamm 1976).

Why aspiration to office matters for party platform change

So far, we have assumed that all parties are equally affected by their opposition or government status. This assumption does not sit well with the literature on party goals, which argues that parties solve potential trade-offs between office, vote and policy pay-offs in various ways because they differ in whether office, vote or policy is their primary goal (Harmel and Janda 1994; Müller and Strøm 1999).⁴ For example, some (coalition) government parties choose to neglect their policy ambitions to maintain the governing coalition of which they are part. Other parties, however, reject office to maintain a “pure” policy profile – like the Dutch Labour Party in 1977 (van Praag 1990; Wolinetz 1993). Furthermore, as our discussion on the costs of governing demonstrated, being a governing party is on average not the best vote-maximizing strategy (Nannestad and Paldam 2002; Powell and Whitten 1993). This means that hypotheses 1 and 2 may not apply to parties that have policy or votes as their primary goals, but only for those that seek office: ‘the

⁴ Harmel and Janda (1994) also distinguish intra-party democracy as a goal. We ignore this goal because it only applies to a few parties and can be subsumed under the policy-seeking label.

more pronounced their failures to achieve executive office, the more likely they are to change' (Harmel & Janda, 1994: 281).

There is no easy way to operationalize *a priori* whether a party is office-seeking, policy-seeking or vote-seeking and often these behaviors are attached to parties *post-hoc*. To remedy this, we return to Bendor et al.'s (2011) concept of the aspiration level, which we discussed in relation to H2. The aspiration level is the benchmark level of performance: it separates satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance.⁵ Bendor et al. (2011) assume that *all* parties aspire office. However, an aspiration level adapts dynamically (Bendor et al. 2011): it is adjusted upwards if performance *exceeds* the aspiration level and adjusted downwards if performance *is below* it. We propose that a party's office aspiration adjusts dynamically, whereby failure – being in opposition – motivates a party to lower its expectation of office and success – being in government – increases its office aspiration. Even if most parties start out as 'a team of men working together in the pursuit of political office' (Schumpeter, 1975: 250), recurring failure to become a government party is hard to cope with and therefore party members and officials lower their office expectations. Also, politicians with office-seeking ambitions – 'careerists' (Panebianco 1988) – are expected to join parties that perform well in this regard which makes the party more oriented towards to that goal (Schumacher, de Vries, and Vis 2013).

To demonstrate that different levels of aspiration to office have different implications for how parties behave when they are in government or in opposition we divide parties into three groups: (1) parties that do not expect to be in office, because they are (almost) never in office – these contain niche parties (Adams et al. 2006; Meguid 2008) or challenger parties (De Vries and

⁵ The aspiration level is similar to prospect theory's reference point, yet the latter is static while the former is dynamic (Bendor et al. 2011).

Hobolt 2012), (2) parties that expect to be in office, because they are (almost) always in office and (3) parties that move in-and-out of office.

First, if parties (almost) permanently in opposition become a government party, they may on the one hand believe they have chosen the “right”, office-maximizing platform and should stick to it. On the other hand, these parties face poor prospects of returning as a government party after the next election. This is because (1) compromises are necessary to maintain a coalition government, however Adams and co-authors (2006) demonstrate that niche parties – a category that largely overlaps with low-aspiration parties – lose votes when they moderate their platform. Analyzing 8 radical left-wing parties after their first-time in government Dunphy and Bale (2011) report that all 8 lost votes. Hence, compromises entail future vote loss, which by Gamson’s Law reduces the party’s portfolios in a future government. However, if this type of party fails to compromise or radicalizes its platform, it risks alienating its coalition partners and dropping out as a potential coalition party altogether. Also, radical intra-party factions may embarrass the party vis-à-vis its coalition partners by making extremist policy demands. The increased media attention for government parties strengthens this. For example, the Dutch Christian Union moderated its position on homosexuality while in government, after radical elements in the party publicly defended the party’s initial extreme position on the matter (see SI section 7). (2) Being inexperienced with government these parties are unlikely to provide experienced office-holders. Voters do not appreciate incompetence and neither do (potential) coalition partners, who fear that by association with their incompetent coalition partner they risk electoral set-backs too.

Facing the prospect of losing their newly acquired status, we expect these parties to become risk-acceptant and change their platform so that it maximizes their future coalition appeal. We expect this office-seeking behavior more likely than a vote-seeking strategy where these parties would radicalize (in a multiparty system), because the latter does not directly help them in

preventing to lose their newly acquired good – office. In line with this, Dunphy and Bale (2011) report that first-time government parties are willing to trade-off short-to-medium term vote losses for office.

In addition, office experience changes parties and may cause a re-alignment of party goals and a change in expectations (Harmel and Janda 1994). In a party whose primary goal is to promote policies, government participation activates those party members or officials with office-seeking ambitions (Harmel et al. 1995) or attract new ones with more instrumental motivations (e.g. careerists [Panebianco 1988]). In such a case it could be argued that ‘if we can do that well without paying attention to the organization or to the opinion polls, imagine how well we could do with an organizational overhaul and a bit of image makeover’ (Harmel et al., 1995: 4). In our case studies (see SI section 7) we discuss how the Socialist People’s Party (Denmark) transformed its organization during their first term in government (2011-2014). This may even change the dominant intra-party faction. The net effect is a re-appraisal of office goals at the expense of policy or vote goals. There are many examples of parties that change their platform after their first spell in government. The German Greens are a prominent example, despite their pacifist and anti-nuclear platform they agreed to participate in two wars and initially postponed the closure of nuclear power stations during their first 1998-2002 term in office (Burchell 2002). Even though many activists left the party, the Greens’ leadership stuck to its new platform to remain an attractive coalition partner and was successful in doing so as they continued as the SPD’s junior partner after the 2002 elections (for a detailed case study of the Greens and 3 other first-time government parties see SI section 7 and results section).

Second, we expect quite a different effect of office exclusion for parties that have (almost) permanently been in office. Whereas parties with low office aspiration expect to lose office again, parties that have been almost always in government will hardly expect this. Such parties

either enjoy a very comfortable electoral majority (e.g. the Swedish Social Democrats from the 1930s to the early 1970s), or are a pivot party (Daalder 1984; Keman 1994) in the party system that needs to be included to make a coalition viable (such as the Dutch Christian Democrats until the mid-1990s). Because failure is so rare for these parties, it is unlikely that loss aversion drives their behavior. Instead, these parties experience a shock if they fail to achieve government status. This failure to meet their aspiration level likely motivates party platform change. For example, the Dutch Christian Democratic Party (CDA) and its predecessors had been permanently in office since World War II before becoming the main opposition party in 1994. Party elites and party members responded to the shock of losing office by engaging in radical organizational and ideological change (Duncan 2007; van Kersbergen 2008). In fact, on our dependent variable – which we will operationalize shortly – the party platform change of the CDA at the election of 1998 – the first one after 1994 – is one of the most radical changes we observe.

Third, for parties regularly in-and-out of office, the loss aversion mechanism is less pronounced compared to parties that are rarely in office because the latter's expectation of returning to office is much lower. But these in-and-out of office parties are not as confident about a continued status as governing party as parties that are almost always in office. Parties that are regularly in-and-out of office are not qualitatively different, but are stuck between the two mechanisms we described for parties with low, or high, office aspiration. We thus expect a linear interaction effect between opposition/government status and the aspiration level. Parties with low office aspiration are more likely to become risk-acceptant once in government. Owing to the loss aversion mechanism, they change their platform to safeguard their newly gained endowment. In turn,

parties with high office aspiration are more likely to change when in opposition. H3 and H4 summarize these hypotheses.⁶

H3: Opposition parties with low office aspiration are *less* likely to change their platform than government parties with low office aspiration.

H4: Opposition parties with high office aspiration are *more* likely to change their platform than government parties with high office aspiration.

Table 1 summarizes the theory section, outlining the dependent variable (party platform change), independent variables (X_1 - X_2), hypotheses and the coefficients' predicted signs.

⁶ We also considered whether parties are more or less likely to change their platform if their office pay-offs are below their level of office aspiration. We found no evidence for this (see section 2 in SI).

Table 1. Definitions and hypotheses

Definitions			
Pr(P) = probability of party platform change			
X ₁ (office performance): In Opposition (1) or in Government (0) prior to election			
X ₂ (office aspiration): $(X_{1,t-1} + X_{1,t-2} + \dots + X_{1,t-n}) / n$, with n as the number of observations of the party in the dataset			
Hypotheses		Predictions	Predicted incidence rate ratios (IRR)⁷
H1	$\text{Pr}(P) = \beta_1 X_1 + \text{controls}$	$\beta_1 > 0$	IRR > 1
H2		$\beta_1 < 0$	IRR < 1
H3 & H4	$\text{Pr}(P) = \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 (X_1 * X_2) + \text{controls}$	$B_3 > 0$, for low X ₂	IRR > 1
		$B_3 < 0$, for high X ₂	IRR < 1

Data and method

To measure party platform change, we used data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006; Volkens et al. 2013). Our dataset contained observations from 191 parties in 21 democracies (see note 1) in the period 1950-2013. The sample was slightly unbalanced since some countries are not democratic throughout the whole period. Because we measure change, we included countries from their second democratic election onwards. We used data from the period 1950-2013 to maximize the number of observations. The CMP employs human coders that assign quasi-sentences in the manifestos to 56 different issue categories.⁸ This provides a summary of attention to each policy issue within each electoral manifesto

⁷ Incidence rate ratios are the probabilities of the differences in counts (the dependent variable) for different values of the independent variables.

⁸ A quasi-sentence is an argument within one sentence (Budge et al. 2001).

(Budge et al. 2001).⁹ To measure platform change we collapsed the 56 issues in the CMP database into 19 categories (see table 2). First, we separated coding-categories that have a natural opposite in the coding scheme (e.g. references to welfare state expansion versus references to welfare state limitation) and created positional scales by subtracting these natural opposites. When categories are of the same topic, we combined them in a single scale (e.g. the economic policy scale). For categories without a natural opposite (e.g. mentions of Freedom and Human Rights) we clustered closely-related categories and summed them to create an attention scale. Second, we created dummy variables for each of the 19 scales, indicating whether a party's score on the scale, measuring issue position or issue attention, at election t significantly differed from its score at election $t-1$. In case the score at t was significantly different, we coded a 1 indicating change, and a 0 for no change.¹⁰ Thirdly, we summed the dummy variables of all 19 categories. This created a count variable of party manifesto change, which theoretically ranged from 0 (no change) to 19 (change on all 19 scales). Other researchers might order the CMP items differently.

⁹ The advantage of the CMP data is that one can construct time-series of party positions that are comparable within and across countries. The reliability of the data has been discussed (Volgens 2007). However, no comparable data source includes as many parties across time and space. Moreover, several authors have cross-validated the left-right placements from the CMP with expert and voter placements and found a high level of correspondence (Marks et al. 2007).

¹⁰ Text analysis is prone to errors, due to the stochastic processes of manifesto writing or due to coding mistakes. Using a bootstrapping method Benoit and co-authors (2009) provide standard errors of left-right party position measures. Using these errors we evaluate whether the change in the mean (issue attention or issue position) significantly differs from 0.

To ensure that our results are independent of our issue classification approach, we tested and found that our results are robust using three alternative measures of platform change.¹¹

Our dependent variable differs from the standard dependent variable – shifts on the left-right scale – in empirical studies on party platform change (e.g. Adams et al., 2004, 2006, 2008). We employ a different measure for three reasons. First, our hypotheses concern the amount of party change, and not the direction of change. Second, focusing on left-right shifts may hide party platform shifts on different issues. Researchers construct left-right scales by subtracting the left-oriented issues from the CMP data from the right-oriented issues. This way a party may change attention to several left-oriented issues, but not changes its left-right position. Third, many studies find that political competition is characterized by multiple dimensions (e.g. Laver & Benoit, 2006). Thus, exclusively focusing on parties' left-right shifts is restrictive. In section 4 of the SI, however, we demonstrate that our findings also extend to (absolute) left-right change.

¹¹ Using the procedure described in the text, we first analyzed change on all 56 items individually and created count variable to probe the extent of change. Second, we used the CMP grouping of items into seven topics (international relations, liberal democracy, political organization, economy, welfare, morality and culture, interest groups), evaluated change in each and counted the changes for each platform. Third, we summed the absolute changes in the 19 issues. See section 3 in SI for these analyses.

Table 2. Classification of CMP issues

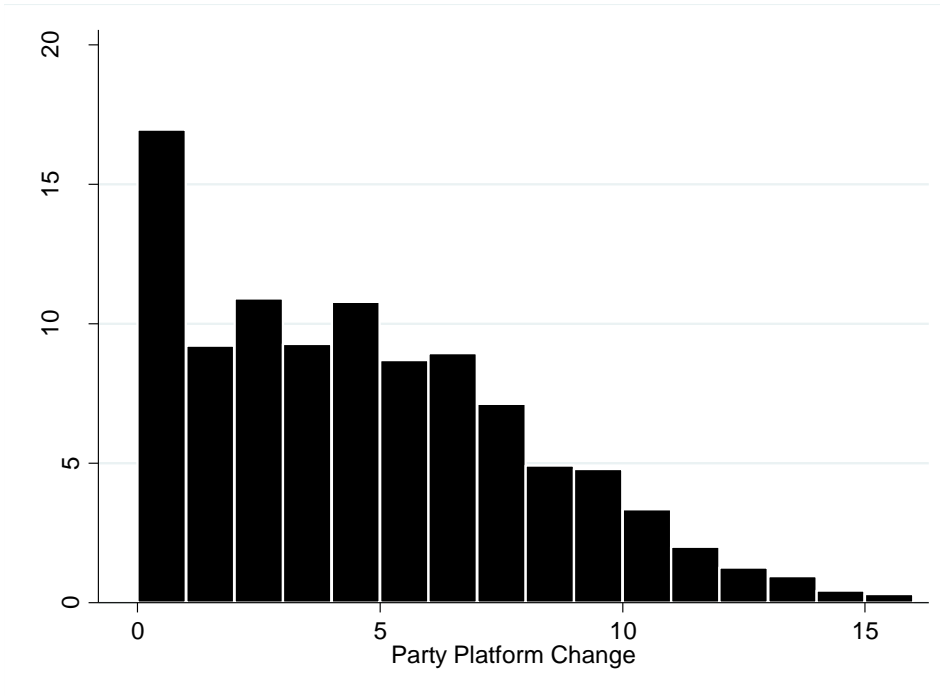
Economic policy	Position	Free market economy+incentives+protectionism: negative regulation+labour groups: negative+economic orthodoxy-(economic planning+corporatism+protectionism: positive+Keynesian Demand Management+Controlled Economy+Nationalization+Marxist Analysis+Labour groups: positive +market regulation)
Welfare policy	Position	Welfare state expansion+education expansion-(welfare state limitation+Education limitation)
Europe	Position	EU: positive-EU: negative
Multiculturalism	Position	Multiculturalism: positive-Multiculturalism: negative
International issues	Position	Anti-imperialism+military: negative+peace+internationalism: positive-(military: positive+internationalism: negative)
Special relations	Position	Foreign special relations: positive-foreign special relations: negative
Constitutional issues	Position	Constitutionalism: positive-constitutionalism: negative
(De)centralization	Position	Decentralization-centralization
Traditional issues	Position	National way of life: positive+traditional morality: positive – (national way of life: negative+traditional morality: negative)
Democracy	Attention	Freedom and Human Rights+Democracy
Treatment of groups	Attention	Equality+underprivileged minority groups+non-economic demographic groups
Government organization	Attention	Governmental and Administrative Efficiency+Political Corruption+Political Authority
Economic growth	Attention	Economic goals+Economic growth: positive+Technology and Infrastructure
Cultural issues	Attention	Culture: Positive
Law and order	Attention	Law and order: Positive
Social harmony	Attention	Social Harmony
Farmers' issues	Attention	Agriculture and farmers: positive

Middle class is- sues	Attention	Middle class: positive
Environmental issues	Attention	Anti-Growth Economy: positive+Environmental Protection

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of our party manifesto platform change variable. In 17 percent of cases, party manifestos were invariant between elections, indicating that parties did not change their platform. Almost 50% of our observations constitute parties that changed on 1 to 5 issues. While the observed maximum is 16 change counts, the figures show that such radical change is exceptional.¹²

¹² Over time the number of changes increases. On average parties changed their manifesto on 2 to 3 issues before the 1970s compared to an average of 5 to 6 issues after the 1990s. We also found considerable between-country variation, with Luxembourg the most extreme (7 changes) and France the least extreme (2 changes).

Figure 1. Histogram of party platform change



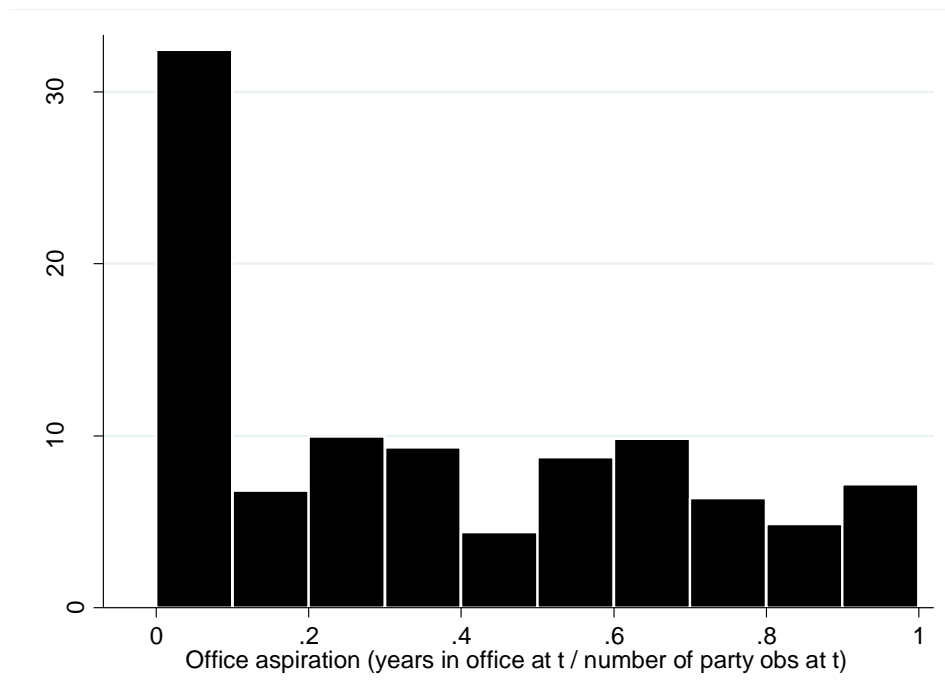
The independent variables

Our two key independent variables are: office performance (X_1) and office aspiration (X_2). Office performance is a dummy variable indicating whether a party was in opposition prior to the election (1) or in office (0). This measure suffices to evaluate H1 and H2. For office aspiration (H3 and H4), we counted at election t all previous spells in office (by year) and divided that by the total number of observations available for that party previous to election t . Hence, this is a continuous variable that ranges between 0 (never in government) and 1 (always in government) and updates with each year (see figure 2).¹³ The distribution is highly skewed towards 0, because about 30% of the parties had no government experience (office aspiration=0). These are the

¹³ We find similar results if we keep aspiration constant for the years in-between elections.

parties in our sample that have been permanently in opposition (e.g. radical left parties: Die Linke (Germany), Socialistische Partij (Netherlands), Izquierda Unida (Spain), Green Parties in Netherlands, Austria and Sweden, and radical right parties: Vlaams Belang (Belgium), the Freedom Party (Netherlands) and Danish People’s Party). About 14% of the sample are parties sometimes in government ($0.0 < \text{office aspiration} \leq 0.25$), such as the German Green Party, the French Communist Party, and the Dutch progressive liberals (D66). Another 20% of the sample are parties regularly in and out-of-government ($0.25 < \text{office aspiration} \leq 0.5$). This includes mainstream parties that regularly switch office such as in the UK, Germany and France. About 27% are parties often in government ($0.5 < \text{office aspiration} < 0.95$) and about 5% are parties in office for at least 95% of the time or more at the time of measurement. The latter group consists of the Swedish and Austrian Social Democrats, the Belgian, Austrian, Italian, Dutch and Luxembourgian Christian Democrats and the Canadian Liberal Party.

Figure 2. Histogram of office aspiration



We also control for alternative explanations of party platform change. First, we control for the change in seats of a party at the last national election (Budge 1994; Somer-Topcu 2009). To measure this we subtracted the party’s seats share at election $t-1$ from its seat share at election $t-2$. As such, negative values indicate that a party lost seats in the previous election, while positive values denote seat gains. Second, to account for party system differences, we included a variable capturing the effective number of parties on the seats level (Armingeon et al. 2013; Laakso and Taagepera 1979). Third, we included the years in between elections as a control because short-time spans restrain parties in re-writing their manifesto. Moreover, some parties even choose to run with the same manifesto in case of time constraints. Table 3 reports the operationalization of our variables and the descriptive statistics.

Table 3. Operationalization and descriptive statistics of dependent and independent variables

DV	Operationalization	Mean(SD)	Min-Max
Platform change	Sum of changes on each issue	4.26(3.42)	0 – 16
Dichotomous IVs		Freq(0)	Freq(1)
X ₁ In opposition	0 in government, 1 in opposition	590	995
Continuous IVs		Mean(SD)	Min-Max
X ₂ Office aspiration	Years in office at t / number of party obs. in data at t	.36(.32)	0 – 1
Years between elections	Z-score of months between elections	3.39(1.09)	0 – 6
ENPS	Effective number of parties	3.84(1.57)	1.69 – 9.07
Seat change	%Seats($t-1$) – %Seats($t-2$)	-.0002(.06)	-.57 – 0.4

Method

We treat the data as pooled time-series with political parties as the cross-sectional units that vary over elections. Our dependent variable, party platform change, is a count variable. Count data do not follow a normal distribution, and therefore ordinary linear regression is not suitable to analyze the data. As a solution, usually two different types of Poisson models are considered. The ordinary Poisson model assumes a distribution in which the mean of the dependent variable equals the variance. Yet, our dependent variable is strongly over-dispersed (variance is 11.5, compared to a mean of 2.1), so we opt for a negative binominal regression, which functions the same way as a Poisson, but better deals with over-dispersion (see Hausman, Hall, & Griliches, 1984).¹⁴

A second step in the model-building process is to choose between a fixed effects specification in which intercepts for all parties are included in the model (a so-called within-estimator) or a random effects model allowing deviation from a mean intercept. Our hypotheses predict that changes *within parties* in office aspiration and differences *between parties* in office aspiration explain variation in party platform change. Furthermore, tests showed that the observed variance in party platform change between parties almost equals the within-party variance (2.59 versus 2.66), indicating that a substantive part of the total variance in the dependent variable is explained by differences between parties. Therefore we followed the recommendations of Plümpfer

¹⁴ An alternative is zero-inflated negative binominal regression. The Vuong test showed that a model in which the excess zeros are accounted for by the years in-between elections is a more viable option. However, given that this method has not been implemented for panel data analysis, and that we arrive at similar findings without this correction (see section 5 in SI where we provide results of several alternative model specifications),

et al. (2005) and specified random effects. Fixed effects would completely absorb differences in the level of aspiration across parties. For example, our party office aspiration variable is time-variant when a party alternates between government and opposition. However, there are many parties that have never governed throughout the sample period, making office aspiration time-invariant (zero for each year). In that case, a fixed effects specification would completely ignore the fact that these parties are less likely to change their platforms in response to office exclusion than those that have governed in the past. For these reasons ‘allowing for a mild bias resulting from omitted variables is less harmful than running a fixed effect specification’ (Plümper et al., 2005: 343).

Do office performance and office aspiration explain party platform change?

In this section, we report and discuss the results of our empirical analysis of what explains party platform change. Table 4 presents the results from our time-series cross-sectional negative binomial regression analyses.

Table 4. Time-series cross-sectional negative binominal regression analyses of party platform change

	Model 1 (H1 & H2)	Model 2 (Main model [H3 & H4])
	irr/se	irr/se
In opposition	.867* (.038)	.70* (.06)
Office aspiration		.963 (.142)
In opposition*Office aspiration		1.73* (.274)
Years between elections	1.09* (.021)	1.09* (.021)
Effective number of parties	1.05* (.023)	1.05* (.023)
Seat change	.726 (.193)	.848 (.226)
Constant	2.60* (.349)	2.81* (.432)
Log Likelihood	-4085.03	-4076.51
N	1686	1686

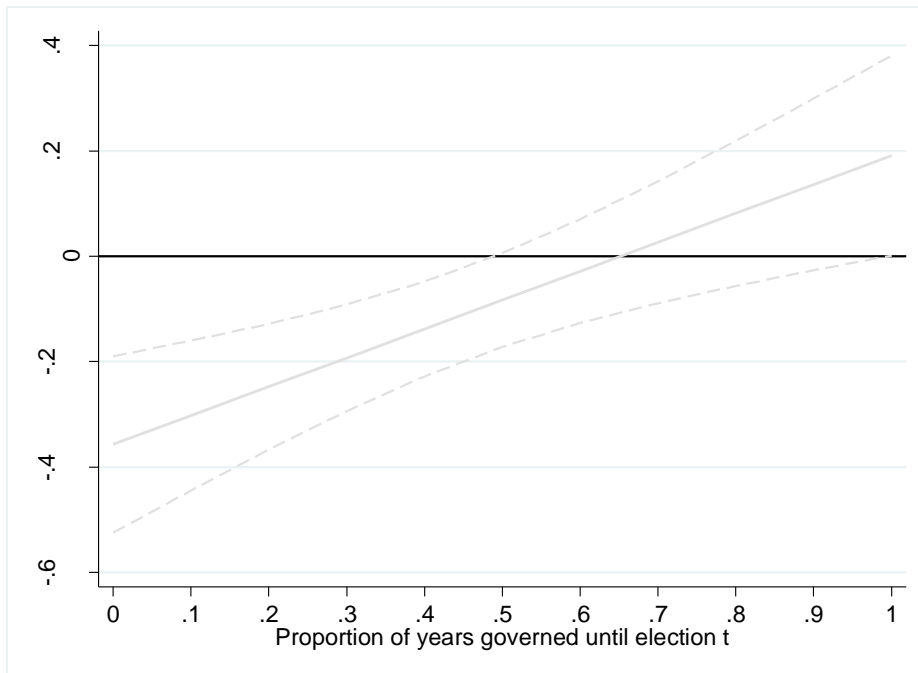
*p<0.05 (two-tailed). Panel negative binominal regression explaining party platform change. Loglikelihood ratio test statistics demonstrated that model 2 fits significantly better than model 1 (LR Chi=12.56, p=.002).

Model 1 simultaneously tests whether opposition parties are more likely to change (H1), and whether government parties are more likely to change (H2). The *in opposition* variable in model 1 has an incidence-rate ratio of .867 (p<.01). This means that platform change of opposition parties is 0.867 times less than platform change of government parties. Hence, contrary to H1 and the literature arguing that opposition parties are more likely to change (Bendor 2010; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Riker 1982, 1986), our findings suggest that government parties are more likely to change. We thus find support for H2, which suggests that loss aversion by government par-

ties, accelerated by the cost of governing, motivates party platform change. Opposition parties, in turn, are risk-averse and change less because they face the prospect of winning office. We will now consider whether parties with different aspiration levels respond differently to being in government or in opposition.

The findings reported in model 2 lend strong support for the main proposition of our study that a party's response to being in opposition (and government) is *moderated* by its level of office aspiration (IRR=1.731, $p < .01$). Because of the presence of the interaction term *in opposition*office aspiration*, the main effect *in opposition* is only indicative of the effect of opposition for parties that have never governed (office aspiration=0). In line with the recommendations of Brambor et al. (2006), we therefore calculate and graph marginal effects (figure 3) to demonstrate the effect of opposition for all the levels of office aspiration (0-1) we have observed in our sample.

Figure 3. Marginal effect of opposition on party platform change for increasing values of office aspiration



Notes: 95 percent confidence intervals. The y-axis denotes the effect (b-coefficient) of being in opposition (reference category is government) on a party's amount of platform change. Positive values denote that government parties are more likely to change their platform than those in opposition; whereas negative effects indicate the reverse.

In line with H3, the marginal effects in figure 3 show that opposition parties are significantly less likely (i.e. negative values on y-axis) than governing parties to change their party platform when their office experience is below .5 (governed less than 50 percent of the years they were included in the sample before the current election). This includes parties new to government (e.g. the German Greens in 1998, the Dutch D66 and PPR in 1973, the Danish Center Democrats and Christian People's Party the Northern League, National Alliance and Forza Italia in 1994 in Italy) and parties that often switch between opposition and government status (many well-known mainstream parties). Figure 3 also shows that opposition and governing parties are equally likely (because the confidence bounds entrap the zero-line) to change their platform when their aspirations range between .5 and .9, i.e., when their office aspiration is moderately high or high. Finally, in line with H4, figure 3 shows that at very high levels of office aspiration ($\geq .95$, about 5% of entire sample), opposition parties become significantly more likely than governing parties to change their platform ($b = .19$, $p < .05$). Recall that examples of such 'parties-of-government' are – at specific periods – the Swedish and Austrian Social Democrats, the Belgian, Austrian, Italian, Dutch and Luxembourgian Christian Democrats and the Canadian Liberal Party. These parties have almost permanently been in government ($\geq 95\%$ of the years), probably perceive a very low chance of losing office, and have office as their primary goal. Losing office is a shock that motivates party platform change.

We have theorized that government parties with a low or medium-level of aspiration are motivated to change their platform to maximize their office pay-offs. If this is the case, it is likely that these parties become more centrist after a spell in office. An alternative explanation is that these parties radicalize their platform to please party members who are dissatisfied with the com-

promises the party had to make during its term in office. Additional analyses (see section 6 in the SI) reveal that radicalization does not occur. Instead, government parties with office aspiration between 0.15 and .5 – thus, those parties with little or no previous office experience or that are regularly in-and-out of office – shift their position in the direction of the mean party’s left-right position. Conversely, opposition parties with an equal aspiration level either shift their left-right position away from the mean party (i.e., those with an aspiration ranging between 0 and .1), or refrain from changing their position (i.e., those with an aspiration between .2 and .5). This demonstrates that government parties with low or moderate office aspiration change their platform to fulfill their office aspirations instead of pleasing party members. We also find evidence for this mechanism in four cases studies which we describe in detail in the Supporting Information (section 7). We study four parties (Center Democrats, Socialist People’s Party (both Denmark), Christian Union (Netherlands) and Greens (Germany) before, during and after their first spell in government. In each of these cases we find that parties moderated their policy stances or adjusted the importance they attach to issues in their first spell in government. For example, the orthodox Protestant Christian Union (Netherlands) altered its controversial position on the role of homosexuals in the party, the Socialist People’s Party (Denmark) shifted to the right on tax, labor market and welfare policies, the Center Democrats shifted from the right to the centre, and – as discussed on page 6 – the Greens even supported Germany’s military involvement in Kosovo, the first major post-World War II German involvement in a military mission.

Overall, the pattern depicted in figure 3 strongly supports our hypotheses 3 and 4 that parties with a low to moderate aspiration to office ($<.5$) become risk-acceptant when in office (and risk-averse if in opposition), whereas parties with very high office aspiration ($\geq.95$) behave risk-averse in office (and risk-acceptant when in opposition). We also performed robustness analyses – 17 in total discussed in the Supporting Information. We evaluated our findings with

(1) different operationalizations of our dependent variable (sections 3, 4 and 8 in SI), (2) different model specifications (section 5), (3) different data sources (using the Chapel Hill Expert Survey to measure party platform change, see section 9), (4) with different subsamples (section 10), (5) with additional control variables such as public opinion or economic change (section 11), (6) with alternative measurements for some of our independent variables (sections 1 and 2) and (7) by constructing case studies from secondary sources (section 7). These robustness analyses support our general findings.

As for the control variables, parties are more likely to change their platform when there are more years in between elections. For each additional year, a party's number of platform changes increases with a factor of 1.093 in model 1 and 1.093 in model 2 ($p < .05$ in all models). This results probably from parties having more time to observe change in their competitive and social environment and adjust their platform accordingly (Sommer-Topcu 2009). Also, parties change their platform more if there are more parties in the party system (IRR=1.045 in model 2, $p < .05$). The statistically insignificant effect in each model of a party's past performance in terms of seats confirms findings in some studies (Adams et al. 2004) but is at odds with others (Budge 1994; Sommer-Topcu 2009). Unlike these studies, we find that parties that have gained seats change their platform in the next elections as much as those parties that have lost seats. What explains this discrepancy? One explanation is that parties are not maximizing their votes, but their coalition appeal. Schofield et al. (1998) report for instance that some Dutch and German parties do not adopt policy positions that maximize their vote share, but instead adopt a position that maximizes their coalition appeal. This also explains why parties with low-aspiration shift to the centre even though Bawn and Sommer-Topcu (2012) report that government parties increase their vote share if they adopt a more extreme platform.

Conclusion

Parties are the key actors in democracies and thus party behavior has important consequences. Our dependent variable – party platform change – describes one manifestation of party behavior, yet the theory we developed in this paper is relevant for all domains in which parties have influence. To recap, our theory consists of two components. First, due to loss aversion evoked by the expectation to lose office government parties change on average their platform more than opposition parties do. Second, but parties differ in their response to being in government depending on their aspiration level. When a low aspiration party is in office, it expects to lose office after the next election which motivates it to change its platform. Parties with a very high aspiration level, conversely, believe it is very unlikely that they will lose and therefore only change their platform when they are kicked out of office. Our empirical test of 1,686 platform changes in 21 democracies supports this theory. Moreover, loss aversion and the aspiration level are general behavioral mechanisms. Therefore we consider it likely that the expectation to lose and the varying expectations of parties also impact on how political choices are represented and translated, which issues receive attention, which interests are represented, and ultimately which policies are written into law. In addition to providing a new hypothesis for other domains in which parties have influence, our paper also makes a number of more direct contributions, which we discuss in the next sections.

Contributing to the literature on party platform change, our results show that a party's opposition/government status should be taken into account next to well-known explanations like public opinion shifts (Adams, Haupt, and Stoll 2008; Adams et al. 2004, 2006), party voter shifts (Ezrow et al. 2011; Schumacher, de Vries, and Vis 2013), rival party shifts (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009), and opinion leaders' shifts (Adams and Ezrow 2009). Also, we demonstrate that in

contrast to existing expectations (Bendor et al. 2011; Carmines and Stimson 1989; Riker 1982), government parties change more on average than opposition parties. Our new dependent variable is a second contribution to this literature. By measuring the absolute change in a party's position and attention to issues using some recent methodological innovations (Benoit, Laver, and Mikheylov 2009; Lowe et al. 2011), this new dependent variable captures party platform change in a different and, in our view, more reliable and valid way. That said, our results are the same with the more standard dependent variable: absolute changes in a party's left-right position (see SI section 4). Interestingly, we also find that our theory explains changes in issue position better than changes in party issue emphases (see SI section 8).

Our study also contributes to the literature on parties' different goals. Most theories about the influence of parties assume parties pursue one or more goals (generally policy, office or vote). Assuming different goals often entails different predictions of party influence. Empirically, however, an explicit measure of office-seeking is lacking and often studies assign the office-seeking label to parties in *ad hoc* fashion. We argue that in addition to intra-party institutions (Müller and Strøm 1999), a party's own performance moderates party goals. A party's success in achieving a goal reinforces the expectation of future success in that area, whereas a party's lack of success in achieving a goal depresses future expectations. By proposing a straightforward way to measure the degree to which parties are office-seeking our paper contributes to general theory-building and empirical testing of the influence of political parties.

Our study furthermore interacts fruitfully with the literature applying behavioral theories of decision-making in political science. Our theory draws on this literature, especially on Bendor and colleagues' (2011) model of aspiration-based updating and studies on the endowment effect and loss aversion (Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1990; Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1981). We also contribute to this literature with our new measure of office aspira-

tion. This measure demonstrates how to establish a non-tautological assessment of an actor's aspiration level – one of the open questions in the field (Mercer 2005: 6).

Finally, our findings pose questions to models of democratic representation that argue that the search for electorally successful platforms by parties that lost power is one mechanism by which congruence between elites and masses could come about (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Riker 1982, 1986). Our finding that, on average, opposition parties change less than government parties does fuel the argument that the role of political opposition in presenting a political alternative to the government is diminishing, thereby weakening this mechanism of representation (Dahl 1966; Mair 2013). Also, the behavior of government parties may have adverse effects on how voters perceive them: by changing their electoral platform government parties seem to take little responsibility for the platform they supported as government party. Or government parties may be seen as too accommodating to coalition parties or interest groups. These suggestions clearly warrant more empirical research to better map mechanisms of representation. This study makes an important step by putting one of these mechanisms of representation in doubt.

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