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Parties under pressure : explaining choices made by parties in the wake of heavy electoral defeat

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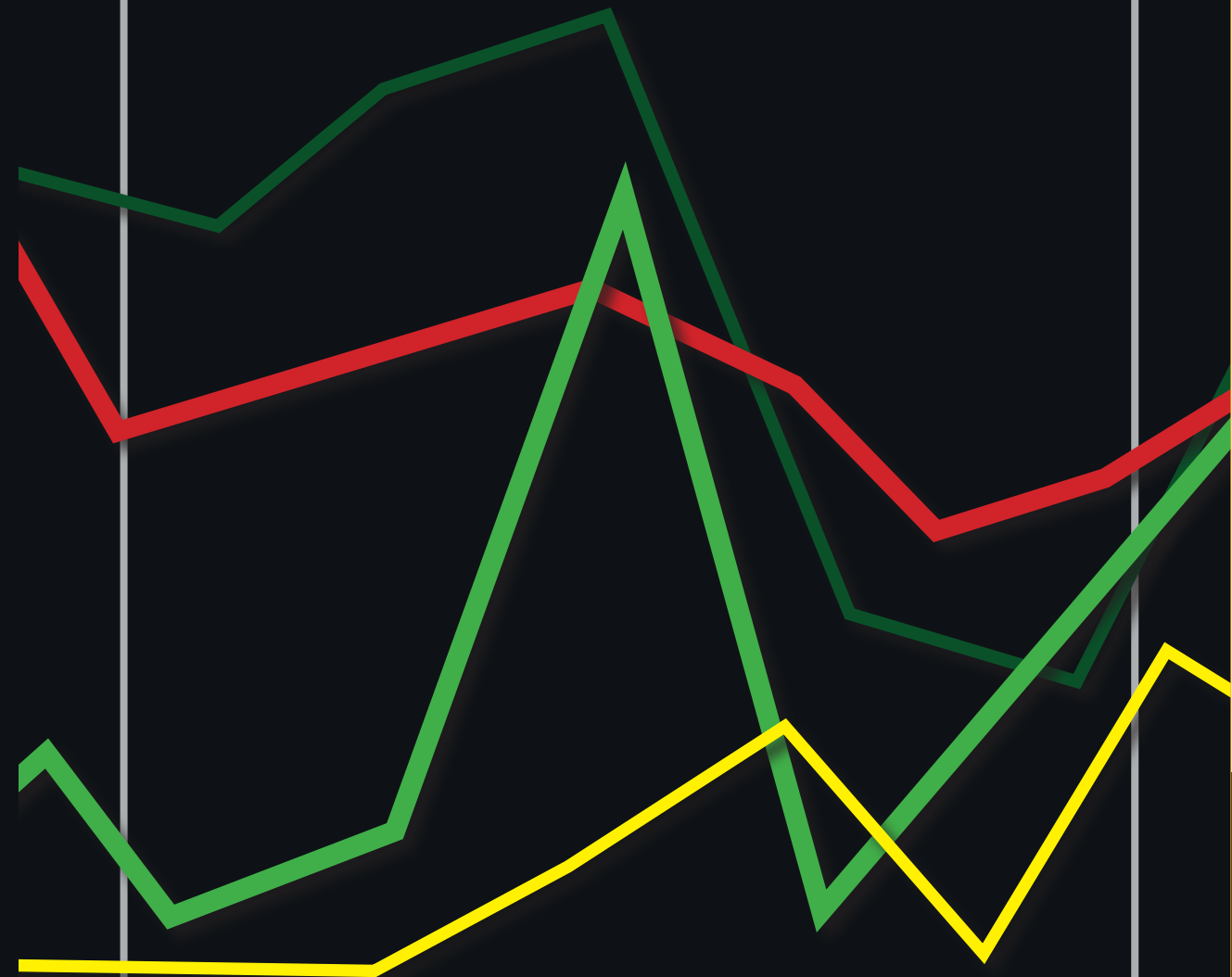
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Parties under Pressure

Explaining choices made by parties in the wake of heavy electoral defeat

Martijn van Nijnanten | Parties under pressure



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How do political parties respond to heavy electoral defeat, and why do different parties respond in different ways? This question has become all the more relevant in the last three decades when it seems more the rule than the exception for at least one party to lose heavily at any election in most countries in Western Europe. This, then, is the central puzzle of this dissertation, which aims to build a new model to explain the choices made by parties in response to heavy electoral defeat. What choices do parties make in such a situation? Does the party choose to reinforce its ties to its current base of electoral supporters or to extend to those who are not regular supporters?

Studying four cases in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (the CDA, Labour, the Liberal Party and D66), this book provides a number of new insights into the process of party change. It turns out that parties under pressure are not just in a struggle for power or in a quest for their primary goals, but also in a continuous conversation with the party's own past. The degree of attachment to the electoral base and the party ideology has a significant impact on the preferences of parties for dealing with a heavy electoral defeat. These factors are, at the same time, sometimes overtaken by the realities of the electoral system in which parties operate. With these insights, this book takes the first step towards building a new model to better understand an increasingly important phenomenon in party systems subjected to the reality of partisan dealignment and electoral volatility.

Martijn van Nijnanten