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

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Citation

Nijnanten, M. T. van. (2019, September 12). *Parties under pressure : explaining choices made by parties in the wake of heavy electoral defeat*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/77745>

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Issue Date: 2019-09-12

10 Conclusion and discussion

10.1 Introduction

This dissertation sought to address the research question “*how do political parties respond to an external shock in the form of heavy electoral defeat, and why do different parties respond in different ways?*”. As argued in chapter one, this is a theoretically as well as socially important research area. As further elaborated in chapter two, the party change literature suffers from a problem of complex causality: the same cause, changes in the external environment, can lead to a variety of outcomes in the category of party change. Distinguishing between them is important especially where electoral shocks are concerned, since party systems in Western Europe have grown increasingly unstable in recent elections.¹ The theoretical ambition of this dissertation, therefore, has been to develop and empirically examine a new heuristic model as a starting point for building a new theoretical model of shocks and change.

In chapter two of this dissertation, a survey of the state of the art in the literature led to the conclusion that development of the theory on shock-induced change had stalled and would benefit from a new approach. The chapter signalled two major problems: the existing model of Harmel and Janda was being overstretched because it was being used to examine the presence or absence of certain kinds of changes, which it was not designed for.² The second was that the literature acted implicitly on a conception of change which was unidirectional, the one direction moving away from the party’s origins. This led to puzzles in which certain kinds of changes were expected but not found on the basis of the theory, demonstrating its limitations.³

Chapter three set out the terms of a new tentative model, which departs from what the shocks literature *had* successfully demonstrated: that an external shock, by and large, caused parties to change.⁴ Electoral shocks were chosen as the focus since they provided the broadest possible “population” for the study by working on parties with all kinds of goals, thus averting the need to “call” a party’s primary goal. The point of departure for our model, inspired by works on campaign strategy, is that once electoral potential has been durably compromised in a significant way, parties roughly have two paths available

1. V. Emmanuele and A. Chiamonte, “Party system volatility, regeneration and de-institutionalization in Western Europe (1945-2015),” *Party Politics* 23, no. 4 (2017): 382-384.

2. R. Harmel and K. Janda, “An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change,” *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 6, no. 3 (1994): 259-287.

3. F. Duncan, “‘Latently, Things Just Don’t Seem the Same’: External Shocks, Party Change and the Adaptation of the Dutch Christian Democrats During ‘Purple Hague’, 1994-8,” *Party Politics* 13, no. 1 (2007): 84.

4. Although of course, the theoretical possibility that change would not occur should have been considered, and this was the focus of the discussion of the whether-stage. See chapter 3.

to them.⁵ One is to appeal to their core voters (the reinforcement strategy), the other (the extension strategy) is to reach out to non-core voters. These strategies are associated with kinds of changes in the field of electoral tactics, party organisation, programme and ideology. Since an electoral shock initiates a critical juncture in which there is increased scope for change, these changes consist of more fundamental and far-reaching changes than those made in a “normal” electoral strategy.⁶ Roughly speaking, the reinforcement strategy represents change towards the party’s roots, since this would appeal to those who had previously voted for the party. The extension strategy represents the hitherto prevailing understanding of change away from the party’s roots and origins.

In specifying the causal mechanisms described by our model, a historical institutionalist approach was chosen, building mostly upon the critical juncture framework as developed by Collier and Collier and Capoccia and Kelemen.⁷ The general mechanism of production by which parties will opt for (elements of) either strategy unfolds in two stages. At the initial stage, preferences are formed based on the party’s internal characteristics as institutions, developed over the course of their history. This is expressed in a first set of two factors: electoral base attachment and ideological attachment.

Electoral base attachment in the form of formal or informal institutional rules drives the party towards the reinforcement strategy, while lack of it points to an extension strategy. This is a function of path-dependency as well as electoral arithmetic: the party’s history increases the costs of changing away from its past trajectory. A similar argument was presented for ideological attachment. Since parties can be to a lesser or greater extent attached to their ideology, it follows that parties with a higher degree of ideological attachment also have higher costs changing away from their past ideological commitments and practices derived from them. This means the reinforcement strategy will be the preferred strategy of parties more strongly attached to ideology, while the extension strategy will be more likely to be adopted by a party that is more weakly attached. The second set of factors proposed were external influences, which might make either strategy less viable by imposing constraints on the preferences based on the party’s institutional characteristics. In particular, majoritarian electoral systems were proposed to push parties towards an extension strategy.

Our model was assessed empirically by means of a comparative research design consisting of four empirical cases of parties suffering an electoral shock: the Dutch Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) between 1994 and 2002, the British Labour Party between 1983 and 1992, the Dutch Democrats 66 (D66) between 1982 and 1989, and finally the British Liberal Party between 1970 and 1974. Using within-case evidence and between-case comparison as evidence, the model was subjected to a first empirical assessment in

5. J. J. M. Van Holsteyn and G. A. Irwin, “CDA, naar voren! Over de veranderende verkiezingsstrategie van het CDA,” in *Jaarboek 1987*, ed. R. A. Koole (Groningen: Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen, 1988), 69-70; R. Rohrschneider, “Mobilizing versus chasing: how do parties target voters in election campaigns?,” *Electoral Studies* 21, no. 3 (2002): 368.

6. See G. Capoccia and R.D. Kelemen, “The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism,” *World Politics* 59, no. 3 (2007): 348.

7. R. Berins Collier and D. Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Capoccia and Kelemen, “The Study of Critical Junctures.”

chapters five through nine. Following the synthesis of data from all four cases in chapter nine, there are two areas in which the model shows promise. The first is its description of the initial formation of preferences through the impact of the internal characteristics of the party as an institution. While the picture is still cloudy, it is plausible that electoral base attachment has a strong effect, while the role of ideology is limited to programmatic change. The second is in the way the FPTP electoral system appears to have constrained the actions of the parties in the two British cases, showing a strong influence of the electoral mechanics on the actions of parties.

On the other hand, even in those two areas, the complexity of the causal mechanism still poses puzzles. A major example is the way in which all dimensions except the tactical dimension conform to expectations under proposition 5 (differentiated effect), while this dimension should have the clearest relationship to electoral base attachment on the basis of the theory. This will undoubtedly require further elaboration of the model in future studies. This overall conclusion forms the point of departure for the concluding argument and discussion presented in this final chapter of this dissertation.

The rest of this conclusion and discussion will unfold as follows. In section 10.2.1 below, the question of what the model has taught us about parties under pressure is addressed. In section 10.2.2, focus shifts to the contribution to the debate on party change and party shocks in general. Finally, section 10.2.3 presents a number of suggestions for future research building on the conclusions and contribution of this dissertation.

10.2 Conclusion and discussion

10.2.1 What have we learned?

Having summarised the argument so far, it is now possible to state in more general terms what can be learned from this research. First of all, let us consider the first part of the research question: how do political parties react to an external shock in the form of heavy electoral defeat? Up until now, the state of the debate was that the answer must be “change”. However, the sheer diversity of the response in even the limited amount of cases studied in this dissertation has shown that this is too simple. The answer, then, must be qualified and extended: political parties respond to an electoral shock not just through ‘change’ in general, but through a wide variety of different changes to their tactics, organisation, programme and personal composition.

The breadth of diversity of changes across the cases studied cannot be emphasised enough. While some parties changed in the conventional direction assumed by much of the literature, taking the extension strategy and looking towards newer policy issues, organisational innovations such as external democratisation, a broader electoral base and/or a more diverse slate of candidates, there were others that changed in the opposite direction, empowering their members and playing more to their old loyalties in terms of base and traditional issues. This challenges the one-dimensional nature of party change as an event that occurs when anything about the party is changed from its past nature. In fact, party change has been shown to be a more multi-faceted phenomenon that does not just unfold in multiple areas within the party, but also unfolds in multiple different ways.

In this way, this study has shown that the causal link observed in most of the literature between an external shock and party change is too simple as a representation of what happens to a party after a shock. Rather, it has been demonstrated that underlying this general causal link observed between an external shock like a heavy electoral defeat and party change, there is a causal process determining how a party can change in different ways that is just as relevant as the link itself. It is this causal process that must be studied to distinguish between the multiple forms party change can take and the various ways parties can arrive at those changes.

In fact, there is such a great diversity within the broader category of party change that the concept of the reinforcement and extension strategies, used in a solely aggregate way, cannot fully describe the various configurations of party change arising as a result of an electoral shock. Given the variance encountered in just four cases, it is unlikely that any general unified conceptualisation of some sort of strategy could have done this. In fact, the question is whether this would be necessary: propositions 5a through 5c, which assigned different effects to various internal factors on various parts of the recovery strategy, were considerably more successful in accounting for the complexity and variety in party's reactions to heavy defeat than the ones presupposing a unified effect, although the puzzling deviation of the tactical dimension and the rejection of proposition 5b have to be noted here as well.

A key purpose of the reinforcement-extension distinction was to solve the problem in the literature that change in the direction of a party's origins was sometimes mistaken for continuity. By and large, this distinction has largely managed to solve this problem. This is visible especially in the case of the CDA, the subject of the earlier case study by Duncan which figured prominently in the literature review.⁸ The observation made there that there was no change in the programmatic area looks to be the result of a one-dimensional understanding of change. Where Duncan's study could not explain using the existing models why the CDA supposedly maintained programmatic continuity during the 1994-2002 crisis years, the model as applied in chapter five, by allowing for an interpretation that sees the Policy Review as change, manages to provide an explanation for both the organisational changes and the Policy Review by reference to ideological attachment and electoral base attachment. This advantage was also shown in the case of D66, where the adoption of a commitment to referenda actually showed a deepening of the party's commitments to direct democracy that capped off a reinforcement strategy on the programmatic dimension.

There are still problems with the reinforcement-extension distinction. It makes the assumption that parties think of electoral outcomes with every step of their recovery strategy, since all actions of a party are interpreted based on their intended impact on the composition of the party's support base. In fact, though parties occasionally gave electoral reasons for moves in the organisational and programmatic fields, they rarely did so with very explicit reference to certain groups. Where they do so, it can be interpreted as the strongest evidence of electoral calculations on decision-making, as in the case of Labour's references to winning over voters who never voted for the party. However, as a reflection on the basic premise of the two strategies, this does raise the question whether

8. Duncan, "‘Lately, Things Just Don't Seem the Same’."

they actually represent a choice between former supporters and new supporters or signify something broader.

Therefore, while the reinforcement-extension distinction served very well as a heuristic tool and a frame of reference as well as a first step in theorising about the specific actions of parties, perhaps what it represents is better seen as broader than the labels themselves. Originally conceived as a strategy premised on core voters, the reinforcement strategy has also proven a strategy of playing to the party's presumed historic strengths – and resulted in change *towards* a party's roots. The extension strategy, which was conceptualised by thinking about the kinds of actions that might make a party more appealing to non-core voters, has also been shown as a strategy marked by diversifying the party's repertoire – and resulted therefore in the typical change *away* from a party's roots. This conception of the two strategies complements the original conceptualisation in a way that strengthens the model.

Having concluded the discussion of the first part of the research question, the discussion will now turn towards the second part. Why do some parties choose one path to recovery and others another? The answer given by our model is that this is due to a combination of preferences formed as a result of institutional loyalties to the party's base and ideology and constraints imposed by the external environment, particularly the electoral system. This answer appeared to be reasonably accurate, but must perhaps be subjected to one change: which path a party under pressure chooses from among the variety of options available is due to a variety of internal and external factors.

In general, it can be concluded that our model has performed reasonably well in explaining the choices made by parties in light of the internal institutional inclinations of parties and considerations arising from the constraints of the external environment. It is significant that it has performed less well where it overestimated the unified nature of various influences on the actions of parties in crisis. This culminated in a confusing picture trying to compare the outcomes to each other in light of the various configurations of variables, particularly internal factors, under study.

In the four cases studied, our model performs reasonably well in modelling the effects of electoral systems. Going on the evidence from the cases of the Labour Party and the Liberal Party, there remains no doubt that the majoritarian logic of the FPTP electoral system with its districts that make it very important who exactly votes for you was a prominent consideration. In essence, this provides new evidence for the centripetal tendency predicted among others by Downs and in a different form by Kirchheimer's catch-all thesis.⁹ Some of the strongest individual pieces of evidence linking certain influences to concrete parts of the recovery strategy were found zooming in on Labour's Policy Review, which was very much informed by the need to perform better in the South and in marginal constituencies.

There is still some ambiguity on the impact of the PR system. While both Dutch parties ended on a reinforcement strategy as predicted, they also started off with one.

9. A. Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 184; O. Kirchheimer, "The Transformation of Western European Party Systems," in *Political Parties and Political Development*, ed. J. LaPalombara and M. Weiner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 177–201.

This means we were not able to gauge whether this is due to internal or external factors. The lack of concrete evidence of any considerations by decision-makers of the electoral system in choosing which voters to appeal to, which did appear in both FPTP cases, presents a difficulty. However, there is some very limited evidence in the form of the return of Van Mierlo which, in the first electoral cycle between 1982 and 1986, swung D66 around from an early extension to a reinforcement strategy. Since this was motivated in part by the lack of improvement in the opinion polls, there seems to have been some electoral motivation. It is not, however, linked strongly enough to the PR system itself to infer a causal effect from it.

In examining the causal mechanisms, however, a few characteristics of the model find some support in the empirical observations. First of all, in all four cases, where the electoral system impacted, it did so in a relatively uniform manner, across all four dimensions. Second, and more importantly, in all cases the impact of external environments appears to occur largely in line with rational strategic calculations by party decision-makers involving conscious considerations of the extent of a party's appeal and the votes needed to gain a good electoral result. This can be seen in the CDA and D66 cases with the detailed observations of Gardeniers and Van den Bos, in the Liberal case with the reports from various regions, and in the Labour case in the conscious reflection on the need to win over those who had not previously voted for Labour. In many of the cases, there appears to have been detailed empirical evidence on which to base these considerations. This confirms one theoretical premise of the model: that the external environment impacts as an opportunity structure, making for a much more rational and strategic reconsideration of the strategy a party should pursue.

It appears that the general assumption of the model that parties retain a measure of path-dependency was correct as well, despite the complex picture arising from the consideration of the impact of internal factors. Whether in the form of electoral base attachment or ideological attachment, a party's past commitments have been shown to matter in the minds of party decision-makers. In all four cases, it initially was the electoral base attachment and ideological baggage of a party that pushed it in an initial direction. Indeed, these variables proved better at explaining party's recovery strategies than a simple functionalist rival explanation that assumed that parties would tailor their strategies to win back the votes they lost. The presence of information known to the four parties that made their strategies less advisable further shows the strength of this tendency. In the Labour case, for instance, even in the face of studies suggesting the problems with using employment as an issue, the party persisted, because that was ultimately what they perceived their party to be about. In this way, parties show themselves to be path-dependent institutions in optima forma: as the theory stipulated, their actions are informed even after an external shock by structures infused with value that have developed over time. In line with historical institutionalist perspectives, a party is shown to be path-dependent: its past choices at certain critical junctures shape its choices in crisis.

It is unfortunately true that our model offered no way to explain why certain internal factors impacted more than others in certain cases. However, this is in part due to the limits of theory-building: it would require an impossibly detailed theory to model all the various influences towards various specific outcomes. As this dissertation is the first

tentative attempt at such a model, this was perhaps simply beyond its scope. There is little doubt that on balance, electoral base attachment and ideological attachment, or commitments related to them, led to pressures towards either strategy as expected. It has not, however, been proven that the same variable played the deciding role every time.

Even disentangling the various dimensions and examining whether different independent variables impact on different dimensions did not entirely mitigate this problem. The conclusions ultimately lined up on the programmatic and organisational dimension, which is a promising result. However, there remains the vexing matter of the most obvious suspect, a link between base attachment and the tactical dimension, not materialising at all. There is a possibility of mitigating this by weighing in external factors and stating that parties anticipate the effects of electoral systems when operating on this dimension. In fact, evidence in the Labour and CDA cases points towards the fact that evidence of the external environment was part of the judgments that led to particular actions on the tactical dimension.

Various parties also seem to weigh the different internal factors differently. For D66, the ideological attachment to being non-dogmatic was a main driving factor towards the reinforcement strategy they pursued on balance. For Labour and the CDA, it was a mix of both, where ultimately base attachment lined up with ideological attachment, making no difference. For the Liberals, the low degree of base attachment led to extension strategies on the tactical and organisational dimensions and a reinforcement strategy on the programmatic dimension. In the individual chapters, we had to resort to the idiosyncrasies of each party to explain this, such as D66's programmatic basis or the unique links of Labour to the trade unions. However, as the reader might be well aware, idiosyncrasies alone by nature do not suffice for a comparative conclusion that is more generally applicable.

One wonders if there might not be an opportunity for party goals to re-enter the equation. Providing a rigorous way is found to make a reliable a priori call on the importance of these goals, the concept of party goals could potentially be brought back in to explain the different impacts base attachment and ideological attachment have in different parties. To use the example of the D66 case: its goal would be policy (as it is based on its programme). Therefore, as policy is its overriding goal, ideological attachment becomes more important. This would have to be incorporated in a restatement of our model.

What, in conclusion, has this dissertation taught us about parties in crisis, and to what extent? From the first evidence, the main theoretical links involved in our model seem reasonably valid. There definitely seems to be an impact of electoral base attachment and ideological attachment on a party's initial strategy, and it broadly goes in the predicted direction. However, our model has run into the problem of complex causality. It did not succeed in clearly disentangling the impact of the various variables from each other, and therefore still cannot explain the presence or absence of individual concrete changes fully. The same applies to the effect of electoral systems, although it has been more successful here. The British cases reveal a tendency of parties operating under FPTP to adopt the extension strategy, pressured by a system which weighs votes differently. However, there is too little evidence to conclude whether the opposite of a FPTP system, the PR system, has a similar effect in the direction of the reinforcement strategy. If we can

in fact extrapolate these tentative conclusions to parties in general, this has interesting societal implications for the way parties and party systems could develop in the future. Going purely on internal characteristics, electoral volatility would create a sort of self-reinforcing effect where strong attachments to electoral base and ideology get stronger and weak attachments get weaker. This sheds an interesting light on the fragmentation of Western party systems, since it implies that parties will get increasingly "specialised".

This study, therefore, has been reasonably successful in what it set out to do, in both ways inherent in the research question. It has demonstrated that party change occurs in a variety of different forms in different cases. It has also provided a heuristic tool for thinking about the choices parties make when put under pressure, showing that the nature of parties as institutions is a defining influence from the very start. With the caveats expressed above about the extension and reinforcement strategies taken into account, it has provided some basis for further analysis of individual changes made by parties, and pointed in the direction of possible explanations. Further research is required, both on internal and external variables, and incorporating more cases, to further refine it so that it can help reliably interpret what is clearly an increasingly frequent phenomenon: parties suffering from heavy electoral defeats.

10.2.2 Contribution to the debate

Having established this answer to the research question, let us now turn to the significance of these findings to various debates in the literature on political parties. It has already been noted above that the apparent importance of internal characteristics of parties matches to a large extent the characteristics of a historical institutionalist approach.¹⁰ This has, in fact, been the dominant narrative in the shocks literature, which has always seen parties as being resistant to change.¹¹ In this sense, this dissertation has extended the observation that party change is not something that just happens or must happen.¹² Even when party change happens, it is still shaped by the same patterns of institutional behaviour that also constitute a party's resistance to change. And even when that party change moves away from a party's roots, as in the case of New Labour, these institutional inclinations are still taken into account, as when the importance of trade unions to Labour got a new meaning when the old block vote system was abandoned for direct voting by affiliated members of trade unions.

In its relationship to the shocks literature, this dissertation had two explicit goals: 1) build a heuristic model as a starting point for building a full theoretical model which could contribute to explaining why certain changes originate from shocks and others do not, and 2) build a model which helps to account for change that essentially returns to a party's roots. Both had been shortcomings of the literature, as has been observed in

10. S. D. Krasner, "Sovereignty: An Institutional Perspective," *Comparative Political Studies* 21, no. 1 (1988): 66–94; P. Pierson, "Increasing returns, path dependence, and the study of politics," *American Political Science Review* 94, no. 2 (2000): 251–267; Collier and Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena*.

11. A. Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, trans. from the Italian by M. Silver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988 [1982]); Harmel and Janda, "An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change."

12. *Ibid.*, 261.

chapter two. In the first goal, much work still has to be done. Our model, by and large, offers a basis for taking this agenda further. In particular, it has contributed towards both its goals through its institutionalist approach through the influence given to past events and loyalties. In relation to the first goal, it has been shown that through the role played by electoral base attachment and ideological attachment, party choices made in crisis are path-dependent, which explains to a large extent the variety of change encountered in the four cases. As regards the second, the study has found that most cases started off on an old and familiar path, which in most cases amounted to a reinforcement strategy, or change towards the party's roots. It is true that it could not account for all the observed changes. As has been argued above, however, this is now a matter of improving the model using the evidence generated by its use as a heuristic device rather than starting one from scratch once again. It has definitely succeeded at the second goal, as showcased in chapter five by improving on the account of Duncan in the CDA case.¹³

More generally in relation to the "shocks literature", this dissertation returns a prominent role to internal characteristics of the party. Previously, the literature had presumed that the changes that resulted from an external shock were the result of a change in the dominant coalition governing a party after the external shock had discredited the original dominant coalition or of a dominant coalition addressing threats to the party goals.¹⁴ In both understandings of change, party characteristics figured in the form of party goals only in the chain of events leading up to change and determining the likelihood and extent of change, since the concept of goal-oriented change was not very well-developed.¹⁵ It can be easily seen in light of this entire research project how this leads to the problem encountered by Duncan in the form of the absence of programmatic change as he saw it.¹⁶

By building a model around the institutional characteristics of a party and showing it has a reasonable degree empirical validity, our model has in effect shed new light on the impact of these characteristics beyond the decision to change. The interplay between internal factors and the external shock that has marked the theory since Panebianco's observations on exogenous or endogenous change has been given a new expression in this way.¹⁷ The prominence of previous patterns of behaviour does not stop after a party has suffered a shock; rather, these patterns are reinterpreted and given new expression. The occurrence of an external shock does not make external circumstances and rational vote-seeking considerations dominant all of a sudden, even though in some cases their effect was noticeably strong. An electoral shock does not necessarily produce an electoralist logic that trumps the party's institutional identity, as has been seen in the case of the CDA persevering in its more traditional approach to the crisis even after the 1998 electoral defeat. Rather, a party turns introspective in a crisis, being confronted with the question what exactly it is and who it is for.

This is shown even in the case of New Labour, which is usually understood as a triumph

13. Duncan, "'Lately, Things Just Don't Seem the Same'."

14. Panebianco, *Political Parties*, 244; Harmel and Janda, "An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change," 278-279.

15. Harmel and Janda, "An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change," 278-279.

16. Duncan, "'Lately, Things Just Don't Seem the Same'," 83.

17. Panebianco, *Political Parties*, 242.

of electoralist logic owing to the deep crisis the Labour Party was in.¹⁸ The case study in this dissertation does show the importance of electoral considerations to the birth of New Labour, but it also shows that progress was incremental, amounting to a continuous balancing act between the party's conception of what it was and who it was for and the constraints imposed upon it by the electoral system in light of changing demographics. This was in part due to power dynamics, as the factional battles between the leadership and the influential hard left of the party signify. It was also due to the fact that having been forced to reconsider its essentials, the party was also forced to come to terms with its own past.

If the "shocks literature" is to progress towards a deeper understanding of why parties change in the way they do, it seems it has to shift the balance from seeing parties as organisations shaped by internal power dynamics and the pursuit of their goals to institutions shaped by their past choices and identities as well as these power dynamics and goals. Power dynamics and threats to primary goals might be enough to explain the occurrence of change and the overcoming of resistance to change per se. A path-dependent understanding based on institutional characteristics shaped by a party's history, however, shows promise when it comes to explaining the specifics of change. This is because it extends the understanding of resistance to change to the kinds of changes implemented. A party under pressure is not just in a struggle for power or a quest for its primary goals. It is also continuously in a conversation with its own past, perhaps even more so than during normal competition. It is in this conversation, it appears, that the changes that result from these crises are shaped.

Interestingly, this concept of a balancing act between internal and external pressures is not new to the literature on political parties. Though it does not figure in the party shocks literature as such, it has appeared in various forms in other parts of the literature. Rose and Mackie used it to model the performance of parties and particularly their failure as a function of their success in negotiating this trade-off.¹⁹ The necessity of negotiating these pressures for parties looking to survive also found expression in Bolleyer's structure-leadership dilemma, describing the challenges facing new parties in terms of a trade-off between the demands of developing an internal structure and the leadership's importance in maintaining electoral performance.²⁰ In both instances, there is a clear link to party survival. That the concept of a trade-off resurfaces from the conclusions of this study on parties under electoral pressure is therefore not entirely surprising. Neither should it be a surprise that the strategies observed in this study, even when leaning in the direction of one strategy, often also contained elements of the opposite strategy. Perhaps the same arguments can be made for parties after electoral shocks as for new parties, which potentially allows us to extend the argument to the reasons why parties survive these shocks.

18. R. Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism: Political Change in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 174, doi:10.1057/9780230598430.

19. R. Rose and T. T. Mackie, "Do parties persist or fail? The big trade-off facing organizations," in *When Parties Fail: Emerging Alternative Organizations*, ed. K. Lawson and P. Merkl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 534.

20. N. Bolleyer, *New Parties in Old Party Systems: Persistence and Decline in Seventeen Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 52.

Moving on from the shocks literature, the importance of the external environment and the structure of electoral competition also makes a link with the “gradual party change” literature and particularly the party types literature. This started with Duverger who linked the rise of the (socialist) mass party to universal suffrage.²¹ Kirchheimer stipulated that parties changed (among others) to accommodate overall changes in the structure of electoral competition in his catch-all thesis.²² He was followed by Katz and Mair in their cartel thesis.²³ Looking at Kirchheimer’s argument, the shedding of ideological baggage by parties to appeal to a broader public has obvious parallels to the extension strategy.

In a way, the conclusions of this research project can be used to shed a new light on the longstanding debates on party types. Koole observed that the debate had become mired in an unfruitful dominant party type versus exceptions narrative.²⁴ By linking up the idea that party change does not just happen from the “shocks literature” with the idea of responses to the environment, this research project allows us also to comment on the conclusions of the party types literature. The fact, for instance, that parties did not uniformly respond to a shrinking electorate by adopting a broader appeal – some pursuing the reinforcement strategy even though they were aware of the demographic challenges – sheds an interesting light on the catch-all party thesis. If parties are resistant to change, it is evidently the crises that drive home the need to change to respond to the environment. Now it has been shown that even some parties noted to be catch-all in orientation, such as D66, responded to a crisis in a decidedly non-catch-all way.

This is merely to illustrate the benefits case studies like the ones in this dissertation can have on the debate in the gradual side of the literature. In focusing on the broader macro-level patterns, the literature may avoid the problems with deciding what is and what is not change,²⁵ but it locks itself into a deterministic pattern that postulates one party type as a dominant form. By looking at parties after an external shock, they can potentially be made to act like test cases that lead to a more sophisticated understanding of party types. In other words: in the future, looking at shocks might point towards reasons why some parties do not conform to the supposed dominant type, leading to a deeper understanding of how parties evolve over time. The occurrence of shocks provide case studies by which the individual characteristics and contexts of parties can be described and linked to party change. Potentially, reintegrating the concept of shock into the more extensive gradual party change literature in this way could help a more sophisticated understanding of the evolution of party types.

21. M. Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State*, trans. from the French by B. North and R. North (London: Methuen, 1954 [1951]), 66.

22. O. Kirchheimer, “The Transformation of Western European Party Systems,” in *Political Parties and Political Development*, ed. J. LaPalombara and M. Weiner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 190.

23. R. S. Katz and P. Mair, “Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: the Emergence of the Cartel Party,” *Party Politics* 1, no. 1 (1995): 13-14.

24. R. A. Koole, “Cadre, Catch-All or Cartel? A Comment on the Notion of the Cartel Party,” *Party Politics* 2, no. 4 (1996): 520.

25. As formulated in P. Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 49.

10.2.3 Avenues for future research

In the previous section, several contributions to the party change literature have been described. First of all, our model has gone beyond the existing theories in the “shock literature” to attempt to explain the specific forms party change can take, and has done so with mixed success. Secondly, also related to the “party shocks” literature, it has introduced a neo-institutionalist perspective to what happens after a shock, in which the party is not just in a power struggle but continues to be shaped by its characteristics as an institution. Thirdly, it presents a case for integrating the concept of shock into the “party types literature”, as it allows for a use of focused case studies.

This opens up various avenues for future research. First of all, the model must be refined in order to deal with the problem of varying effects of internal factors like electoral base attachment or ideology that has been described above. Admittedly, it is going to be hard to build a model which accounts for all possible variations, but there is still meaningful progress to be made towards a model that can account for most of them, without making the model more complex than it already is. Future research needs to focus first and foremost on disentangling the various effects of base attachment and ideological attachment from each other. As has been noted, the introduction of party goals into the model might be a good option for further development. By differentiating among the various goals parties can have, it might become possible to model the different impacts of the various internal factors more accurately. The individual agency of leaders such as Kinnock in the Labour case and Van Mierlo in the D66 case might also be subjected to further study and integrated further into the model.

In general, the refinement of the model should go hand in hand with testing the theory in a broader array of cases. It is probably too early for a large-N approach, but adding further electoral systems to the model (or indeed an extra FPTP case to attempt to find further support for the conclusion about its strong impact) can help shed light on the way the conclusion about the effect of the FPTP is to be read. In addition, such an approach potentially increases the certainty with which we can say the conclusions can be generalised – and will therefore only strengthen the model and provide further material for refinement. In this context, the field of inquiry should also be extended to other regions than Western Europe, since there is nothing in the theory underlying our model that cannot be applied to other parts of the world - especially since figure 1.1 suggested that the heavy defeats that have been the subject of this study appear to be a structural feature of politics in many Eastern European democracies.

Once this is done, various avenues are truly open. As has been mentioned, one potential use of the model would be in a case study to shed light on the development of party types. Looking for cases around the time parties presumably developed into catch-all or cartel parties, the approach used in this dissertation could be modified to examine the way in which parties did or did not develop in the direction of the presumed dominant party type at critical junctures in their existence. In doing so, it could help clear up whether a dominant party type actually exists and help develop the typology of political parties.

Ultimately, a well-developed model might be able to branch out into the debate on the success and failure of parties as well, asking the question why some parties brave

a crisis while others diminish or fail. To do so requires the researcher to negotiate a methodological minefield, since it would require a combination of research on electoral behaviour as well as party behaviour. In effect, it would require researchers to ask voters what certain reforms meant for them. This is difficult to study, but using a well-developed typology like the extension and reinforcement strategies and a model of party behaviour, the link could potentially be made.

All in all, however, the aim of this study has been to try to resolve an apparent impasse in the development of theory on party behaviour following a shock, and it is here that it might hope for its most lasting contribution to future research. Electoral shocks certainly are not the only type of shocks that cause parties to change, as Harmel *et al.* observed.²⁶ It is to be hoped that the way of thinking applied to this study of electoral shocks can be applied to other types of shocks as well, such as dramatic failure to get into a coalition or intense internal strife. This would first and foremost require a clear typology of shocks that allows the research to get concrete, after which much the same avenue can be followed for different kinds of shocks as the one followed in the construction of the theory in this dissertation.

To use the shock of dramatic failure to get into a governing coalition, for example, which would be an “office shock”, one might formulate versions of the extension and reinforcement strategies that focus on traditional and new partners. By using the same approach in which internal factors are constrained by external factors, propositions could then be constructed about the impact of both. It would be truly interesting to see if responses to other shocks follow a logic similar to responses to electoral shocks. In effect, this would be a logical theoretical implication of the conclusions presented here, since it has been argued above that what underlies the choices made by parties in crisis is their nature as path-dependent institutions. It would be a challenge to that conclusion if this were found not to apply when parties were put under pressure in a different way.

The circumstances of the political game that parties play are changing. To return to the observation with which the introduction in chapter one started: any scholar of political parties after a shock is likely to be confronted at any social or scholarly gathering with different examples of parties under pressure. The social relevance of the field is increasing, and understanding how parties react when put under pressure is essential to understanding the way in which they work and in which they will develop in the future in the exercise of their important figures. As Mair observed, parties have stayed around because of a remarkable capacity for adaptation.²⁷ As partisan dealignment continues and the structure of democratic competition changes, so parties will continue to change. As the book is closed on this study, it is to be hoped that it has stimulated a new way to approach this development, and a new approach as to how political parties will change in the future.

26. R. Harmel et al., “Performance, Leadership, Factions and Party Change: An Empirical Analysis,” *West European Politics* 18, no. 1 (1995): 3.

27. Mair, *Party System Change*, 89.

