Office Rookies Feeling the Blues:

Why and How Parties Change After Office Attainment

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Abstract

What happens when longstanding opposition parties attain office status for the first time? We argue that the transition from opposition to office induces change among these parties. They attract new and more career-oriented members and become increasingly leadership-dominated. Additionally, due to poor performance in election polls resulting from the costs of governing, their expectation of remaining in office is rather low. Aversion against a potential loss of their newly acquired status as government party triggers these parties to change. Hence, while the literature generally has conflicting predictions about the effect of a party's government/opposition status on party change, we argue specifically that longstanding opposition parties – conceptualized as parties with low aspiration to office – change more when in office. We find empirical evidence for this proposition in a nested analysis which includes detailed case-studies of five political parties across European party systems moving into office for the first time.

Introduction

Many democracies are witnessing a splintering of their party systems. Perhaps accelerated by the global economic crisis, many new parties have sprung and are challenging establishment parties. Also, and central to this paper, longstanding members of the opposition – that is parties formerly considered as outsiders, fringe parties or outright pariahs – are performing very well electorally. As a result of their electoral success, these parties are increasingly participating in government coalitions. In recent years, existing parties such as the Socialist People's Party (DK), Progress Party (N), the Environmental Party (SW), Christian Union (NL), Syriza (GR) and the Greens (Ireland) have entered government, and parties such as the Danish People's Party (DK), Socialist Party (NL), Green Left (NL), The Left (GER) are actively debating such a move. But what does such a move do to these parties? How do typical opposition parties react to office attainment?

These long-standing opposition parties have for long posed as ideologically purer variants of establishment parties. Often their politicians promise to break with machine politics concerned mostly with personal rent-seeking and offer instead a system driven by ideals, debate and deliberation. One could expect that if these parties attain office, they feel that they are doing something right. So, once in office they will stick to their guns. Recently, however, Schumacher and co-authors (2015) have rejected this claim and demonstrated the opposite: When longstanding members of the opposition, which they label parties with low office aspiration, move to office for the first-time, they change their election platform significantly more than other parties in government do. Partly, this result stems from first-time government parties being more radical than the parties that are typically in office (Schumacher et al., 2015). Still, the observation that they do change the most is striking, especially since these parties have organizations in which activists are relatively influential, which on average should deflate parties' ability to change (Schumacher & Giger, 2015).

In this paper we analyze this observation in greater detail than what was possible with the quantitative design applied by Schumacher and co-authors (2015). By means of a comparative case-study methodology, we examine to what extent longstanding opposition parties that are for the first time in office react to poor opinion polls, undergo important changes such as attracting new and career-oriented members, and modify their organizations to become more leadership-dominated. These questions are not easy to evaluate because there are no cross-national, over-time data dealing with such issues. Instead we present and discuss various sources of primary and secondary material in a "nested analysis" of party change -- a mixed method approach combining statistical analysis with in-depth investigation of cases carefully selected from the sample (cf. Lieberman 2005). We present five case studies of parties moving from opposition to office for the first time: the Socialist People's Party, the Center-Democrats (both from Denmark), the Christian Union (the Netherlands), the Green Party (Germany) and the Freedom Party (Austria). Overall, our analyses support the hypothesis that longstanding opposition parties change more when in office.

A behavioral theory of party change

Schumacher, van de Wardt, Vis and Klitgaard's (2015) behavioral theory of party change is based on two core propositions. First, because of the cost of governing, parties in office fear losing their position after the next election (Lewis-Beck & Paldam, 2000; Nannestad & Paldam, 2002). Due to the fact that losses hurt more than equal gains please (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1990), government parties change their platform on average more than opposition parties do. This finding goes against several theories that have proposed the exact opposite effect (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Riker, 1982). Second, the extent to which loss aversion is triggered depends on a party's aspiration level – a level of performance against which parties benchmark their current performance (Bendor, Diermeier, Siegel, & Ting, 2011; Simon, 1955). The aspiration level adapts dynamically to parties' performance: in case of success

in getting into office, parties' aspiration to office increases; in case of failure, office aspiration decreases (Bendor et al., 2011).

A party's aspiration level is measured by a continuous variable that captures the proportion of years it has been in office since its inclusion in the sample. Yet, for the sake of simplicity, Schumacher et al. (2015) group the parties into three different types. Parties that alternate periods in opposition with periods in office, middle-aspiration parties, and those that are almost always in office, high-aspiration parties, can be relatively sure that losing office will only be temporary. Low-aspiration parties, however, are used to being in opposition and cannot have such high expectations. The latter's costs of governing may well be larger. When in office, these low aspiration parties need to make compromises and moderate on policy stances, which is known to result typically in a loss of votes for them (Adams, Clark, Ezrow, & Glasgow, 2006; Dunphy & Bale, 2011). Moreover, these parties' office-holders will be inexperienced, which may result in incompetence and consequent punishment by both the voters and the (potential) coalition partners. This time in office may be their only chance. Therefore, they are expected to change their platform the most; an expectation that find support in a pooled time-series analysis of over 1,600 platform changes in 21 democracies since 1950 (Schumacher and co-authors 2015).

In this paper, we move forward by evaluating three untested claims used by Schumacher and co-authors (2015) as causal mechanisms to explain why long standing opposition parties (that is, parties with low office aspiration) change more in office. First, Schumacher et al. assume that government parties face the prospect of electoral defeat (through the cost of governing) which triggers the loss-aversion mechanism, but they do not evaluate empirically whether opinion polls in fact predict government parties' losses. In other words, do opinion polls give them the blues? Do these parties expect to lose on the basis of the information they have, and do they react to this information? Second, Schumacher et al. also assumed that these parties attract new members who are motivated more by career-

oriented incentives than the parties' existing membership base (Panebianco, 1988). The former facilitates broad acceptance of (further) moderation of the party platform. Third, it was claimed that parties become more leadership-dominated when in office. This enables the party leadership to push through party platform changes which it deems necessary to stay in office. These three mechanisms should especially be visible among the low aspiration parties that we examine in this paper, namely those that are for the first time in office after having been members of the opposition for a considerable time.

Why distinguish between parties based on their aspiration level?

Before we proceed and formulate the hypotheses that are researched in this paper, let us clarify why it is relevant and theoretically innovative to distinguish between parties on the basis of their aspiration level, and why we zoom in on the parties with low aspiration to office that nevertheless enter office for the first time. This type of parties are in the literature aggregated into several conceptually different, but in practice often overlapping categories: niche parties (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow, Vries, Steenbergen, & Edwards, 2010; Meguid, 2005), challenger parties (De Vries & Hobolt, 2012; van de Wardt et al., 2014), small parties (Spoon, 2011), or outsider parties (Barr, 2009). To begin with niche parties, a concept that has become an empirical commonality, employed to make predictions about the behavior of a group of parties that allegedly share the same characteristics.

As such, it is a problematic that there exists quite some ambiguity when it comes to operationalizing niche parties. According to Meguid (2005), niche parties belong to the environmentalist or nationalist family; yet, Adams et al. (2006) also considers communist parties as niche parties. A second drawback of the niche party conceptualization, which also applies to small and outsider parties, is a lack of dynamism. Except for the classification approach proposed by Wagner (2011), niche parties are generally defined on the basis of party family, which makes niche party status a time-invariant characteristic. Yet, we know empirically that niche parties, small parties, or outsider parties can in fact switch to a main-

stream issue profile (Meyer and Wagner 2013), or can become rather large (Italian Communist Party) or active in government (German Green Party). The concept of challenger parties (De Vries & Hobolt, 2012), that is parties that have never governed, is a step forward in terms of dynamics, as challengers become mainstream opposition parties or mainstream government parties once they have governed. Also the different types of parties have been linked to different configurations of vote, office, and policy goals and it is acknowledged that parties reconsider their goals in response to office participation (De Vries and Hobolt 2013; Van de Wardt 2014).

Still, we argue that the concept of an office aspiration level provides a more fine-grained measure of a party's previous office experience. In contrast to Hobolt and De Vries (2012), the aspiration level can also adjust downwards, which is acknowledged by Van de Wardt (2015), in the case a party fails to gain office. Finally, we also gain considerable explanatory power if we distinguish between parties on the basis of concrete characteristics, in this case their historic success of getting into office, rather than using crude distinctions like the niche-mainstream dichotomy. That is to say, in many cases it remains unclear what aspect of a party's nicheness, smallness, or outsider status, influences its behavior. Is it their mode of party organization, their preference for specific non-economic issues, their lack of electoral success, or their lack of office experience that explains their behavior? We show how parties' aspirations regarding their goals (such as office) are constantly updated by a party's performance. First-time office experience strengthens aspiration for office: party politicians and members expect more than before, increase their desire for office and policy access. In sum, if parties never govern they stay a niche party, challenger party or outsider party; but once they have smelled the taste of office, they will change.

It is exactly because of this change that we focus our attention to parties that are in office for the first time. The experience of being in office for the first time can be seen as a shock that both increases the

party's self-esteem and the number of 'hard decisions' the party needs to make between principles and power. Some idealistic politicians may turn out to be quite pragmatic. New members may flock to the party, eyeing office rewards. Thus, we propose, experiencing office for the first time forces parties to reconsider and re-prioritize their goals. By studying this process we can come to a better understanding of party change and party goals themselves.

Hypotheses: Internal and external pressures during a first-term in office

When parties move into office for the first time, they are also for the first time exposed to the cost of governing rule. The cost of governing claim relates to parties' electoral performance. Although it is likely that parties are aware that there are costs of governing, it is more likely that they take cues about their future electoral performance from weekly or monthly opinion polls. Becoming ever more frequent, opinion polls seem almost like the heartbeat of contemporary democracy. Bad performance in the polls puts the pressure on the party, reminds or reinforces the idea of a cost of governing and thus serves as the mechanism triggering or strengthening loss aversion, which leads the party to change. In sum, however excited these parties are about office attainment, the electoral costs associated with hard decision making also make them feel the blues (Schumacher et al., 2015).

H1: Parties for the first time in office face the prospect of electoral defeat.

Existing literature suggests that office experience changes parties and may cause a re-alignment of party goals and a change in expectations (Harmel & Janda, 1994). In low aspiration parties, their original primary goal typically is policy (as opposed to votes and office), that is to maximize policy purity (Harmel & Janda, 1994). Yet, government participation likely activates party members or officials with office-seeking ambitions (Harmel, Heo, Tan, & Janda, 1995), or attract new members with more instrumental

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motivations (e.g. careerists [Panebianco 1988]). This way ideological sacrifices are more accepted by the membership and even deemed necessary.

H2: Parties for the first time in office attract more career-oriented party members.

When in office, the party leader or leadership needs to balance the policy demands from the coalition parties against the policy demands from the party. Of course the leadership would like to prevent radical intra-party factions making extremist policy demands that cause embarrassments vis-à-vis their coalition partner(s). Leaning ones ear too much to the party may prematurely end the newlywed coalition. Reversely, party leaders may lose their position within the party if they make too many concessions towards coalition parties. To prevent this, the leadership is likely to seek to increase its influence on the party. By participating in office the leadership already increases the resources at hand, and thereby becomes more independent from the party's resources.

H3: Parties for the first time in office become more leadership-dominated.

Case selection and research approach

We analyze five European parties before, during and after their first experience in office: the Socialist People's Party (Denmark), the Center Democrats (Denmark), the Green Party (Germany), the Christian Union (Netherlands), and the Austrian Freedom Party. These cases were selected out of a larger sample on the basis of Lieberman's (2005) framework for nested analysis. According to this approach, researchers should first run a quantitative large-N analysis (LNA); in our case, the analysis presented in Schumacher et al. (2015). If the model is well specified and the results turn out to be robust (which they were), one proceeds with a qualitative, small-N analysis (SNA). The main goal of the SNA is to answer the question of whether 'the start, end, and intermediate steps of the [quantitative] model [can be] used

to explain the behavior of real world actors' (Lieberman 2005: 442). Hence, as SNA is used to reveal the causal mechanisms, a first requirement is that the cases are well predicted by the model, that is, they are so-called on-the-regression-line cases. Second, they must vary substantively on the most important independent variables.

For our case selection we looked at cases after 1975, because our in-depth analysis requires secondary literature and information on the party's membership base and party organization, which are very difficult to acquire the further back we go in time. Figure 1 shows a party's predicted and observed party platform change in the election *before* it first gained office (indicated by the suffix 'b' after the party label), *when* it was first elected to office (suffix 'g'), and *after* it had participated in office (suffix 'a').[1] The trajectories of the Freedom Party, Christian Union, and Centre-Democrats all conform to Schumacher et al.'s (2015) behavioral theory: party platform change is always the highest in the election after these parties have been in office. Moreover, these trajectories lie fairly close to the regression line. The fact that some dots may lie even closer to the regression line does not mean that these are more suitable cases for analysis. Not only individual party-election combinations should lie close to the regression line, but the party's entire sequence of party platform change before, during and after government.

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[1] For more information on the model specification, see Schumacher et al. (2015).

Figure 1. Case selection based on pooled-time-series regression analysis presented in Schumacher (2015).
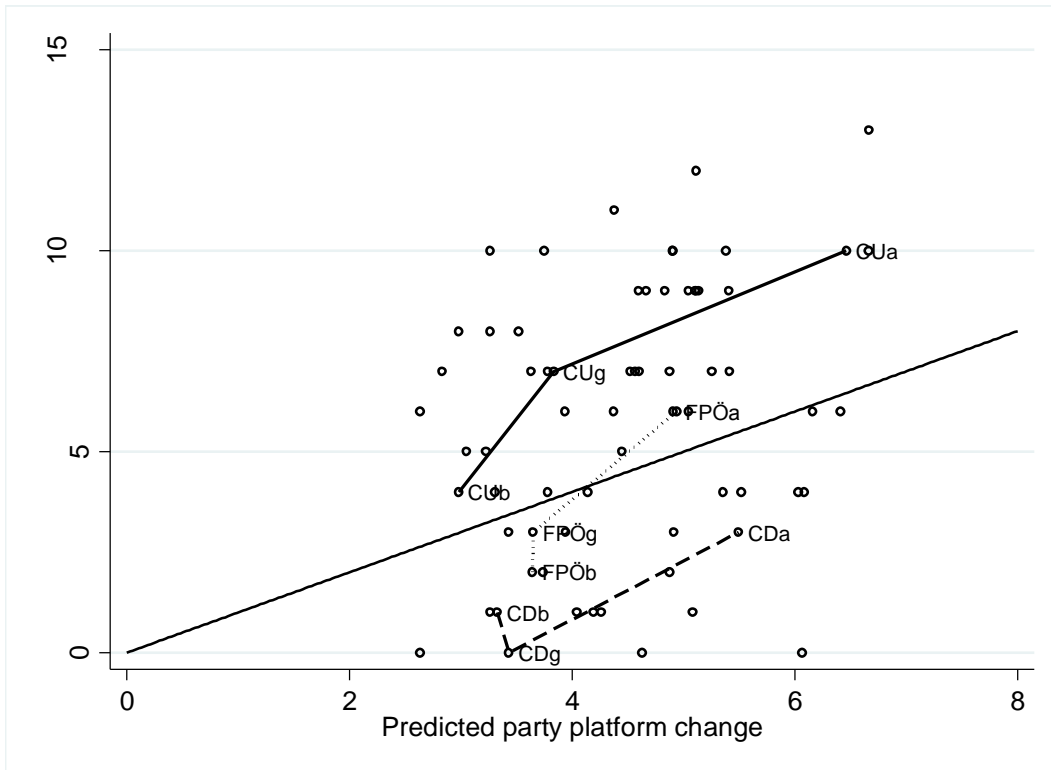
Note: the y-axis depicts a party's observed party platform change in an election, while the x-axis shows the degree of platform change predicted by the model. If a case lies on the line, the observed and predicted values on the dependent variable are equal. LN=Lega Nord, CU=Christian Union, FPO=Freedom Party, and CD=Centre Democrats.

From figure 1 we also learn that the selected cases span the entire range of predicted party platform changes along the x-axis. This satisfies the second criterion that there must be sufficient variation on the independent variable(s), as the predicted values on the dependent variable can only differ because of different scores on the independent variables. Since we are only interested in low aspiration parties, we do not intend to select cases that span the entire range of our aspiration level variable. This measure indicates the proportion of years a party has been in office at a particular moment in time, and so, it ranges between 0 and 1. The Center Democrats, FPO, and Christian Union have an aspiration of .05 (which literally means that they have governed for 5% of years when they leave office), .09 and .22,

respectively, after having spent their first term in office. Whereas these three cases all fall under the umbrella of low-aspiration parties, their different scores on the aspiration variable make sure that our conclusions are based on low aspiration parties that enter office at different moments in their life span. Put differently, some of our cases were more longstanding members of the opposition than others.

Unfortunately, we lack quantitative data on party platform change for our other cases. Yet, in case of the German Greens, we can be pretty confident that they changed more after having experienced office for the first time. Their 2002 platform was actually the first comprehensive attempt to update the party's original foundation program of 1980 (Bludorn 2009). As for the Socialist People's Party, we need to wait until the next Danish election to see whether they change more after having governed. Even though we cannot assess whether the inclusion of these two cases is justified by Lieberman's criteria, both cases are very useful to our theoretical endeavor. They are not only well documented in the literature, but more importantly, the inclusion of a Green and Socialist party alongside the party families presented in figure 1 (Social Democratic, Christian Democratic and Radical Right) allow us to control for ideological extremity. It is plausible that the loss aversion mechanism will be triggered more strongly among parties with a more radical ideological profile. Thus, to safeguard the generalizability of our findings, we want maximum variation on the party family variable.

We will now briefly introduce our cases (see table 1 for an overview of the parties' characteristics). The Danish *Socialist People's Party (SF)* was formed in 1959 as a splinter party from the Danish Communist party and is positioned left of the Social Democrats. It moved into office for the first time as part of a new center-left coalition government in 2011. It left the government coalition again in 2014. The *Center-Democrats* (CD), also from Denmark, emerged in 1973 as a splinter party from the Social Democrats. It entered parliament less than a month after its formation and had its debut in office in 1982 as part of a center-right coalition government (Schlüter I). The German *Green Party* was founded in 1980 and

emerged from the peace movement and anti-nuclear energy action groups. It gained its first parliamentary representation at the federal level in 1983. After the federal election in 1998 the party entered government for the first time as the junior partner of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in a new (center-) left government (Schröder I). The Dutch *Christian Union* (CU) was the result of a merger of two small Christian so-called testimonial parties, the GPV and the RPF, in 2000. The party takes its inspiration from the Bible, is socially-conservative and center-left on economic issues. After the election in 2006 it entered office as member of a coalition with the Christian Democrats and the Labour Party (Balkenenede IV). That the FPO became a governing party in 1983 marked the end of a long transition from protest party to governing party. The party, coming from Austria's Third Lager of nationalist and liberals, had links to Nazism, which made it a political pariah for years. The party gradually transformed itself from the 1970s adopting a more liberal profile. In 1982 these ideological developments were grounded into a new party program. The party leader – Norbert Steger – had come from a group of so-called Young Turks, who pursued liberal reforms within the party. These reforms clashed with the ideas of more nationalist party members (Luther, 1988) and exposed a rift between liberal and nationalist intra-party factions and eventually, the FPO's leader Norbert Steger was toppled by Jörg Haider who transformed the party into a populist radical right party (Luther, 2000, 2011).

Table 1. Overview of parties and background information

Party name	Year of formation	Party family*	First-term in government	Government coalition
Socialist People's Party (DK)	1959	Radical left	2011-2014	Center-Left
Center Democrats (DK)	1973	Social Democrats**	1982-1984	Center-Right
Christian Union (NL)	2000	Protestant	2007-2010	Left-Right
Green Party (G)	1980	Green	1998-2002	Left
Freedom Party (A)	1956	Radical right	1983-1986	Center-Left

*Parties are categorized on basis of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey codes. **The Comparative Manifesto project codes the Center-Democrats as a liberal party. The coding disagreement probably reflects its status as a center party, which at different times have cooperated with parties on the left as well parties on the right.

To assess to what extent being in office for the first time indeed changed our parties in line with the predictions of our behavioral theory, we now move on to examine (1) the extent to which office-rookies are motivated to change by the prospects of foreseeable electoral defeat; (2) the change in the party's membership composition; and (3) the change in the party's organization. For data on these characteristics, we employ secondary literature, EJPR yearbooks, data on party membership, turnover of candidates on party lists and party leader speeches. Not all data are available for all parties, though. We organize our case studies along the dependent variables.

Results

Do parties for the first time in office face the prospect of electoral defeat?

Our first hypothesis posits that low aspiration parties that enter office for the first time face the prospect of electoral defeat (H1), which (eventually) lead them to change. To assess this hypothesis, we examine the development of the parties' standing in the polls (see figure 2). The opinion polls (Schumacher, 2015) are averaged by month and represent the vote share the party can expect if elections were held at that moment. The grey bars present the vote share the party had in the last election, thus if polls are above this line the party expects to gain at the next election, if polls are below the line the party can expect to lose.

Figure 2. Averaged monthly vote share predicted by opinion polls
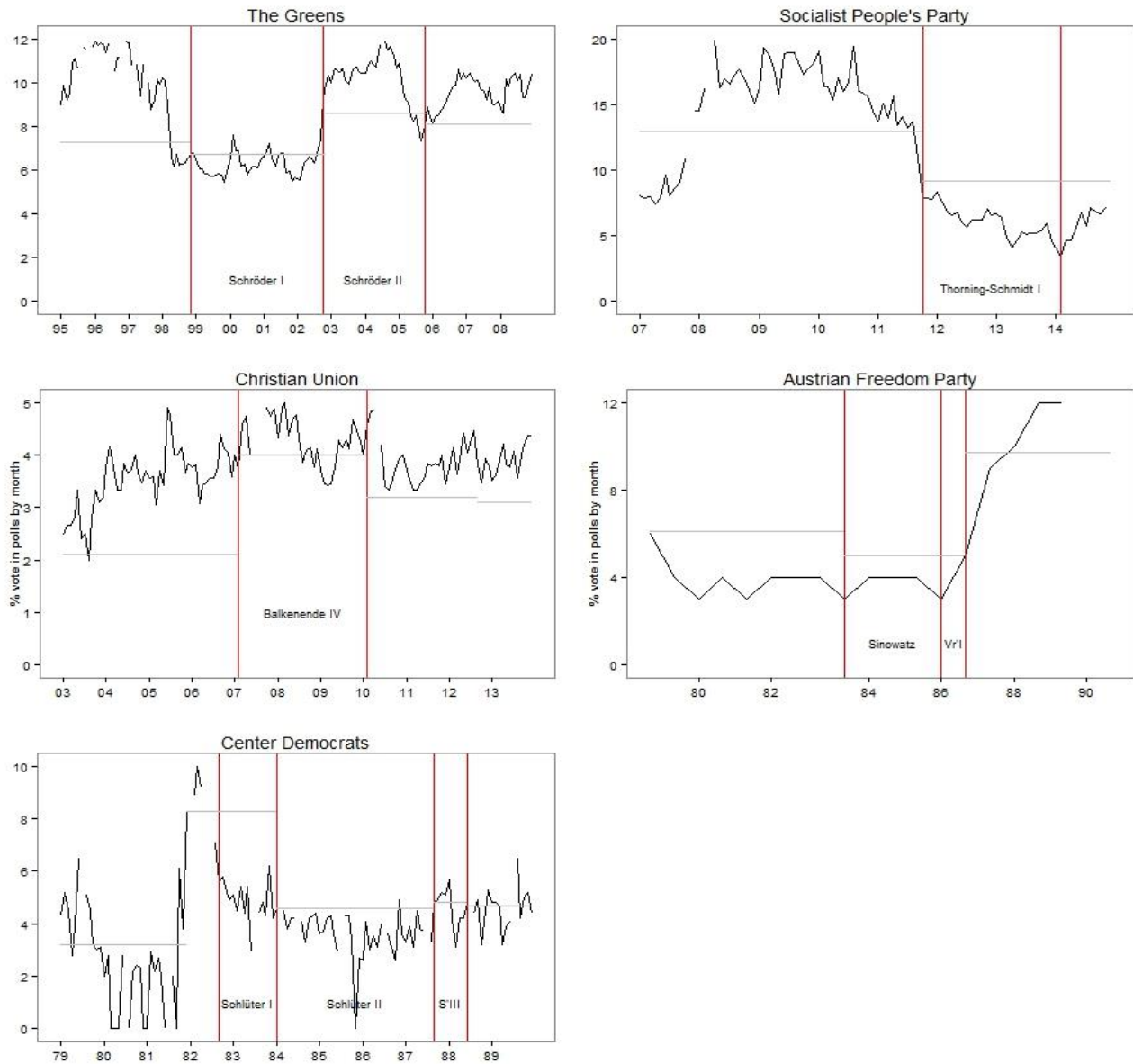
Notes: Grey vertical bars present party's vote share in last election; red horizontal bars denote periods in government with respective name of cabinet. Source: Schumacher, 2015.

Four out of five parties stand to lose in the polls during their first term in government, and the proposition of Schumacher et al. (2015) is that especially parties with little experience in office are affected by the costs of governing, which subsequently triggers party change among these parties. As a result of the 2007 general election in Denmark the right-wing government renewed its mandate. The *Socialist People's*

Party received 13% of the votes but climbed to around 20% in the polls the following months, where the party elite worked steadily to prepare the party for entry to government. As from late in 2010, when it became more and more likely that The Socialist People's Party were going to be a government party, it started to lose votes in the polls. Intensified cooperation with the Social Democrats at the leadership level led party activists and some MPs to worry that the party was losing its independent profile and compromised too much on important issues (Mortensen 2014). It suffered a loss of almost 4% at the 2011 general election and continued to deteriorate in the polls until the party stepped out of Thorning-Schmidt I coalition in 2014.

Less than one month after the formation of the *Center-Democrats*, the party received 7.8% of the votes in a land-slide election doubling the number of parties in the Danish Parliament. In the following years the party went up and down in the polls. Between elections the party was often close to – occasionally under – the 2% threshold, while poll performance usually improved during election campaigns. The year before the party stepped into office as member of a four-party Centre-Right minority coalition, the party had as an outcome of the 1981 general election grown from the 3.2% it received in the 1979 election to 8.3% of the votes (Bille 1997: 251). The 1981 result was never exceeded before the party was dissolved in 2008. In the months after the election it climbed even further in the polls until it began losing support in the later part of 1982. In the period after office entrance the Center-Democrats performed consistently below the 1981-result. At the first election after office attainment, held in 1984, the Center-Democrats suffered a big loss and received only 4.6% of the votes.

While, on average, the trend in the opinion polls for the *Christian Union's* since its first parliamentary election in 2002 was positive, the period as a whole is marked by quite some ups – especially closer to its entering office – but also downs. The 2002-election proved a deception for the party. While its position in the polls prior to the election had been quite positive, the party received only four seats – a loss

of one seat compared to what the parties that merged into the Christian Union had received at the 1998-election. The 2002-election was an unusual election, because of the assassination of the right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn about a week before the election. Whereas some of the Christian Union's voters had strategically turned to the Christian democrats so as to avoid that Fortuyn's party would end up as the largest, the lost elections led to a lot of turmoil within the party. Especially the campaigning geared towards office, with accompanying willingness to compromise, was considered problematic (Voerman, 2010: 102) and also the position of the party leader was put into question (idem: 102-105). The latter resulted ultimately in a new party leader: André Rouvout. The aim to follow a "principally-biblical" course in the coming period (Voerman, 2010: 106) could be put into practice immediately, because of early elections in 2003. During this election campaign, the party did not speak of office participation at all. The election result was poor again, with one further seat lost, leaving three. Surprisingly, the party was invited at the negotiation table with the Christian democrats and the conservative liberals. While these parties in the end went for the progressive liberals as the junior coalition partner, the invitation underlined the party's office-readiness. The 2004-elections for the European parliament would be the last elections prior to entering office in which the Christian Union lost. Around 2004, the party started to rise in the polls to four to five seats. Also Rouvoet's star was rising, especially after his convincing way of debating in the campaign on the referendum for the European constitution, which led to a spur in the polls to even eight seats (Voerman, 2010: 117). At the 2006-municipal elections, the party ended up as one of the winners, becoming the fourth largest party (idem). Also at the 2006-parliamentary elections, the Christian Union emerged as one of the winners, doubling its seats (from three to six) (Voerman, 2010: 120). This trend continued at the 2007-provincial elections (Voerman, 2010: 123) and thereafter. In fact, in the first half of its period in office, the Christian Union was the only party of the three coalition parties for which the polls predicted on average electoral gains of about two seats. This changed after the debate on the party's position on homosexuality in 2008,[2] which led to a substantial

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[2] The debate was started when a local council member wrote in a Dutch newspaper that based on the Bible, ho-

drop in the polls to five or even four seats. At the 2010-elections, the party ended up losing one seat. After its period in office, the Christian Union's standing in the polls improved a bit but remained, on average, lower than it had been during its spell in office.

The *German Green* party is an exceptional case in that besides election polls being a source of bad news, they 'already looked into the abyss and only just escaped the freefall to almost certain political death' when in 1998 they entered office with 6.7 per cent of the votes: a 0.6 percent vote loss compared to the 1994elections. Yet, the pre-election polls had initially suggested an even bigger electoral loss. The Greens' poor performance in the run-up to the elections has been ascribed to the fact that to the disappointment of the party leadership, the fundamentalist wing within the party managed to pass a proposal during a pre-election congress at Magdeburg that the party would fight for gradual rise of petrol prices from 1.6 to 5 German Marks per liter. Also a Green MP, Halo Saibold, suggested to tax aircraft fuel in the same way, arguing that flying abroad for holidays once every five years was enough for people. Notwithstanding that at a later congress it was decided that these issues were not to be mentioned in the election manifesto, the electoral damage was already done. When the Green party entered office they not only realized that their outdated policy platform was hopelessly out of touch with the electorate, but also they had to cope with the reality that the SPD was their only potential coalition partner, while the latter always had the option of returning to the CDU (Rudig 2002). These conditions have likely triggered the loss aversion mechanism among the Greens. What is more, figure 2 shows that for most months in their first-term in government the German Greens (first-term 1998-02 under Schröder I) scored even worse in the polls than during the 1998-election. Except for some peaks, the polls sig-

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mosexuality needed to be condemned fully – a statement that led to a furious reaction by the Dutch organization for gay rights and to turmoil within the party. After a heated internal deabte on whether party members in representative organs or in board functions to have a same-sex relationship or not, the party moderated its position on homosexuality drastically by not automatically ruling out homosexuals from such functions (Voerman, 2010: 123-126).

naled electoral losses. Close to the 2002-election, however, the Greens improved performance and eventually gained in terms of vote share (+1.9%). This increased support, however, came after, and maybe also because the party had for the first time since its founding in 1980 seriously revised its program (Bluhorn 2009).

The *FPO's* prospects during its first term in government were outright dramatic, even running the risk of falling below the 4% electoral threshold. It quickly lost its sizeable protest vote and even its own members criticized the party for selling out to the socialists. In 1985 Haider proposed to break away from the party and threatened to take some of the party's MPs with him. Eventually, Haider organized a coup and deposed Steger. As a consequence, the chancellor Sinowatz dropped the FPO as coalition partner and organized new elections. With Haider, the party returned to being a protest party, and conducted 'an emotive, populist campaign' as 'it had nothing to lose and [it] mounted a no-holds-barred attack on both [mainstream, GS] parties' (Luther, 1988: 245). Programmatically, the party shifted to the right, with some major liberal figures quitting the party. This radical change was successful; the party almost doubled its vote share. However, the party again became a political pariah. In sum, during its first-term of government the party first dramatically consolidated its ongoing move towards liberalism, but by the end, dramatically shifted course again as a consequence of changing intra-party dynamics (Luther, 1988).

Overall, and with the exception of the Christian Union, our hypothesis 1 is largely supported. Our low aspiration parties that enter office for the first time also enter a domain of loss, evidenced by a drop in the polls. This means that they are confronted with the prospect of electoral defeat and ultimately a loss of newly achieved office benefits. Hence, they seem indeed to feel the blues and thus be triggered by the loss aversion mechanism to change.

Do parties for the first time in office attract more career-oriented party members?

Did the composition of party membership change after parties entered office for the first time? Did they attract more career-oriented party members, as H2 suggests? To answer this question we use comparative data on party membership figures for all our parties with low office aspiration entering office for the first time (see figure 3). We use party membership as a proxy here: if anything, party membership should have increased once the party entered office. For three out of five parties (Greens, Christian Union, and Socialist People's Party) the membership numbers increased in the year the party entered office, only to decrease in the next few years. It is likely that initially we would see more instrumentally motivated members signing up to the party (careerists, in line with H2), and that later more ideologically motivated members leaving their party because it is breaking some principle(s) while in office. To the extent that relevant party member surveys are available, we will supplement general information on party membership rates with an analysis on the motivations of party members to see if existing members have become more career-oriented or that parties have started attracting more career-oriented members.

Figure 3. Development of party membership.
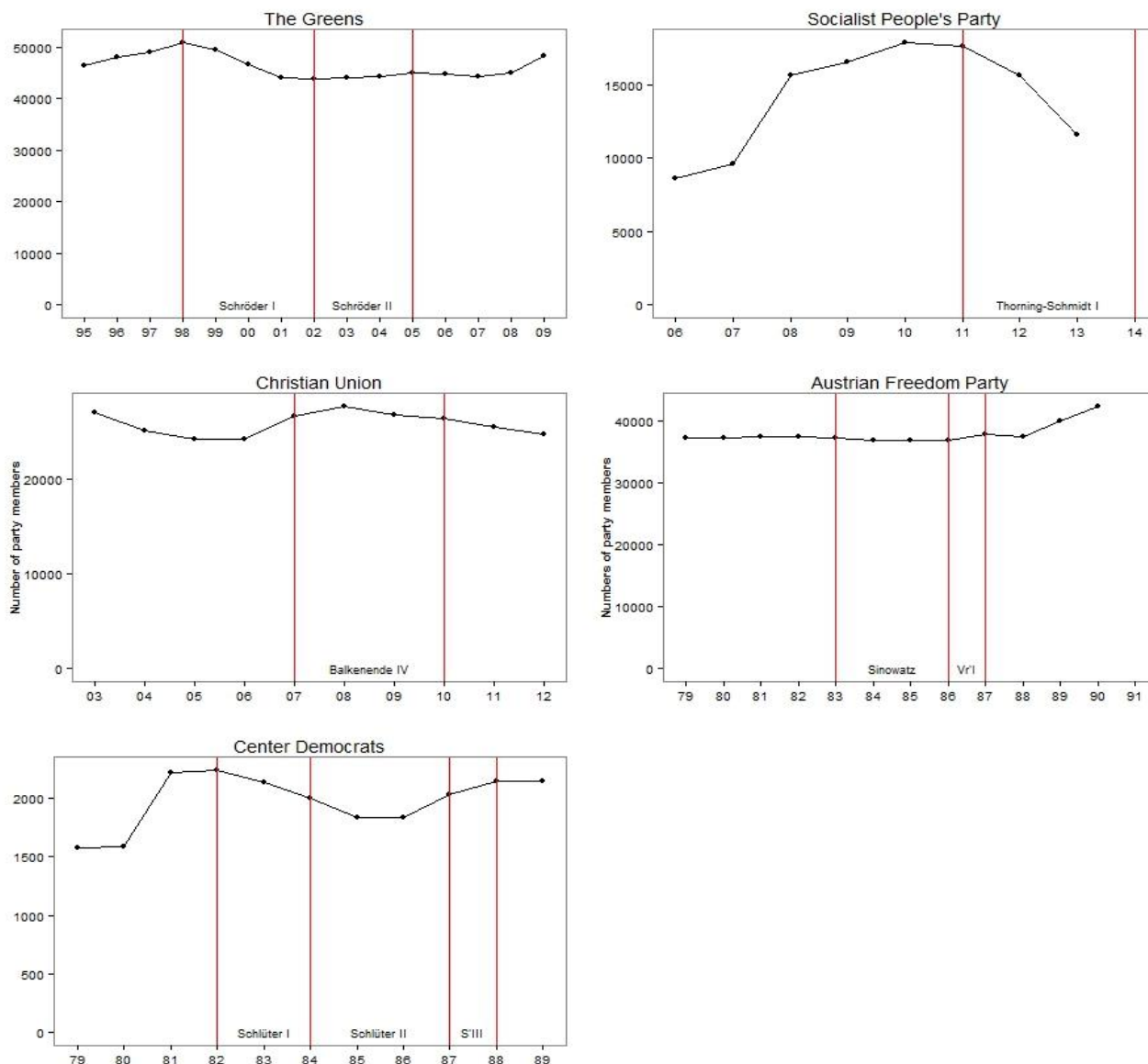
Notes: red horizontal bars denote periods in government with respective name of cabinet. Source: Giger & Schumacher, 2014.

Membership of *The Socialist People's Party* grew in the years before office-entrance, and started to decline after. A significant pool of careerists seems to be among the new members fluxing into the party in the period leading up to office-entrance. The percentage of members with some form of position within the party declaring prepared to run for election and thus pursue a political career rose with more than

40% in the period between 2000 and 2012 (Elklit & Bille 2003; Kosiara-Pedersen 2014). In 2012, this category of members attended party meetings more frequently, sought contact with members of the parliamentary group more often, and participated more often in policy formulation. The same development is observed among rank and file party members without any position – but not to the same extent – which altogether leave the impression that Socialist People's Party's members in 2012 generally are more active and ready for a political career (Kosiara-Pedersen 2014). Internal member surveys conducted by the party in 2010 and 2012 indicate that a significant share of the new members had joined the party to achieve a political career, strengthening this impression (SF 2010; 2012). A final indication of stronger careerist orientation among at least some party members is that three members of the parliamentary group, whose careers took off in the years of preparing the party for government, culminating with the reward of government portfolios or party leadership positions after the 2011 election, left the party when the party left government in 2014. Two of them joined the Social Democrats and the last went to the Social Liberal Party – the two government experienced and high aspiration parties that continued in office.

Membership of the *Center-Democrats* grew consistently during the 1970s and peaked in the years of 1981-1983. There is a significant increase in membership from 1980 to 1981 – the year in which the party received its best electoral result ever and the year before it moved to office. We have little information about the motivations of Center-Democrat party members in the years around its entrance to government in 1982. The membership/voter ratio (the share of voters that are also members of the party) has been the lowest among all Danish parties and never exceeded 2% (Bille 1997: 75). What we do know is that the influence of these relatively few members always has been very weak in a party strongly dominated by its leadership and parliamentary group (Bille 1997).

The *Christian Union* experienced a dip in membership in 2008 where there was a lot of turmoil within the party because of the party leadership deciding on a less conservative stance on homosexuality (see note 2). The party did not recover from this dip. The continuation of a downward trend in party membership for the Christian Union continued after the government fell in 2010, which could mean that the new, perhaps more career-oreinted members, (also) left the party. For the Christian Union, the political positions of the party's cadre, that is those deputies of local departments of the party and the active members who participate at the opinion-forming congresses, were more pragmatic (for example, somewhat less conservative on ethical issues) and more left-of-center in 2009 (that is, during its first spell in office) than it has been in 2000 (Lucardi & Van Schuur, 2010). The fact that the members of the cadre seemed willing to trade policy ideals for office benefits could on the one hand suggest that these members have become more careerist. On the other hand, it could mean that new members with a more careerist-orientation entered the party cadre. Or both.[3]

For the *German Greens*, on the whole, membership levels increased in the year in which they gained office, decreased during its first spell in office (Schröder 1), remained constant during its second spell in office (Schröder 2), and recovered when the party returned to opposition. The decline during the Schröder 1 government is likely due to the ideological sacrifices the party had to make once in office. Many of the Greens' activists were bewildered by the decision of military intervention in Kosovo at the Bielefeld congress of May 1999. Similarly, the decision to agree to a very long term phasing out of nuclear energy upset its formerly most loyal supporters (Poguntke 2001). Change within the Greens has been portrayed as a transition from long haired hippies in Birkenstocks into mature statesmen in grey

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[3] The overwhelming majority of the party members is (very) proud to be in office, according to journalist Piet H. de Jong: 'The approval during one of the congresses was of an eastern European nature. There was maybe one critical remark about abortion. The rest was applause. Apparently the party constituency was ready to see the party in office' (Pasterkamp, 2008: 149, authors' translation).

flannel suits that have finally discarded their utopian fantasies (Jachnow 2013). Unfortunately, data on the motives of new party members of the German Greens could not yet be included in this version of the paper, so for now we can only compare the motives of the entire sample before and after 1998, the year the Greens first went to office. In the 1998 Potsdammer Party Membership Survey, which was conducted 6 month prior to their entry in office, 1.4% of the members expressed that they joined the party for instrumental reasons. These reasons include increasing one's general career prospects, an interest to take up political office, or wanting a job in the party on the ground. In 2009, 4 years after the Greens last governed, the German Party Member Study asked the same question. 1.7% reported careerist motives, which would suggest a 0.3% increase. Yet, the percentage of all German party members expressing this motive has also risen by 0.3%: from 1.7 to 2% (Laux 2011). Therefore, there is insufficient ground to conclude that the membership base became more career-motivated because of their party's office status. At the same time, there is insufficient evidence to reject H2, as careerist motives among members that joined after 1998 could still significantly differ from the membership base as a whole. So additional analyses will be necessary to come to a final verdict. The same goes for the prevalence of ideological reasons. There is only a 0.1 percentage point decrease (from 4% in 1998 to 3.9% in 2009) of party members reporting ideological reasons for joining the party (Laux 2011), which is insufficient evidence to conclude that ideologically-motivated individuals have left the party.

For the Austrian FPO, we see no change in its membership. Prior to entering office and during this period "[t]he party recruited a significant number of liberal (and careerist) 'young Turks'" (Luther, 2000: 429). However, at the same time the liberal course of the Freedom Party during its spell in office, alienated the nationalist-oriented members of the party, which perhaps explains why we see stability in the party membership.

All this may suggest that, in line with H2, in reaction to office-attainment the very composure of low aspiration office rookies changes since they are likely to attract more career-oriented party members,

and activate party members with strong office seeking ambitions. However, we lack systematic longitudinal data for all our parties, and we are for this reason not yet able to land on a decisive conclusion.

Do parties for the first time in office become more leadership-dominated?

Our final hypothesis 3 concerns what happens with a low aspiration party's institutional structure once it enters office for the first time. Specifically, we hypothesize that this makes the party more leadership-dominated. There are a few datasets that describe the intra-party institutions of parties (Cross & Pilet, 2015; Katz & Mair, 1992). In terms of the methods of leadership selection (Cross & Pilet, 2015) or candidate selection (Bille, 2001; Lundell, 2004), we see no change in the respective parties before, after or during their first term in government.

Looking into the details of first the *Socialist People's Party*, it held in April 2012 its first party conference after office-entry in 2011. It was expected that conflicts between the party elite, consisting of newly appointed ministers, and party activists, supported by a handful members of the parliamentary group and outspoken critics of the government project would escalate at the party conference. Hence, media attention was intense. Unexpectedly, however, the leadership got through with a further strengthening of its own position in the party organization. First, at the election for party vice-chairman the leadership endorsed candidate(s) won eventually over the party-activist nominee who were critical to government participation, and wanted to strengthen the members in party decision making (Bille, 2013). Second, in the weeks before the conference, members of the national committee had expressed that this central party organ should authorize any decisions made by the party elite in the coming negotiations over a tax policy reform. The party leadership declared that the party would not be able to negotiate under such conditions. It would embarrass itself and be unable to cooperate with its coalition partners. In the end the leadership got an open mandate from the committee and, in effect, increased further its autonomy from the party base in day-to-day decision making. It was also seen as an indication that for the Social-

ist People's Party government power was now more important than the consistent promotion of strong ideological viewpoints. A minister of the party summarized the outcomes of the conference by stating that the Socialist People's Party '(i)s now a true government party' (Jyllands-Posten, April 16 2012: p. 2).

It was written into the laws of the *Center Democrats* already by its formation that the parliamentary group in any matter is independent from the national committee of the party, as well as from any other governing body in the membership organization (Pedersen 2010). Thus, already by the time of its formation the party was strongly leadership-dominated. The parliamentary group even controls the election of party chairman as the national committee can choose between members nominated by the parliamentary group. The party reacted organizationally to office attainment by strengthening the power and autonomy of its elected representatives in day-to-day policy decisions even further. Until 1982 the national committee of the party had the right to call for a round of negotiations over policy matters, but this right was abolished and substituted by minimally two annual meetings between the parliamentary group and members of the national committee (Pedersen 2010). There has never been intra-party controversy over this arrangement. In his organizational report to the 1984 party conference the chairman of the national committee wrote, for example; that the main task for party members is to mobilize support for the party during electoral campaigns; they should not act as an interest group pressing its demands on the parliamentary group; party members are not by paying a membership fee entitled to greater power and more influence than non-members that are voting for the party (Centrum-Demokraterne 1984). At the party congress of 1986 the leadership dominance of the party caused in fact the leadership to call for more policy-oriented activity from party members (Centrum-Demokraterne 1986: 8). The report from the 1986 party congress demonstrate further that the party focused strongly on the political and organizational requirements for keeping the government coalition intact to maintain office status (Centrum Demokraterne 1986: pp. 7-8).

As indicated, the *Christian Union* resulted from a merger of two small Christian parties, the GPV and the RPF. Both of these parties had been policy-seeking parties (or testimonial parties) par excellence, aimed 'spreading the word of God' (Coffé & Torenvlied, 2008: 11). Did this change when the Christian Union entered office for the first time in 2006? According to its party leader Rouvoet, even though being in office professionalized the party, its essence remained the same (quoted in Pasterkamp, 2008: 171). More specifically, Rouvoet stated that, for the Christian Union, being in office meant having to consider three issues on a daily basis: 'One: the Christian Union's duty is to prove to be a responsible governing party. Two: we should book concrete Christion Union-results. (…) Three: as the Christian Union, we should remain our self. That combination is quite difficult' (Pasterkamp, 2008). Whereas the second and third issues could be taken to imply that the party remained true to its "pure" policy-seeking profile, the first could be taken as a shift towards a more office-orientated. However, when in office for the first time, the Christian Union did not display institutional changes going in the direction of leadership-domination. Against the general trend towards more democratization in Dutch political parties, the Christian Union kept its indirect sphere of influence. Party members do not elect their party leader. Instead, the decision-making process is organized in a congress of delegates. As of 2003, the Christian Union does have an opinion-forming congress of party members (Den Ridder, 2014: 50), indicating more rather than less influence from party members.

For the *German Greens* we do have expert survey data before and after their first term in government. Bolleyer et al. (2012) report an increase from 4.9 in 2000, when the Greens had just started their term in office, to 6.9 in 2004 (10-point scale) regarding how well the party organization was organized at the national level as evaluated by experts. This is an increase of 2 compared to an average increase of 0.65 for all parties that were included in the expert survey. Admittedly, whether a party is well-organized or not does not necessarily mean that it is leadership-dominated. Yet, it seems plausible that party elites

should at least have some steering-capacity within well-organized parties. Importantly, and closely in line with H3, Giger and Schumacher (2014) have quantitative evidence that the Greens also became more leadership-dominated after their first two terms in office compared to the earlier 1990s (-0.536 [1992] to 0.13 [2006], on a scale from -1 [activist-dominated] to 1 [leadership-dominated]). Existing case study research also suggests that the Greens pursued organizational reform when in office with the intention to increase the steering capacity of party elites. During the Leipzig party congress of December 1998, which was held only two months after the Schröder 1 government had been sworn in, the Greens adopted a configuration of leadership bodies that closely resembled the other German parties. The party executive was reduced to 5 members and became responsible for governing the party on a daily basis. Also it established a *Parteirat* (party council), which effectively became the national executive, consisting of 25 members that was to meet every month; twelve of its 25 members could be parliamentarians or government ministers. The latter is clearly at odds with the sacred principle of separation of office and mandate and gave the parliamentary party much more grip over the party on the ground (Poguntke 2001). This was still a watered down version of the original proposal, however, and as a form of protest, party leader Joschka Fischer declined to stand for election to this body (Rudig 2010). Little more than a year later, not least because the Greens had a very difficult start in government and experienced electoral defeat in subsequent *Land* elections, the party leadership managed to further reform the party structure at the Karlsruhe conference of March 2000. The size of the aforementioned *Parteirat* was to be halved and the partial separation of office and mandate was fully abolished (Poguntke 2001). As such, there is firm quantitative and qualitative case-study evidence that the party organization of the Greens became more leadership-dominated when they gained office, in agreement with H2. One should realize, however, that even though government participation clearly led to an intensification of organizational reform, the process of reform already started earlier. To be specific, after the disastrous 1990 elections in which the Greens lost parliamentary representation, when the party implemented a series of reforms, such as the abolishment of the rotation principle, to increase

the autonomy of party elites (Poguntke 2001). Moreover, in the run-up to the 1998 elections when election polls indicated that a red-green coalition had become a realistic possibility, the party leadership initiated a debate of abolishing the strict separation between Bundestag party and the party on the ground (Poguntke 2001). Nonetheless, these attempts were unsuccessful until the Leipzig and Karlsruhe conferences when the party was actually in office.[4]

Based on the four low aspiration office rookies for which we have presented material here (see note 4), our hypothesis 3 is largely supported. Except for the Christian Union, the parties' organization is changed in the direction of stronger leadership-domination.

6. Discussion and conclusion

West European party systems are in change. New parties are mushrooming, and parties who were previously seen as outcasts are in a host of countries elevated to office. Such parties – by us conceptualized as low aspiration parties – are distinct from more established parties, and we have asked how they react to the change in status from opposition to office. On basis of a new theory, developed and presented in an earlier related work (Schumacher et al. 2015), we propose generally the following: office achievement strengthens office aspiration, and because of the cost of governing, moving to office triggers a loss aversion mechanism which leads these parties to change and re-prioritize among party goals.

We see, in conjunction with our first hypothesis, and with the exception of the Christian Union, that when our low aspiration parties enter office they also enter a domain of loss. They drop in the polls, face the prospect of electoral defeat and ultimately a loss of newly achieved office benefits. Hence, they seem indeed to feel the blues and thus be triggered by the loss aversion mechanism. We also suggested

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[4] Analysis of FPO still to be included.

that in reaction to office-attainment the very composure of most of the low aspiration parties changes as they are likely to attract more career-oriented party members, and activate party members with strong office seeking ambitions (H2); and that most of them change the party organization in the direction of stronger leadership domination (H3). Overall, and on basis of the data we have gathered so far, we conclude that we find empirical evidence for H1, as well as there is little doubt that the parties also facilitated institutional change to strengthen the leadership of the parties (H3). This is especially true for traditionally activist-dominated parties like the Socialist People's Party and the Green Party. But also the Center-Democrats, characterized by a leadership so strong that in 1986 it called for more party member activism, moved even further in the direction of leadership dominance. The Christian Union did not display much change here. As for patterns of membership development and the composure of the parties, the analysis remains at this stage inconclusive. Data from the reported party member surveys indicates that party members in some parties did become more career-oriented when the party tuned in on and eventually attained office, but we need systematic longitudinal membership surveys to conclude anything with certainty.

Detailed case-studies are excellent to reveal developments and patterns not thought of and neither theorized beforehand. Our study of five low aspiration parties across European party systems is no exception. We have been especially concerned with the reaction and changes of these parties *after* office attainment. Our data – of which not all are reported in the study yet – suggest, however, that to get the full picture of what happens in the transition from opposition to office, it is also important to focus on what sets low aspiration parties on the track to office, and on the changes that are occurring in the period *before* they actually receive the keys. Looking at the membership development in figure 2, for example, it is clear that new members are flocking to the parties primarily in the period before office entrance. The type of institutional party change that leaves the party elite larger degrees of discretion in daily decision-making have typically also begun before parties were actually installed in office. Institu-

tional changes post office entrance are significant, but largely a continuation of changes that did begin pre office entrance.

These observations suggest that low aspiration parties go to office as the result of a deliberate decision and long term planning, rather than that they are suddenly being catapulted into it after a random election where they happened to comes out as (big) winners. They engage in adapting and preparing the party to the environment in which they expect to find themselves in a foreseeable future. At a certain point in time these parties seems in other words to re-prioritize among their party-goals in such a way that office attainment comes to figure high on what the party, or at least party elites, wants to achieve. In short, office aspiration begins to grow before office is achieved. This begs the following question: where does the going-to-office-energy come from, and why does the goal of office comes to range high among low aspiration parties that is usually characteristic for relatively strong ideological orientation and with a focus primarily on policy achievement?

After having taken a broad and comprehensive look at all the data and information we have collected for this study, we suggest that this is the result of extra-ordinarily electoral achievements such as an electoral victory and/or unusual strong performance in the polls. The course to government was initiated by the Socialist People's Party after the 2007 election where the party achieved one of its best results ever; the Center-Democrats moved in in 1982 upon a never again achieved electoral result in 1981; the Green Party started to prepare for government after a remarkable victory in 1994 and moved to office in 1998; the Christian Union announced office-readiness it the very first election in which it participated, interestingly only to gain access to office in a subsequent election in which it explicitly did not speak of office-participation but doubled its seats in parliament. FPÖ moved to office upon a loss in the 1983 election, but nevertheless had begun a process of mainstreaming in 1980 to prepare the party for office entrance.

Parties have numerous goals, but they also have a primary goal that varies across parties but also within parties across time (Harmel & Janda 1994: 265).What is happening to these parties may be explained with a reference to how they prioritize among party goals, and as an effect of how extra-ordinarily strong electoral achievement may cause them to re-prioritize such goals. With party goals we refer to the distinction between policy, office and votes (Harmel and Janda 1994). We know from previous research that the parties of our concern are primarily oriented towards policy, that is, expressing pure policy ideals. Office benefits are in the literature often associated with the personal rents and prestige for office holders. But office is also instrumental for a party that wishes to translate its policy preferences into real policy. Strong electoral achievement by this particular type of party may cause them to reason that since there is a strong public backing behind their policy platforms, they are now in a position where it seems natural to reach out for office. It may require also party-internal pressure to begin such a move. A strong electoral achievement, such as an electoral victory, is likely to cause significant change in the parliamentary group; new and unexperienced members who are willing to question old routines are coming in, which may contribute to create the energy that is setting the party on the track to office.

The move to office, and the changes associated with it, thus seem to begin in a period in which the party finds itself in a winning context and is fired up by strong electoral performance. However, and in line with the behavioral theory of party change that we test here, the process of party change reaches full momentum once the party actually enters office. At that moment the cost of governing kicks-in, and the party enters a domain of losses. The theoretical challenge with which we are now confronted is to capture these dynamics in a single coherent model. We believe that parties might not only change in response to office payoffs. In addition to including a party's office performance in relation to its office aspiration level, preferably on the basis of polling data, future studies should try to simultaneously con-

sider the party's electoral performance and aspiration level. If this can be done we believe that we are

taking a step toward a better understanding of European party systems in flux.

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