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# CHANGES IN PARTY IDENTITY

## Evidence from Party Manifestos

*Kenneth Janda, Robert Harmel, Christine Edens  
and Patricia Goff*

### ABSTRACT

Political folklore holds that political parties often try to change their images following a disastrous election defeat. This paper inquires into the truth of this common assumption through a systematic analysis of manifestos promulgated by eight parties in Britain, Germany and the USA prior to national elections in the 1950s through 1980s. Each election was classified as triumphal, gratifying, tolerable, disappointing or calamitous from the standpoint of each party. The change in party images for adjacent elections was assessed by correlating the percentages of sentences devoted to standard political themes in the pair of manifestos. We tested the hypothesis that parties were most likely to change their policy images following disappointing or calamitous elections. Our findings suggest that poor electoral performance was not a sufficient condition to produce a major overhaul of party images, but poor performance in the prior election was virtually necessary to produce major change in policy packaging at the next election.

KEY WORDS ■ content analysis ■ elections ■ manifestos ■ party change

We define the *identity* of a political party as the image that citizens have in mind when they think about that party. Political parties develop their identities through the different faces they present to the public while in and out of government. A party's human face is shaped by the characteristics of its leaders and supporters. During the 1980s, for example, the British Conservative Party was personified by Margaret Thatcher, while Labour was seen as closely linked to trade union leaders. Occasionally, the public reacts to a party's organizational face: one party can come across as centralized and highly disciplined while another is seen as disorganized or even fragmented. Of course, parties also create a policy face by the positions they espouse on

political issues. Sometimes parties initiate a policy facelift by changing or repackaging their policies, altering their identity by moving to the left, or getting tough on crime, or embracing family values, or championing nationalism, or stressing some other policy shift.

Given that party leadership, supporters, organization and policies do change over time, it follows that parties display different identities to voters over time. In publicized cases of scandals or corruption, parties may not have much control over the face that voters see. Otherwise, parties consciously try to shape their images so that the public sees what the parties want. This is particularly true when parties formulate their policy statements prior to an election campaign. In the USA, these campaign documents are called 'party platforms', but elsewhere they are usually known as 'election manifestos'. Occasionally, parties have fundamentally altered their platforms or manifestos between elections, attempting to shape a new party identity. Recalling Edmund Burke's definition of a political party as a body of people 'united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed' (Pomper, 1992: 2), we might ask why parties change the 'particular principles' on which their leaders and supporters were once united. Why do they seek to change their identity by fundamentally changing their manifestos between elections?

This specific question fits within the general area of inquiry: why do parties change? Various scholars have sought to answer this general question. Lippman (1914) and Panebianco (1988) have looked mainly to external shocks – particularly election defeat – to explain party change. Katz and Mair (1990) and Appleton and Ward (1991) argued that certain changes in the environment have a particular effect on party organization. Wilson (1980, 1989) and Deschouwer (1992) focused on the visions and actions of individual leaders as the stimulus to change, while Panebianco expected more sweeping changes when leadership change was accompanied by a change in the sociological composition of the party's dominant coalition. The topic of party change, which has long attracted the attention of theorists, is also becoming the subject of more systematic empirical investigation, as witnessed by the massive compilation of data on party organizations in 12 countries from 1960 to 1990 edited by Katz and Mair (1992).

In a more modest research project, Harmel and Janda undertook to collect data on changes in the organization and issue positions of political parties in Britain, Denmark, Germany and the USA from 1950 to 1990. To prepare for their effort, they formulated a theoretical framework explaining party change as a function of three major factors: (1) external shock, (2) leadership change and (3) change in the dominant coalition (Harmel and Janda, 1994). Harmel et al. (1995) conducted a preliminary test of that theory using data collected on 210 changes in the organization and issue positions of three British and three German parties from 1950 to 1990. They concluded:

The results of our preliminary empirical analyses have generally supported the view that while external factors (and most especially, poor

electoral performances) may act as important stimuli for change, there is also an important role for the social (i.e., sub-party) actor to play in the theory of party change. Our test of electoral performance theory revealed that while a substantial portion of total party change could conceivably be linked to bad electoral performances, the latter falls considerably short of being either a necessary (as originally hypothesized) or sufficient condition for change, with large residuals remaining for all parties. Our search for complementary factors led us to posit an important role for change in organizational actors (i.e., leaders and dominant factions) in explaining some of the residuals. And indeed, our data provide evidence for such a role.

(Harmel et al., 1995: 17–18)

In this paper, we conduct another test of the electoral performance portion of the explanation of party change, one that focuses on a different aspect of party change from that addressed by Harmel et al. Whereas they sought to explain specific instances of change in the way parties are organized (e.g. enlargement of the national committee) or in the positions they take on specific issues (e.g. protection of the environment), here we are interested in how parties try to change another dimension of their public identity: how they package their policies in election manifestos. We use data from the European Party Manifestos Project to determine when a party dramatically changes how it treats political issues in its election manifestos. Our study covers elections from the 1950s to the 1980s for eight parties: the Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties in Britain; the Christian Democrats, Free Democrats and Social Democrats in Germany; and the Democratic and Republican parties in the USA. We match the changes in manifestos between elections against a classification of elections to determine whether major changes in the packaging of party policies tend to follow instances of electoral defeat.

### Electoral Performance as a Source of Party Change

In an important article on innovation in party systems, Lowi (1963) quotes from a 1914 book by Walter Lippman. Speaking of the famed ‘Tammany Hall’ machine of the Democratic Party in New York City, Lippman says that it ‘becomes rigid when it is too successful, and only defeat seems to give it new life’ (1914: 26). Unfortunately, Lippman did not expand on his observation. Nor does Lowi, whose thesis is that innovation is the function of the minority party in a party system (p. 571). His thesis is similar to the advertising theme of the Avis car rental company, the number-two firm in the American market, which used the slogan ‘We try harder’ to compete against the number-one firm (Hertz).

The hypothesis on which we focus in this research, positing electoral performance as a source of party change, is different and more in keeping with Lippman’s comment. It assumes that defeat is the mother of party change. Obviously, this idea is not new. In 1983, Mair stated that the

'revitalization' of party organization can 'result from electoral defeat, in so far as the party interprets its losses as the rejection of its politics or its representativeness. There are many cases in the literature of parties seeking to renew their organizational effectiveness in the wake of electoral defeat' (p. 408). Perhaps most explicitly, Panebianco links party change with 'an organizational crisis unleashed by strong environmental pressure. Electoral defeat and deterioration in terms of exchange in the electoral arena are classic types of external challenges which exert very strong pressure on the party' (Panebianco, 1988: 243).

The theoretical argument for electoral defeat as a major source (and perhaps the primary source) of party change in electorally motivated parties is as follows. All organizations are conservative in the sense of avoiding change, but parties are especially conservative, for several reasons. First, parties become identified with issue positions that constrain their political movement. Second, they depend on the support of certain social groups that constrain their social appeals. Third – as Panebianco (1988: 38–40) explains so well – they are built on delicate power bases, and change threatens organizational cohesion. In sum, Schlesinger notes:

To understand parties, we must recognize that they do not perform and adapt as do businesses, bureaus, or interest groups; nor can they be expected to do so, given their peculiar combinations of organizational properties. Parties are perhaps best described as forms of organized trial and error.

(Schlesinger, 1984: 390)

Unlike firms, which typically have full-time managers aided by a staff of lower management supported by secretaries and clerks, most parties depend heavily on part-time leadership and volunteer labor. In this context, the leadership coalitions competing for control of the organization are unlikely to experiment with changing the organization. Their guiding principle is: 'If it isn't broken, don't fix it'.

When do competing leaders recognize that something in the party is broken and needs to be fixed? Some have argued that the evidence emerges most clearly after an election. As Schlesinger writes:

A party which does not respond to the electoral market will by definition lose to parties which do, and over the long run in a society where people are free to form new parties, it will find itself supplanted by responsive parties. . . . Because the market sends clear and unavoidable signals about performance with respect to its particular goals, individuals or units most responsible for market success can readily be identified. . . . Influence within the party, therefore, will follow closely individual success and failure in the electoral market.

(Schlesinger, 1984: 384)

In his important analysis of party organization, Panebianco (1988) cites several case studies in which electoral defeat stimulated party change. In the case of the French Gaullists, he notes that the party became more institutionalized at the Congress in Lille in 1967, when it adopted a new

name, Union des Démocrates pour la République (UDR), and the old Gaullists shared power with a newer generation.

The occasion arose due to an external challenge: the noticeable loss in the Gaullist impetus in the 1965 presidential elections (the two electoral rounds between De Gaulle and Mitterrand) and then in the party's 1967 electoral defeat and loss of many seats. The changing of the guard at Lille led to an important party reorganization.

(Panebianco, 1988: 155)

In the case of the British Conservative Party, Panebianco links organizational change to a series of electoral defeats:

The 1906 electoral débâcle brought about a modification of the dominant coalition (Balfour, the old leader, lost power to Chamberlain); the result was a temporary reorganization which de-institutionalized the party, taking power from the Central Office (then controlled by Balfour) and giving it to the National Union (then controlled by Chamberlain) (p. 250).

The defeat in 1910 brought Bonar Law and a new generation of leaders to power, leading to significant organizational restructuring (with Steel-Maitland at the head of the Central Office) (p. 250).

The next most important reform took place in 1948 under the impact of the renewal imposed by the 1945 defeat (pp. 250–1).

The internal movement for organizational reform regained vitality after the 1964 electoral defeat. . . . Up until then the new leader had been chosen through an informal meeting of party notables. Afterwards the leader was *elected* by the parliamentary group, and ballots were used if no candidates obtained an absolute majority in the first round (p. 251).

In 1975, after another electoral defeat, criteria for the election of the leader were once again modified. Two new clauses were introduced: the local party associations had to be consulted before electing a leader, and the parliamentarians gained the right to propose a vote of no confidence for the leader in office (p. 251).

In West Germany, Panebianco attributes the organizational expansion and centralization of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 1973 to its loss of government in 1969, and to the confirmation of its loss in the 1972 elections (pp. 258–9).

These various examples of electoral defeat stimulating party change deal primarily with organizational change, but electoral defeat is also likely to provoke change in the policy face that the party presents to voters. In fact, the literature on spatial modeling of voting behavior assumes that parties 'formulate policies in order to win elections' (Downs, 1957: 28). Of course, parties can win or lose elections for various reasons that have little to do with party policies – the outbreak of war, a scandal, a poor (or excellent) economy, and so on. If a party campaigns on an election manifesto that is followed by an election defeat, however, we expect the party to consider drastically

altering its manifesto for the next election campaign. We will use data from the European Party Manifestos Project to test this expectation.

## An Overview of the European Party Manifestos Project

As described in *Ideology, Strategy and Party Change* (Budge et al., 1987), the European Party Manifestos Project grew out of a research group of the European Consortium for Political Research organized in 1979. The organizers stated that their objective was 'to investigate the ideology and strategy of post-war parties across countries within a common framework, so as to facilitate comparisons and ultimately to support generalizations about the way parties shape their appeals' (p. 17). They based their research on party manifestos or platforms, defined as the 'recognizable statement of policy, which has the backing of the leadership as the authoritative definition of party policy for that election' (p. 18). Accordingly, they mounted an unprecedented international project to analyze the post-war election programs of all significant parties in 19 democracies.

One should note that some of the most critical party programs are left out of the manifesto database. The most notable of these is perhaps the SPD's Godesberg Program. In November 1959, at a party conference in Godesberg, the SPD produced a new party program outlining the most fundamental party changes in SPD history. As Bark and Gress describe it, 'The program represented a fundamental shift in philosophical direction for the party, from primary emphasis on Marxism and Marxist solutions for problems of social and economic life, to primary emphasis on recognizing the achievements of liberal capitalism' (Bark and Gress, 1989, v. 1: 445). Although these changes had originated in the earlier 1952 Dortmund conference, they were not fully articulated and integrated into a formal party document until the Godesberg conference. This program is an example of the type of fundamental party change that will be missed in the manifesto database because it was not produced in the platform immediately preceding the election. Despite such omissions, the manifesto project represents one of the most important datasets for the comparative study of political parties and one that should be used to test theories of party change.

The research procedures of the party manifesto project are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 and Appendix B of *Ideology, Strategy and Party Change*. Suffice it to say that individual country investigators had the task of classifying specific statements in the manifestos into one of 54 specific categories grouped into seven headings or 'domains', as outlined in the Appendix to this paper. They state:

The basic object of all coding with the exception of West Germany (where paragraphs were used) was to place each sentence in each of the manifestos/platforms or their equivalents under one (and no more than one) of the categories. Sentences were coded since they form the natural

grammatical unit in most languages. However, very long grammatical periods were composed into 'quasi-sentences' where the sense changed between colons or commas.

(Budge et al., 1987: 24)

To facilitate inter-coder reliability and comparability across parties and countries, the researchers opted for counting the *topics* that the manifestos discussed rather than the actual *content* (i.e. the policy positions actually taken in the manifestos). In other words, the study counted

. . . the number of sentences referring to each policy area out of the total number of sentences in the programme. Sentences were counted rather than single words or phrases because we want to catch the stress laid on certain ideas and concerns rather than on slogans . . . (p. 31).

Rather than simply tallying the raw frequencies of sentences in each of the 54 categories, the researchers computed percentages, 'because we did not think that the constantly increasing length of election programmes – an almost mechanical tendency – should affect analyses of their internal concerns' (p. 31).

The manifesto data are available through the ESRC Data Archive at the University of Essex.<sup>1</sup> As distributed in 1992, the data had 1018 cases; one case for each party platform coded for each election from 1945 to the last election analyzed in the mid-1980s – the most recent being the German election of 1987. Each case consists of a set of percentages for each of the 54 coding categories and a count of the total number of sentences (or paragraphs in the case of Germany) included in the analysis.

### What the Manifestos Project Data Say about Party Identity

It is very important to note here that, while data from the manifesto project are useful for testing hypotheses related to certain aspects of party change, there are many components for which other data (such as the judgmental data currently being collected by the Harmel–Janda project) are required. Because manifesto project data consist exclusively of proportions of platform statements devoted to particular issues (and in some cases, to particular issue positions, i.e. pro or con), these data can tell us nothing about changes in a party's organizational framework or internal power distribution, for instance. And while the manifesto data can tell us something about one aspect of a party's identity, i.e. the relative intensities with which its platform addresses particular issues and positions, the data would not be useful for tapping changes in such other aspects of the party's public profile as its primary goal or even its name. And perhaps most importantly, the manifesto data themselves are not very useful for establishing the party's actual positions on any of the issues that together constitute its issue profile (or at least, not precisely enough to be useful in studying *changes* in issue positions).

But while the manifesto data do not cover all aspects of party identity, they



do cover an important aspect that is not tapped by other datasets (such as Harmel and Janda’s own data), which code parties’ positions but not the relative intensities with which issues are addressed. The distinction here is one of *substance* (i.e. positions or ‘principles’) versus *packaging* (i.e. the relative salience of issues in the manifesto).<sup>2</sup> And for electorally motivated parties, with candidates to sell in the market-place of votes, packaging is important in its own right.

As a practical matter, it is important to keep this distinction in mind when comparing results from different studies of party change. The Harmel et al. (1995) study, for instance, addressed party change theory with data covering changes in both party organization and issue positions, without regard to issue saliency. The current study, on the other hand, measures change on the latter dimension without regard to either organization or issue positions. Any differences in findings might well be attributed to differences in the dependent variables being studied, even though both deal with aspects of party change. As a theoretical matter, parties and party strategists may approach quite differently the prospects of changing the substance and the packaging of their most public statements of principle. It seems reasonable to assume that, in general, the packaging is more easily altered than the substance of the party’s platform. Hypothetically, a party hoping to do better in the next election could avoid some of the infighting and the ultimate risk involved in changing its basic positions on issues, but still strategically downplay some issues that were emphasized in the last manifesto, while playing up others. This could

**Table 1.** Pairs of elections (29) in the study<sup>a</sup>

<i>Britain</i> (11 election pairs)	<i>Germany</i> (10 election pairs)	<i>United States</i> (8 election pairs)
1945–50	1949–53	1948–52
1950–51	1953–57	1952–56
1951–55	1957–61	1956–60
1955–59	1961–65	1960–64
1959–64	1965–69	1964–68
1964–66	1969–72	1968–72
1966–70	1972–76	1972–76
1970–1974a	1976–80	1976–80
1974a–1974b	1980–83	
1974b–79	1983–87	
1979–83 <sup>b</sup>		

<sup>a</sup> Total number of party manifestos paired by elections in the study: Britain = 32 (11 pairs for 3 parties all years except 1979–83); Germany = 30 (10 pairs for 3 parties in all years); USA = 16 (8 pairs for 2 parties in all years). Total = 78 pairs of cases.

<sup>b</sup> No Liberal Party in 1983; allied with the SDP.

have the effect of altering one dimension of the party's profile (the packaging) while leaving another (the substance) intact.

### Using the Manifesto Data to Study Party Change

Since it was first publicized (Budge and Laver, 1984), data generated from this project have been used by numerous researchers in various ways. The first major book studied similarities and differences of parties within countries (Budge et al., 1987; Strøm and Liepart, 1989). Other researchers have linked what parties promised in their election manifestos to their expenditures when in office (Budge and Hofferbert, 1990, 1992; Klingemann and Hofferbert, 1990), or to policy outputs (Kalogeropoulou, 1989; Budge and Laver, 1993). Still others have used the data to predict which parties will join in government coalitions (Budge and Laver, 1993; Strøm and Liepart, 1993) and even to explain the decline of party identification (Klingemann and Wattenberg, 1992).

We use the manifesto data quite differently from previous researchers to study party change between adjacent elections for eight parties: the British Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties; the German Christian Democrats, Free Democrats and Social Democrats; and the US Democratic and Republican parties. For each country, we cover the pairs of elections identified in Table 1.

In each of the 78 cases in our analysis, we compare the profiles of topics discussed in the party manifesto for one election with the profile of topics discussed in the same party's manifesto for the subsequent election, using correlation and regression analysis. We regress the percentages of topics discussed in the second election on the prior election and compute the product-moment correlation to summarize the comparison.<sup>3</sup> To illustrate the method, Figure 1 plots the correlation between topics discussed in the election manifestos of the German Social Democratic Party for 1983 and 1987 for 37 coding categories.<sup>4</sup> For example, code 411, which tagged mentions about advancing 'technology and infrastructure', accounted for 11.8 percent of mentions in 1983 and 10 percent in 1987. On the other hand, code 606, which tagged appeals for 'national effort and social harmony', accounted for 4.2 percent of mentions in 1983 but none in 1987. The correlation of .78 in Figure 1 was one of the highest computed for any of our pairs. These data suggest that the issue positions of the SPD changed very little between 1983 and 1987, as reflected in the respective election manifestos.<sup>5</sup>

If parties do not change much in the issues they emphasize from one election to the next, the correlation between the profile of manifesto topics discussed in adjacent election years will be high. The greater the change in issue emphasis, the lower the correlation. The highest correlation between party manifestos in adjacent elections was achieved by the US Democrats,

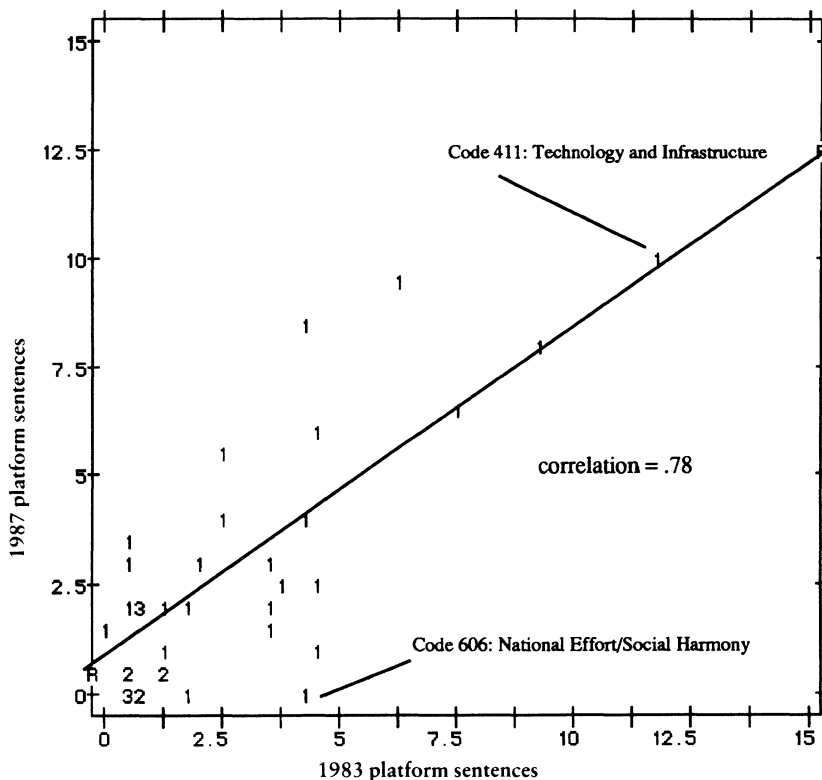


Figure 1. Percent of sentences assigned to 37 coding categories in the election manifestos of the German Social Democratic Party in 1983 and 1987.

Table 2. Central tendency and variation in correlations for party manifestos, by party

Label	Mean	Standard deviation	Cases
British Conservative	.36	.17	11
British Labour	.38	.20	11
British Liberal	.13	.23	10
German CDU	.41	.28	10
German FDP	.41	.25	10
German SPD	.52	.18	10
US Democratic	.62	.21	8
US Republican	.55	.12	8
For entire population	.41	.24	78

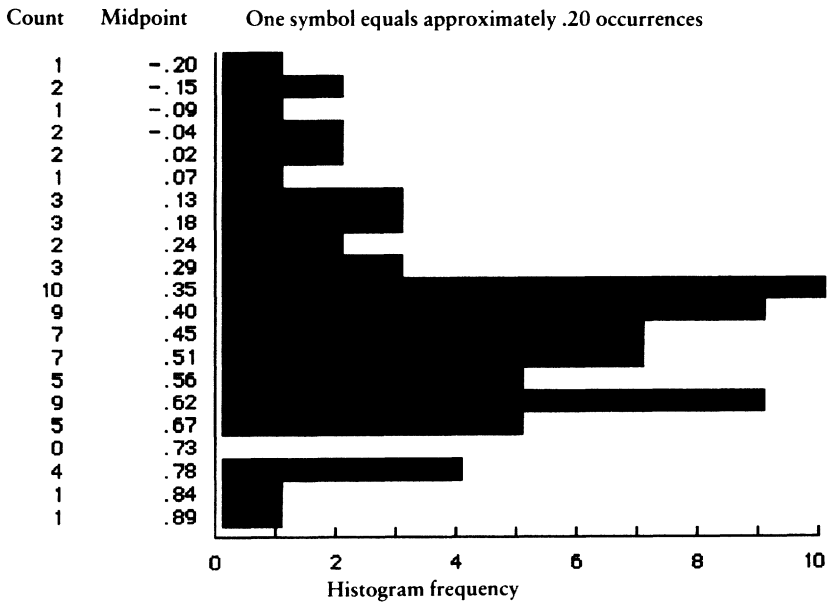


Figure 2. Histogram of 78 correlations between party platforms in adjacent elections.

whose 1960 and 1964 platforms correlated .89. The lowest correlation was  $-.20$  for the Liberal Party of Britain, whose 1955 and 1959 manifestos were *negatively* correlated. In fact, several pairs of manifestos had negative correlations. The distribution of correlations is graphed in Figure 2.

As shown in the summary of correlation coefficients in Table 2, parties differed considerably in the extent to which their manifestos correlated with each other between elections, with a good deal of variation associated with the country. The American parties generally showed more consistency in platform themes between election years, followed by the German parties. The British parties, particularly the Liberals, demonstrated the most volatility.

Given these data, the task now is to try to account for the patterns. Why do parties sometimes dramatically change the issues they emphasize between elections? From the particular theoretical perspective taken here, we are primarily interested in learning whether poor electoral performance in one election results in parties recasting their policy identities before contesting the subsequent election.

### Classification Scheme for Party Perception of Elections

The following coding scheme aims at classifying a party's perception of its performance in the wake of the preceding general election. Strictly speaking,

the classification does not apply to elections, but to different parties' perceptions of the previous election. Because competing parties view election results quite differently, a 'good' election for one party may be a 'bad' result for another. As a result, there are as many classifications of a given election as there are parties.

### *Conceptualizing the Classification*

The focus is on how the party activists themselves view the election results. Ideally, activists would be interviewed to learn their perceptions of the party's performance in the last election. In the absence of such data, one must attempt to classify the elections by reference to journalists' reports and scholars' analyses of the elections. The classification is based on these assumptions:

- 1 A party regards votes and seats won in elections as important criteria for judging political performance.
- 2 A party compares its results in the last election against previous elections, weighing the most recent election most heavily.
- 3 A party also compares the votes and seats won in the last election with the votes and seats won by other parties, particularly the one it regards as its greatest rival.
- 4 Expectations prior to the election matter: a party that wins fewer votes and seats than it expected will judge its performance more negatively than if the loss was expected.
- 5 A party includes in its evaluation whether the election has given the party a leading role in government. How this is interpreted depends on whether the government is a presidential system or a parliamentary system.
  - 5.1.1 In presidential systems, a party places the most importance on capturing the presidency.
  - 5.1.2 In presidential systems, a party places some importance on capturing control of the legislative chambers.
  - 5.2.1 In parliamentary systems, a party places the most importance on forming the government under a prime minister, preferably under a majority government.
  - 5.2.2 In parliamentary systems, a party places some importance on participating in the governing coalition.
- 6 A party includes in its evaluation whether the election has caused it to lose a leading role in government.

### *Operationalizing the Classification*

Based on these assumptions, we have devised the following set of five categories for classifying general elections with reference to electoral results and published sources that discuss the elections.

- 1 A *calamitous* election is one viewed by party activists as decisively confirming a party's negative performance. Such an election could be

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**Table 3.** Summary of election classification by party

<i>Party</i>	<i>Calamitous</i>	<i>Disappointing</i>	<i>Tolerable</i>	<i>Gratifying</i>	<i>Triumphal</i>	<i>Row total</i>
Britain						
Conservative	1	3	2	3	1	10
Labour		5	3	2		10
Liberal	2	4	2	1		9
Germany						
CDU	1	2	2	1	3	9
FDP	1	3	2	1	2	9
SPD	2	2	2	2	1	9
USA						
Democratic	1	2	1	2	1	7
Republican	1	2		2	2	7
Column total	9	23	14	14	10	70
Percentage	12.9	32.9	20.0	20.0	14.3	100.0

evidenced by a large loss of seats and votes in a single election or from a continued pattern of electoral decline or even stagnation. A party could also regard an election as calamitous if its major rival simultaneously achieved a huge victory that seemed to seal the fate of the frustrated party. The key is whether a party's activists perceive the election results as an overwhelming rejection of the party's past programs or actions.

- 2 A *disappointing* election is one viewed by party activists as a distinct rebuke to the party for its performance. Such an election could be evidenced by a moderate loss of seats and votes in a single election, by its rival's superior showing in the election, or by loss of a leading role in government. It could also be evidenced by a small loss of seats when activists expected a sizable gain.
- 3 A *tolerable* election is one accepted by party activists as reflecting the vicissitudes of politics and public opinion with no major message concerning party performance. The election may result in either a small loss or a small gain in votes or seats, but the outcome is viewed as politically normal and expected. The party's governmental status before the election is usually unchanged after the election.
- 4 A *gratifying* election is one viewed by party activists as a distinct endorsement of the party's performance. Such an election could be evidenced by a moderate gain in seats and votes in a single election, by its rival's inferior showing in the election, or by gain of a leading role in government. It could also be evidenced by a small gain of seats when activists expected a sizable loss.

**Table 4.** Classification of elections by parties

<i>Britain</i>				<i>Germany</i>			<i>USA</i>			
<i>Date</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>CDU</i>	<i>FDP</i>	<i>SPD</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Democratic</i>	<i>Republican</i>
1950	Tolerable	Tolerable	Calamitous	1953	Triumphal	Disappointing	Calamitous	1952	Disappointing	Triumphal
1951	Gratifying	Disappointing	Calamitous	1957	Triumphal	Calamitous	Disappointing	1956	Tolerable	Gratifying
1955	Gratifying	Disappointing	Disappointing	1961	Disappointing	Triumphal	Gratifying	1960	Gratifying	Disappointing
1959	Triumphal	Disappointing	Disappointing	1965	Gratifying	Tolerable	Tolerable	1964	Triumphal	Calamitous
1964	Disappointing	Gratifying	Tolerable	1969	Disappointing	Disappointing	Gratifying	1968	Disappointing	Gratifying
1966	Disappointing	Gratifying	Tolerable	1972	Calamitous	Gratifying	Triumphal	1972	Calamitous	Triumphal
1970	Tolerable	Disappointing	Disappointing	1976	Tolerable	Disappointing	Tolerable	1976	Gratifying	Disappointing
1974a	Disappointing	Tolerable	Gratifying	1980	Tolerable	Triumphal	Disappointing			
1974b	Calamitous	Tolerable	Disappointing	1983	Triumphal	Tolerable	Calamitous			
1979	Gratifying	Disappointing								

5 A *triumphal* election is one viewed by party activists as decisively confirming the party's positive performance. Such an election could be evidenced by a large gain in seats and votes in a single election. A party could also regard an election as triumphal if its major rival suffered a simultaneous defeat that seemed to seal its fate. The key is whether a party's activists perceive the election results as a vindication of the party's past programs or actions.

This classification scheme was applied to each election for all eight parties in the dataset. The results are summarized in Table 3. Not surprisingly, most parties were classified as experiencing some degree of disappointment after elections, given that only one party could usually 'win' an election. Also as expected, both calamitous and triumphal elections were relatively rare. The specific codes assigned to individual elections as viewed by each party are reported in Table 4.

### Using Electoral Performance to Explain Manifesto Change

Our theoretical framework assumes that parties are conservative organizations which are unlikely to change unless forced (Harmel and Janda, 1994). According to performance theory, parties may be forced to change when they perform badly in elections. We have classified the elections in our study according to a scheme tailored to each party's performance in each election. We can now apply our classification of party performance to the election for which the manifesto was promulgated. If the party performs well in that election, the theory predicts that the party will *not* change its manifesto much for the subsequent election. If, however, the party performs very poorly in the election for which the manifesto was created, the theory predicts that the party *may* dramatically change its platform for the next election. The theory does not predict that it *will* change for two reasons. First, observers may believe that the party lost the election for reasons – war, scandal, economic conditions – that had little to do with its policies. Second, some parties may care more about their policies than winning elections (Harmel and Janda, 1994). Such parties may stubbornly keep to their principles in spite of a major election defeat. In this study, we are focusing only on the hypothesis that states that *electoral defeat is a necessary but not a sufficient reason for major change in manifesto packaging in electorally motivated parties*.

The Appendix contains country graphs (Figs A1, A2 and A3) that plot the correlations over time between coding categories for manifestos in adjacent elections for each of its parties. Vertical bars are superimposed on the correlation trend lines to indicate when the party suffered a disappointing election (thin bars) or a calamitous election (thick bars). Examining these graphs, one cannot discern any relationship between electoral performance and low correlations of manifesto codings. However, one would expect such



a relationship only if electoral performance were a sufficient condition of manifesto change. Because the hypothesis states that poor electoral performance is only a necessary condition of manifesto change, we must look at the data differently. We need to isolate instances of major manifesto change (i.e. very low correlations between elections) and determine whether they occurred *only* after poor electoral performance. Viewed in this light, the data behave very closely to expectations.

Table 5 reports 19 of the lowest correlations between the topics in adjacent elections in our dataset, based on two different cut-off points. For the European parties, we arbitrarily selected all correlations of .20 or lower. For the US parties, which had no correlations that low between manifestos, we arbitrarily chose the two lowest correlations for each one. Out of these 19 correlations, 15 fit the theory, in that they occur between a pair of manifestos in which the intervening election was either disappointing or calamitous. Moreover, six of the nine calamitous elections are represented in this set, which suggests that parties are strongly affected by a disastrous outcome. Of the four cases that do not fit the theory, two had an intervening election judged to be 'tolerable'. These deviations could conceivably be due to

**Table 5.** The 19 lowest correlations between election manifestos in adjacent years

<i>Party</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Correlation</i>	<i>Type of election</i>
Britain			
Conservative	1950–1	.20	Tolerable
	1966–70	.11	Disappointing
	1974b–9	.18	Calamitous
Labour	1970–4a	–.12	Disappointing
Liberal	1951–5	–.06	Calamitous
	1955–9	–.20	Disappointing
	1966–70	.04	Tolerable
	1970–4a	–.14	Disappointing
	1974b–9	.02	Disappointing
Germany			
CDU	1953–7	–.03	<i>Triumphal</i>
	1957–61	–.13	<i>Triumphal</i>
FDP	1953–7	.17	Disappointing
	1957–61	.05	Calamitous
	1969–72	.11	Disappointing
SPD	1953–7	.13	Calamitous
USA			
Democrats	1968–72	.36	Disappointing
	1972–6	.36	Calamitous
Republicans	1960–4	.42	Disappointing
	1964–8	.37	Calamitous

misclassifying that election, or to other factors in our broader theory of party change.<sup>6</sup> More troubling for the theory are the other two cases involving the German CDU (italicized in Table 5).

In 1953, the CDU experienced a ‘triumphal’ election. According to the hypothesis, when a party scores a huge victory, it can be expected to ‘stand pat’ in appealing to voters in the next election. On the contrary, however, the CDU’s platform in 1957 had virtually no correlation with its platform in 1953. Similarly, the CDU experienced another ‘triumphal’ election in 1957, only to demonstrate a negative correlation between its winning platform in 1957 and its subsequent platform in 1961. Why would a party completely overhaul its program after one triumphal election, let alone after *two*?

As it turns out, the German parties were not always treated consistently in the manifesto project, and the different treatments introduce some inappropriate comparisons between manifestos. In his chapter on Germany in *Ideology, Strategy and Party Change*, Klingemann stated that, because most of the election programs were rather long, ‘the paragraph, not the quasi-sentence was taken as the coding unit’ (1987: 301). But on the same page, he also noted that the German manifestos varied widely in size: ‘The number of pages ranges from two (SPD 1949; FDP 1972; CDU 1961, 1965) to 116 (SPD 1965). On the average the SPD presented their case in 36 pages, the FDP in 21, and the CDU with only 15’. Later, he stated that for the very short programs mentioned above *and* for the CDU in 1957 (which was only three pages long), the quasi-sentence was used as the coding unit.

The different treatment for the ‘short’ and ‘long’ manifestos raises two questions. First, just how short *were* the short manifestos? We can determine whether they contained sufficient quasi-sentences to warrant computing percentages by consulting the variable ‘total’ in the manifesto dataset, which reports the number of quasi-sentences (or paragraphs) used to compute percentages for the 54 possible manifesto categories. As disclosed in Table 6, some short programs were very short indeed. The SPD 1949 manifesto and the CDU manifestos for 1957 and 1961 consisted of only about 50 quasi-sentences. The small number of sentences alone causes concern about comparisons, for the occurrence or omission of a single quasi-sentence

Table 6. Number of quasi-sentences in the ‘short’ German manifestos

<i>Party and year</i>	<i>‘Total’ (quasi-sentences)</i>	<i>Implication for the analysis</i>
SPD 1949	49	None; the 1949 election not coded for performance
FDP 1972	174	Sufficient base for computing percentages
CDU 1957	52	Insufficient base for computing percentages
CDU 1961	43	Insufficient base for computing percentages
CDU 1965	165	Sufficient base for computing percentages

accounts for about 2 percent of these manifestos! Although the short SPD manifesto is not included in our set of 19 low correlations, the two short CDU manifestos are. Because the percentages being correlated for those CDU manifestos are based on such small numbers of sentences, one can disregard the negative correlation for 1957–61 as not reflecting two stable sets of data. For similar reasons, one can also disregard the observed negative correlation for 1953–7. It was generated between the CDU's 1953 election manifesto, which contained 121 *paragraphs*(!), and its *three-page* 1957 election brochure, which consisted of only 52 quasi-sentences.

This last observation prompts the second question about the different treatment accorded the short and long election manifestos. Can we legitimately compare *any* 'short' manifestos (those coded for quasi-sentences) with 'long' manifestos (those coded for paragraphs)?<sup>7</sup> One can argue that they simply are not comparable campaign documents and should not be subject to correlational analysis.<sup>8</sup> In effect, the magnitude of the CDU's election victories in 1953 and 1957 allowed them to issue short, almost meaningless, election manifestos. Voters knew that the CDU was not about to change its basic policies, and the brief manifestos in those years certainly did not imply any change in party identity.

If we disregard the two glaring challenges to the theory as methodological artifacts rather than theoretical exceptions, the manifesto project data reveal only 17 striking instances of major changes in the issue positions taken by these eight parties when contesting elections from 1945 to the mid-1980s.<sup>9</sup> Of these 17 instances of party change, 15 followed elections that were independently classified as disappointing or calamitous. To be sure, not all elections classified as disappointing or calamitous were followed by major overhauls of party manifestos, so election defeat is surely not a sufficient

**Table 7.** Rankings of intervening election outcome and correlations between election manifestos

<i>Ordinal code</i>	<i>Election outcome</i>	<i>Mean correlation</i>	<i>Number of cases<sup>a</sup></i>
1	Calamitous	.31	9
2	Disappointing	.36	24
3	Tolerable	.48	14
4	Gratifying	.50	14
5	Triumphal	.55	8

<sup>a</sup> The number of cases is less than 78 because elections prior to 1950 were not classified for outcomes and the two short CDU manifestos for 1957 and 1961 were excluded.

cause for change in party identity. Moreover, gratifying and triumphal elections were sometimes followed by substantial changes in party manifestos (although not thorough overhauls). Nevertheless, the correlations between election manifestos tended to increase systematically with our ordinal ranking of electoral performance, as shown in Table 7.

Following gratifying and especially triumphal elections, parties tended to echo their old emphases on issues when formulating manifestos to contest the next election. Parties were far less likely to repeat their prior emphases on issues after experiencing disappointing and especially calamitous elections. Most importantly (as shown in Table 5), nearly all major overhauls of policy packaging did follow disappointing or calamitous elections. We believe that our findings provide concrete evidence for predicting when parties change their identity. Parties try to change their identity when voters reject the policy face that they had presented in the previous election. Confronted with poor electoral performance under their old identity, parties change their policy package, hoping to create a new identity that appeals more to the voters. Although this may seem like a reasonably simple and obviously true proposition, it is easier said than empirically demonstrated.

### Summary and Conclusion

This paper addressed the question: why do parties change their policy identities? The manifesto project data for eight parties in Britain, Germany and the USA were analyzed to determine how much parties changed their emphasis on particular issues in their manifestos between elections held from the 1950s to the 1980s. Specifically, the percentages of sentences accorded to 54 issue categories in one election were correlated with the percentages discussed in the subsequent election. The mean correlation between adjacent election manifestos was .41 for 78 cases. The hypothesis being tested was that electorally motivated parties were most likely to change their policy identities following disappointing or calamitous elections. The 17 lowest correlations between manifestos for these parties were analyzed according to the outcome of the preceding election. These instances represented the most striking cases of change in the packaging of election manifestos. Of these 17 cases, 15 followed election performances that were independently classified as disappointing or calamitous. Our findings suggest that while substantial change in issue emphases may occur in the absence of poor electoral performance, poor performance may be needed to produce extreme attempts to change party identity through election manifestos. While election defeat is surely not a sufficient cause for party change, and may stop short of being necessary for at least some types and levels of change, this study provides new evidence of an important role for poor electoral performance in explaining when and why parties change.

## Appendix

### *Full Set of 54 Codes Used in the European Party Manifestos Project*

#### *Domain 1 External Relations*

- 101 Foreign special relationships: positive
- 102 Foreign special relationships: negative
- 103 Decolonization
- 104 Military: positive
- 105 Military: negative
- 106 Peace
- 107 Internationalism: positive
- 108 European Community: positive
- 109 Internationalism: negative
- 110 Internationalism: negative EEC and Europe

#### *Domain 2 Freedom and Democracy*

- 201 Freedom and human rights
- 202 Democracy
- 203 Constitutionalism: positive
- 204 Constitutionalism: negative

#### *Domain 3 Government*

- 301 Decentralization: positive
- 302 Decentralization: negative
- 303 Government efficiency
- 304 Government corruption
- 305 Government effectiveness and authority

#### *Domain 4 Economy*

- 401 Enterprise
- 402 Incentives
- 403 Regulation of capitalism
- 404 Economic planning
- 405 Corporatism (applicable to the Netherlands and Canada only)
- 406 Protectionism: positive
- 407 Protectionism: negative
- 408 Economic goals
- 409 Keynesian demand management
- 410 Productivity
- 411 Technology and infrastructure
- 412 Controlled economy
- 413 Nationalism
- 414 Economic orthodoxy and efficiency

#### *Domain 5 Welfare and Quality of Life*

- 501 Environmental protection
- 502 Art, sport, leisure and media
- 503 Social justice
- 504 Social services expansion: positive
- 505 Social services expansion: negative

CHANGES IN PARTY IDENTITY

- 506 Education: pro-expansion
- 507 Education: anti-expansion
- Domain 6 Fabric of Society*
  - 601 Defense of national way of life: positive
  - 602 Defense of national way of life: negative
  - 603 Traditional morality: positive
  - 604 Traditional morality: negative
  - 605 Law and order
  - 606 National effort/social harmony
  - 607 Communalism, pluralism, pillarization: positive
  - 608 Communalism, pluralism, pillarization: negative
- Domain 7 Social Groups*
  - 701 Labor groups: positive
  - 702 Labor groups: negative
  - 703 Agriculture and farmers
  - 704 Other economic groups
  - 705 Underprivileged minority groups
  - 706 Non-economic demographic groups

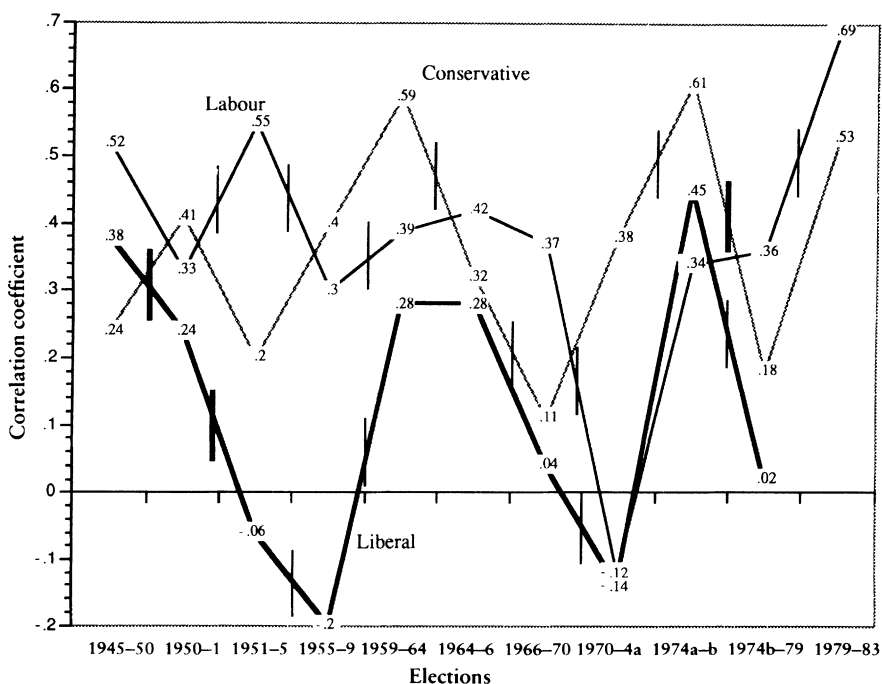
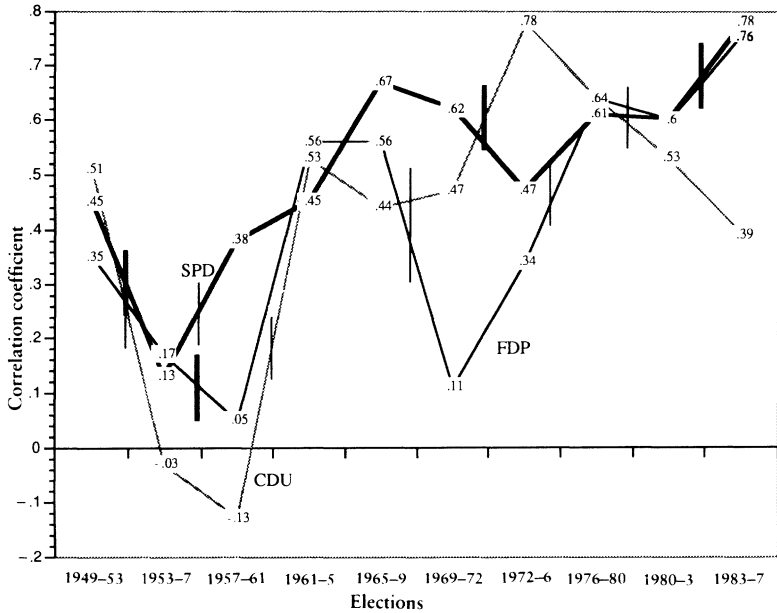


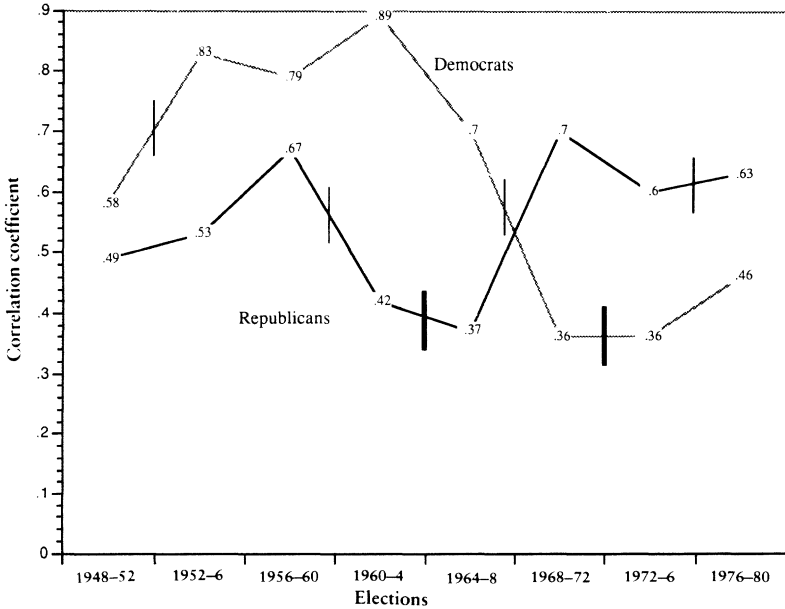
Figure A1. Correlations between coding categories for manifestos in adjacent British elections, 1945-83.

Note: Thin bar = disappointing election; thick bar = calamitous election.



**Figure A2.** Correlations between coding categories for manifestos in adjacent German elections, 1949-87.

*Note:* Thin bar = disappointing election; thick bar = calamitous election.



**Figure A3.** Correlations between coding categories for manifestos in adjacent US elections, 1948-80.

*Note:* Thin bar = disappointing election; thick bar = calamitous election.

## Notes

This article is based on a paper prepared for delivery at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, The New York Hilton, 1–4 September 1994. An earlier version of that paper appeared as Kenneth Janda, Christine Edens and Patricia Goff, 'Why Parties Change: Some New Evidence Using Party Manifestos', prepared for delivery at the XIIIth World Congress of Sociology, Bielefeld, Germany, 18–13 July 1994. This research was supported by the National Science Foundation, Grants SES-9112357 and SES-9112491. Kenneth Janda also worked on the paper while a Fulbright Scholar at the Budapest University of Economics, 1993–4.

- 1 The data are available in machine-readable form with control cards for creating an SPSS file. Documentation for the machine-readable data is contained in Budge et al. (1992).
- 2 In making this distinction, we do not mean to imply that there is no overlap between substance and packaging. In the instance of completely dropping all reference to an issue that had been addressed previously, for instance, a party may indeed be indicating a change in position as well as emphasis. However, in other instances, a party's actual position may remain unchanged between two manifestos, while the percentage of lines devoted to that position may vary substantially. Alternatively, the same level of emphasis in two programs could mask an important change of position. In the absence of data on the extent of empirical overlap, we think it important to maintain the conceptual distinction.
- 3 The data file distributed with the manifesto project is not configured to support this analysis. The original file regards the 54 percentage categories as variables and the 1018 party manifestos as the cases. To conduct this analysis the file needs to be transposed (which can be done using the FLIP command in SPSS) so that the 54 percentages become the cases and the party manifestos for each election become the variables. Then the coding percentages assigned in adjacent elections can be correlated with each other.
- 4 Although the coding scheme of the manifesto project contains 54 distinct categories, some parties simply do not discuss topics that fit under some coding categories at all or do not do so in adjacent elections. Topics that are not discussed were coded 0 percent in both elections. Including these zero variables artificially raises the correlation and thus inflates the 'agreement' between platforms. All correlations reported in this paper are based on non-zero percentages in at least one of the years. Thus, the number of cases involved in the correlations varies, usually between 25 and 40.
- 5 In personal communication (3 August 1994), Thomas Poguntke contends that the SPD actually changed a lot between 1983 and 1987 on particular issues, e.g. toward the Greens in terms of ecology and nuclear disarmament. This movement is not captured by the manifesto project, which he notes is coded in a way that is 'rather insensitive to changes of substance, which are not also reflected in changes of emphasis'. This is certainly true, but all other manifestos in the analysis would be comparably affected.
- 6 For example, our theory says that a change in the party leader can produce a change in party organization or policies quite apart from an election defeat as the new party leader attempts to put his or her stamp on the party. Accordingly, the low correlation (.04) between the 1966 and 1970 manifestos of the British Liberals may



be due to the change in party leadership in January 1967, from Jo Grimond to Jeremy Thorpe. However, we are not prepared at this time to introduce leadership change as a general factor in this empirical test. Moreover, the dramatic change in manifestos for the Conservative Party between 1950 and 1951 seems due to a deliberate change in format. According to Butler, 'in presenting their programme in the form of a personal statement from their Leader [Winston Churchill], the Conservatives were reverting in some measure to a bygone practice, when the election address of its leader was regarded as a party's manifesto. But of late it had become customary for party programmes to be put forward more impersonally' (1952: 44). Such an idiosyncratic change in style falls outside even our expanded theory.

- 7 There is the more general question of whether there is a systematic relationship between the *imbalance* between the number of quasi-sentences in adjacent election manifestos and their intercorrelations. That is, will the correlations tend to be low if one manifesto has, say, 800 sentences and the other only 400 sentences? Conversely, will they tend to be higher if both manifestos are of similar length? The answer is that the lengths of the manifestos being compared bear no systematic relationship to the extent to which the manifestos are correlated. The correlation between a measure of similarity in manifesto length and the magnitude of correlation between the manifestos is .04.
- 8 Fortunately, the length of the party manifestos in the dataset is non-problematic in nearly all other cases. At 52 and 43 quasi-sentences respectively, the 1957 and 1961 CDU manifestos are the smallest ones involved in the analysis. Other than the 49 quasi-sentences for the 1949 German SPD manifesto, the only other values for 'total' that fall under 100 are 81 and 68 for the SPD in 1953 and 1957; 89 and 69 for the FDP in 1953 and 1957; and 94 for the British Liberals in 1970. Moreover, all these numbers are based on paragraphs, not quasi-sentences. So these other manifestos were substantial campaign documents.
- 9 If one takes the position that it is illegitimate to compare manifestos coded for paragraphs with those coded for quasi-sentences, then the low correlation of only .11 between the 1969 and 1972 manifestos for the German FDP should also not be counted as one of the 15 successful predictions from performance theory. We do not take this position because of these facts: the FDP's 1969 manifesto had 150 *paragraphs*, while its 1972 manifesto had 174 *quasi-sentences*. We assume that comparisons are valid if percentages assigned to the manifesto issue categories are based on sufficient *Ns*, whether paragraphs or sentences. We do this in part because sentences often constitute paragraphs in election manifestos. Eliminating the 1969–72 FDP case would not change the basic results, leaving only 16 instances of party change and 14 successes.

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