

Understanding Change and Stability in Party Ideologies: Do Parties Respond to Public Opinion or to Past Election Results?

JAMES ADAMS, MICHAEL CLARK, LAWRENCE EZROW AND GARRETT GLASGOW*

Previous research explains the evolution of parties' ideological positions in terms of decision rules that stress the uncertainty of the political environment. The authors extend this research by examining whether parties adjust their ideologies in response to two possible influences: shifts in public opinion, and past election results. Their empirical analyses, which are based on the Comparative Manifesto Project's codings of parties' post-war programmes in eight West European nations, suggest that parties respond to shifts in public opinion, but that these effects are only significant in situations where public opinion is clearly shifting away from the party's policy positions. By contrast, no evidence is found here that parties adjust their ideologies in response to past election results. These findings have important implications for parties' election strategies and for models of political representation.

The study of party policy platforms has been the focus of two very different research traditions. One approach, epitomized by the work of the Comparative Manifesto Project, involves empirical examinations of party platforms. The second approach, which may be traced back to Anthony Downs and before, is spatial modelling. Spatial modellers typically assume that parties compete for votes from an issue-oriented electorate, and attempt to deduce the policies that parties will present in order to win elections. These two research traditions have evolved largely independently of each other.

Participants in the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) are concerned with determining the content of parties' policy proposals, as well as how these policies evolve over time. Specifically, through comparative coding of parties' election programmes the CMP assigns positions to parties along a variety of policy dimensions. To date, this coding procedure has been applied to over 1,500 programmes, in about thirty democracies, during the post-war period.

Spatial modellers, by contrast, typically assume that parties maximize votes, or, in multiparty systems, that they maximize their chances of obtaining membership in the governing coalition. The general quest is for a policy equilibrium during a single election period – i.e., a set of party platforms such that no party can improve its position by changing its policies, given the policies of its rivals.

The spatial maps of parties' policy movements published by the CMP reveal dynamic patterns that spatial modellers, with their focus on party equilibrium during single election periods, rarely attempt to explain. This gap in the literature is unfortunate, because many critical issues relating to our understanding of political parties, elections and representation

* Department of Political Science, University of California at Santa Barbara. Previous versions of this article were presented at the annual meeting of the Public Choice Society, Nashville, 2003, and the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, 2003. We thank Ian Budge, Nolan McCarthy, Jesse Russell and Paul Warwick for valuable comments on earlier drafts of it. Any remaining errors are the authors' responsibility.

revolve around understanding the factors motivating political elites to change (or maintain) their parties' policy orientations over time. Yet to our knowledge the only systematic comparative effort to explain the dynamics of parties' policy positioning is by Ian Budge.¹ Basing his analysis on the observed dynamics of parties' ideologies in twenty Western democracies, Budge empirically evaluates alternative decision rules that party elites might employ when deciding how to adjust their policies – by shifting to the left or the right – between elections. He concludes that different parties employ different decision rules to decide the direction of their inter-election policy shifts, and, furthermore, that there is substantial temporal stability in parties' ideologies. Budge attributes this ideological stability in part to the uncertain political environment that elites confront, one in which they cannot accurately forecast how their ideologies will affect their electoral fortunes.

We extend Budge's approach by exploring how party elites react to two external factors that plausibly influence their policy orientations: shifts in public opinion and past election results. Our study produces three central findings.

First, we conclude that parties shift their ideological orientations in response to shifts in public opinion. This finding is not surprising. However, more surprising is our conclusion that this is not a general tendency. Instead, we find that parties systematically respond to shifts in public opinion only in situations where opinion shifts in a direction that is clearly disadvantageous to the party, i.e. right-wing parties moderate their policies when public opinion shifts to the left, while leftist parties moderate their positions when opinion shifts to the right. We label this finding the *Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Result*.

Secondly, we find no evidence that parties adjust their ideologies in response to past election results. Specifically, parties that shifted to the left (right) in the last election and lost votes (relative to the next-to-last election) showed no systematic tendency to reverse direction and shift back towards the right (left) for the current election; similarly, parties that gained votes in the previous election displayed no systematic tendency to maintain their ideological positions (or shift even further in the same direction) at the time of the current election. Indeed, we find the statistical evidence on this point is sufficiently strong that we can reject the hypothesis that past election results motivate substantively significant shifts in party ideologies.

Our third, related, finding is that our empirical results support one of Budge's most important conclusions: namely, that parties are reluctant to alter their ideologies. This conclusion flows from our findings that parties display no systematic tendency to respond to public opinion except when it clearly shifts away from them, and that they show no significant tendency to adjust their policies in response to past election results.

Our conclusions have important implications for political representation and for spatial models of elections. With respect to representation, our findings bear on the model of 'dynamic representation' as well as the majoritarian model of elections advanced

¹ Ian Budge, 'A New Theory of Party Competition: Uncertainty, Ideology and Policy Equilibria Viewed Comparatively and Temporally', *British Journal of Political Science*, 24 (1994), 443–67. We note that Jack Nagel, in 'Center-Party Strength and Major-Party Polarization in Britain' (presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 2001), employs the CMP data to analyse the dynamics of parties' policy shifts in post-war Britain, while Adams presents theoretical arguments intended to illuminate the patterns of parties' policy dynamics in Britain, France and the United States (see James Adams, *Party Competition and Responsible Party Government* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001)). Neither the Nagel nor the Adams study, however, explores the range of comparative data analysed by Budge in his twenty-nation survey.

by Powell.² Both models identify party responsiveness to public opinion as a key component of the representation process, and in this regard our findings on the dynamics of disadvantaged parties provides reason for optimism. With respect to spatial models of elections, our findings suggest empirical puzzles on parties' election strategies that may prove susceptible to the spatial modelling approach: namely, whether there is a rational choice explanation for our findings on the dynamics of disadvantaged parties, and how a rational choice model of party competition can be reconciled with our finding that parties do not adjust their policies in response to past election results. We will offer some preliminary thoughts about these puzzles, following the presentation of our empirical results.

Finally, we note that while we present wide-ranging evidence in support of our substantive conclusions, we also extensively explore issues of measurement, model specification and causal inference, which complicate our analysis of party ideologies. Indeed, one of our central themes is that the complex inter-relationships between voter ideologies, party ideologies and past election results – coupled with the difficulties involved in measuring these variables – pose serious obstacles to understanding parties' ideological dynamics. For this reason we explore these inter-relationships using alternative measures of the key variables and alternative sets of assumptions about the causal relationships between them. We are encouraged that these alternative approaches all support similar substantive conclusions.

HYPOTHESES ABOUT PARTY BEHAVIOUR

Our aim is to evaluate hypotheses about the relationship between political parties' ideological shifts, on the one hand, and trends in public opinion and parties' interpretations of past election results on the other. We note first that our focus on public opinion and past election results by no mean exhausts the list of factors that plausibly influence party ideologies. In particular, theoretical and empirical research suggests that a party's ideological position may be influenced by the voting system used to allocate seats in parliament,³ by the number of parties⁴ and by the policy preferences of party activists.⁵ However, as we discuss below, limitations in our dataset – due to the fact that our analysis is restricted to a small set of countries and a limited time period – render unfeasible an analysis of all plausible influences upon party ideologies. In this spirit we proceed.

² On dynamic representation, see James Stimson, Michael MacKuen and Robert Erikson, 'Dynamic Representation', *American Political Science Review*, 89 (1995), 543–65, and also Robert Erikson, Michael MacKuen and James Stimson, *The Macro Polity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). On the majoritarian model of representation, see G. Bingham Powell, *Elections as Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000).

³ See Jay Dow, 'A Comparative Spatial Analysis of Majoritarian and Proportional Systems', *Electoral Studies*, 9 (2001), 109–25; David Austen-Smith and Jeffrey Banks, 'Elections, Coalitions, and Legislative Outcomes', *American Political Science Review*, 82 (1988), 405–22.

⁴ See Gary Cox, 'Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives in Electoral Systems', *American Journal of Political Science*, 34 (1990), 905–35; Samuel Merrill III and James Adams, 'Centripetal Incentives in Multicandidate Elections', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 14 (2002), 275–300.

⁵ John Aldrich, 'A Downsian Spatial Model with Party Activists', *American Political Science Review*, 77 (1983), 974–90; Norman Schofield and Itai Sened, 'The Myth of the Political Centre: Modeling the Interaction of Parties, Activists, and Voters' (unpublished, Washington University St Louis); Donald Wittman, 'Candidate Motivation: A Synthesis of Alternatives', *American Political Science Review*, 77 (1983), 142–57.

Our first hypothesis is a general one, on the relationship between public opinion and party ideologies:

H1 (The General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis). Political parties systematically shift their ideological positions in response to shifts in public opinion.

H1 is a straightforward application of the logic underlying spatial modelling studies, particularly those that ascribe vote-maximizing or office-maximizing motivations to parties. Although such studies typically analyse the characteristics of political equilibrium in a single election, their theoretical results imply that when voters' policy preferences shift, say, x units to the left (right), parties' equilibrium positions will shift by x policy units in the same direction – i.e. that parties will systematically shift their positions in response to shifts in public opinion.⁶ Stimson et al.'s concept of 'dynamic representation' – in which shifts in public opinion may induce political parties to respond in kind – is also relevant here.⁷

Although the General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis (H1) is a logical starting point for analysing the ideological linkages between parties and the mass public, there are empirical and theoretical reasons to doubt that it holds in practice. Theoretically, spatial modellers have developed results suggesting that it is not necessarily rational for policy-motivated politicians – i.e. politicians who seek office as a means of enacting their preferred policies rather than announcing policies as a means of winning office – to adjust their policy stances in response to shifts in public opinion.⁸ Empirically, many scholars conclude that party elites are indeed frequently policy-motivated;⁹ in fact, case studies of party organizations conclude that party elites and activists at times prize ideological purity over most competing considerations, so that they are highly resistant to ideological 'compromises' designed to attract votes.¹⁰ Additional challenges to H1 arise from empirical studies which conclude that politicians frequently misperceive public opinion,¹¹ and that election outcomes do not turn primarily on voters' policy beliefs, but are instead more heavily influenced by factors such as national economic conditions and party leaders'

⁶ In models of two-party elections, the prediction is that vote-seeking or office-seeking parties will locate at the median voter's position or, for probabilistic voting models with quadratic policy losses, at the voter mean; see James Enelow and Melvin Hinich, *The Spatial Theory of Voting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Matters are more complicated in multiparty analyses; however, multiparty spatial models with probabilistic voting find that parties are likely to be drawn towards the mean voter position, while analyses based on deterministic policy voting suggest that parties will still orient themselves relative to the voter distribution, so that shifts in public opinion should motivate shifts in parties' positions. On multiparty probabilistic voting models, see Tse-Min Lin, James Enelow and Han Dorussen, 'Equilibrium in Multicandidate Probabilistic Spatial Voting', *Public Choice*, 98 (1999), 59–82; on deterministic multiparty models, see Cox, 'Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives in Electoral Systems.'

⁷ Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson, 'Dynamic Representation'.

⁸ See Timothy Groseclose, 'A Model of Candidate Location When One Candidate Has a Valence Advantage', *American Journal of Political Science*, 45 (2001), 862–86.

⁹ John Huber, 'Parliamentary Rules and Party Behavior during Minority Government in France', in Wolfgang Muller and Kaare Strøm, eds, *Policy, Office, or Votes? How Political Parties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 258–78; Roberto D'Alimonte, 'Party Behavior in a Polarized System: The Italian Communist Party and the Historic Compromise', in Muller and Strøm, eds, *Policy, Office, or Votes?*

¹⁰ Wolfgang Muller, 'Decision for Opposition: The Austrian Socialist Party's Abandonment of Government Participation in 1966', in Muller and Strøm, eds, *Policy, Office, or Votes?* pp. 172–91.

¹¹ Philip Converse and Roy Pierce, *Political Representation in France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

personal images.¹² If politicians cannot accurately gauge public opinion shifts or if they doubt that such shifts have significant electoral consequences, then the General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis is problematic. In passing, we note that the above considerations – that politicians may misperceive public opinion, and that the electoral impact of voters' policy beliefs is unclear – highlight one of Budge's central themes: that politicians make strategic decisions in highly uncertain environments, which complicate their decision-making processes.¹³

Taken together, the above considerations raise questions about whether party elites will systematically respond to shifts in public opinion. Can we develop more nuanced hypotheses, on particular sets of conditions that motivate party responsiveness in an uncertain environment? One plausible approach is to focus on the *direction* of public opinion change relative to parties, specifically on whether or not public opinion is clearly shifting away from the party's policy positions. The case in which public opinion change is disadvantageous for the party – as when a leftist party's leaders perceive opinion shifting to the right¹⁴ – plausibly provides the strongest incentives for dynamic representation. In this situation vote-seeking elites will presumably argue that the party should moderate its positions in order to avoid losing votes; meanwhile policy-motivated party elites may be persuaded that policy moderation provides the only chance for winning office, which is necessary in order to enact their modified policies, and also to forestall the election of rival parties from the opposite end of the policy spectrum, who would enact policies highly distasteful to the disadvantaged party's politicians.

By contrast, matters are less clear in situations where public opinion shifts in an advantageous direction relative to the party – as when a left-wing party perceives a leftward shift in public opinion – or when the electoral effects of public opinion change are ambiguous, as may be the case for centrist parties.¹⁵ In the case of advantaged parties, party radicals may argue that the favourable public opinion shift gives the party the electoral leeway to shift its policies further away from the centre. However, vote-seeking and office-seeking party elites may argue that such policy shifts would squander the electoral benefit of the shift in public opinion, leaving the party no better off than it was before. In this argument, office-seeking politicians may be supported by ideologically moderate party elites who are primarily concerned with implementing policy, since these moderates will oppose the radicals' proposals on policy grounds. These considerations suggest an alternative hypothesis on the link between public opinion and party ideologies:

H2 (The Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Hypothesis). Parties systematically adjust their ideologies in response to public opinion when public opinion clearly shifts away from the party's ideological position.

¹² Michael Lewis-Beck, *Economics and Elections* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988); R. Michael Alvarez, Jonathan Nagler and Shaun Bowler, 'Issues, Economics, and the Dynamics of Multiparty Elections: The 1997 British General Election', *American Political Science Review*, 42 (2000), 55–96. We note that empirical research suggesting that voters have little knowledge of parties' policy programmes, and indeed that some citizens may lack meaningful attitudes on important dimensions of political controversy, is also relevant here. For evidence on these issues, see Converse and Pierce, *Political Representation in France*, and John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹³ Budge, 'A New Theory of Party Competition'.

¹⁴ We note that our references to left and right parties locate these parties relative to the voter distribution.

¹⁵ With respect to centrist parties, our logic is that because it is difficult for centrist politicians to determine whether their policies are slightly to the right or to the left of the median voter, it is also difficult for these politicians to determine whether moderate shifts in public opinion move the overall voter distribution nearer to or further away from the party's policies.

Note that H1 and H2 are related, in that the Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Hypothesis is a component of the General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis, i.e. H2 is a necessary but not sufficient condition for H1.

Our third hypothesis is borrowed directly from Budge, who postulates a decision rule in which parties adjust their ideologies based on the electoral success associated with their policy shift at the time of the previous election.¹⁶ Specifically, in Budge's 'past election' model, political parties consider two pieces of information; the direction (left or right) of their policy shift in the last election (relative to the next-to-last election), and whether their vote rose or fell in the last election. The past election model posits that parties shift in the same ideological direction as the last time if they gained votes in the previous election, and shift in the opposite direction if they lost votes in the last election. Budge justifies this model by arguing that while party elites recognize that it is problematic to extrapolate past election results into the present, they may nonetheless view past results as the only clear electoral 'signal' in a highly uncertain political environment.¹⁷ To this we add an additional, related, justification: that contests for party leadership turn largely on the party's electoral fortunes, so that party leaders tend to retain their posts when the party achieves favourable election results, but frequently resign or are replaced when results are disappointing. Therefore, to the extent that leaders shape the party's ideological direction, parties achieving electoral gains are likely to retain their leaders and hence their ideological direction, while parties that lose votes are likely to experience leadership turnover and consequently reverse their ideological direction. These considerations motivate our third hypothesis:

H3 (The Past Election Results Hypothesis). Parties adjust their ideologies in response to the electoral gains (or losses) associated with the party's ideological shift in the last election.

Budge reports empirical support for H3, in that he finds that the past election model consistently predicts the directions of parties' ideological shifts for about twenty of the roughly seventy parties included in his analysis.¹⁸ In addition, we note that Nagel finds evidence from post-war British elections that the Labour and Conservative parties adjusted their policies in response to past election results.¹⁹

TESTING HYPOTHESES 1–3: MEASUREMENT ISSUES AND MODEL SPECIFICATION

Measuring the Dependent and Independent Variables

In order to evaluate Hypotheses 1–3 we require a measure of parties' ideological shifts, preferably one that is comparable across countries so that we have the option of pooling our data. Such information has been made available through the work of the Comparative

¹⁶ Budge, 'A New Theory of Party Competition.'

¹⁷ We note that Budge's argument is also consistent with the concept of 'boundedly rational' parties, which update their policy positions in response to polling information or past election results. See Richard McKelvey and Peter Ordeshook, 'Elections with Limited Information: A Fulfilled Expectations Model Using Contemporaneous Polling Data', *Journal of Economic Theory*, 15 (1985), 55–85; see also Kenneth Kollman, John Miller and Scott Page, 'Adaptive Parties in Spatial Elections', *American Political Science Review*, 86 (1992), 929–37.

¹⁸ Specifically, Budge concludes that of the five possible party decision rules he enumerates, the past election model provides the best fit for about twenty of the seventy parties included in his empirical analyses. For these twenty parties, the past election results model correctly predicts the direction of the party's policy shift (left or right) 70 per cent of the time (see Table 3 in Budge, 'A New Theory of Party Competition').

¹⁹ Nagel, 'Center-Party Strength and Major-Party Polarization in Britain'.

Manifesto Project (CMP), which has analysed all post-war election programmes for all significant parties in over thirty democracies. Election programmes (such as British party manifestos and US party platforms) plausibly provide reliable observations of parties' policy orientations, since in many polities they provide the only comprehensive, authoritative statements about the party's policy priorities at the time of the election. The fact that the content of such programmes is often the topic of heated debate at party conferences and conventions also testifies to their importance.

The coding procedures used to map the parties' policies from their election programmes are described in several of the CMP's publications, and will be only briefly reviewed here.²⁰ The logic underlying the coding rules is that parties take positions by emphasizing the importance of certain policy areas compared to others. The coding procedure involves sorting the sentences – actually quasi-sentences – in the party's election programme into varying categories (for example, welfare, defence, law and order, etc.), and then taking the percentages in each category as a measure of the party's priorities. By comparing the relative policy emphases in the same party's programmes at two successive elections, one can chart the changes in the party's policy priorities. By applying this approach to all the major parties in a polity over a series of elections, one can create a policy 'mapping' of the party system. Comparisons of CMP codings with alternative methods of locating parties (such as expert surveys and mean placements of party supporters) suggest that the CMP codings provide generally reliable estimates – both temporally and comparatively – of party policies.²¹ In our analyses we re-scaled the CMP codings of the party programmes, which run from – 100 to + 100, to the more familiar 1–10 left–right scale that is typically used to locate parties and respondents in survey research.

Figure 1 shows how this procedure works when applied to British parties during the post-war period. The parties' positions, as estimated from the CMP's coding system, accord well with historical impressions: at every election Labour's programme is coded as being to the left of the Conservative programme, and these parties converge during the 'Social Democratic Consensus' of the 1950s and 1960s but diverge during the 1970s and 1980s, when the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher's leadership shifted sharply to the right. The CMP coding also registers Labour's dramatic shift towards the centre under Tony Blair.

For our measure of public opinion, we employ the only available survey instrument that has been administered, in an identical format across time and across countries, in a wide variety of Western democracies: the Eurobarometer surveys of voters' left–right self-placements.²² The Eurobarometer scale runs from 1 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme

²⁰ Readers interested in a comprehensive summary of the CMP's coding procedures are referred to Appendix 2 in Ian Budge, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Andrea Volkens, Judith Bara and Eric Tanenbaum, *Mapping Policy Preferences: Estimates for Parties, Electors, and Governments 1945–1998* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²¹ Derek Hearl, 'Checking the Party Policy Estimates: Reliability', in Budge *et al.*, *Mapping Policy Preferences*, pp. 111–26; Michael McDonald and Sylvia Mendes, 'Checking the Party Policy Estimates: Convergent Validity', in Budge *et al.*, *Mapping Policy Preferences*, pp. 127–42. Below we report additional analyses based on an alternative method for coding party programmes developed by Gabel and Huber; see Matthew Gabel and John Huber, 'Putting Parties in their Place: Inferring Party Left–Right Ideological Positions from Party Manifesto Data', *American Journal of Political Science*, 44 (2000), 94–103.

²² We note that Kim and Fording have developed an alternative comparative method for inferring the median voter's ideological position in an election year, which relies on election results and parties' estimated ideological positions (as coded by the CMP), rather than on voter surveys; see Heemin Kim and Richard Fording, 'Voter Ideology in Western Democracies, 1946–1989', *European Journal of Political Research*, 33 (1998), 73–97. While promising, the Kim–Fording coding procedure is not ideal for our purposes since it uses party ideologies to infer voters' ideological positions. Since we are interested in the effect of voters' ideological positions upon party ideologies, use of the Kim–Fording measure in our analysis would involve using party ideologies as both the dependent variable and a component of the independent variable.

TABLE 1 *Mean Respondent Left-Right Self-Placements in the Eurobarometer Surveys, Stratified by Country*

	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
France	4.76	4.80	5.09	4.95	4.91	4.78	4.87	5.16	5.27	5.25	5.22	4.88	5.00	4.86	5.03	4.85	5.02	4.92	4.88	5.00	4.70	4.60	4.94
Netherlands	5.86	5.72	5.50	5.44	4.97	5.31	5.44	5.39	5.34	5.28	5.30	5.25	5.28	5.28	5.36	5.38	5.32	5.34	5.30	5.17	5.15	4.87	5.01
Italy	4.13	4.24	4.33	4.30	4.73	4.51	4.53	4.63	4.67	4.71	4.68	4.73	4.83	4.63	4.76	4.79	4.85	4.76	5.40	5.02	5.08	5.14	5.16
Luxembourg	5.48	5.93	5.72	5.63	5.49	5.68	5.35	5.63	5.65	5.77	5.78	5.66	5.76	5.61	5.62	5.43	5.19	5.18	5.46	5.10	5.24	5.17	5.25
Denmark	5.48	5.33	5.55	5.59	5.52	5.63	5.55	5.93	5.67	5.65	5.63	5.56	5.87	5.87	5.57	5.70	5.68	5.58	5.62	5.54	5.50	5.76	5.54
United Kingdom	5.90	5.97	5.92	5.89	5.77	5.72	5.75	5.87	5.81	5.84	5.69	5.92	5.94	5.89	5.31	5.58	5.41	5.40	5.33	5.28	5.23	5.02	5.11
Greece	-	-	-	-	-	6.12	4.94	5.12	5.16	5.04	5.33	5.42	5.51	5.38	5.66	5.79	5.90	5.59	5.61	5.44	5.61	5.40	5.33
Spain	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.80	4.52	4.59	4.55	4.43	4.43	4.34	4.42	4.55	4.79	4.71	4.71	4.70	4.77

Notes: These results represent the mean of all valid respondent self-placements along a 1–10 left–right scale, stratified by country. The Eurobarometer surveys were not administered in Greece and Spain until 1981 and 1986, respectively.

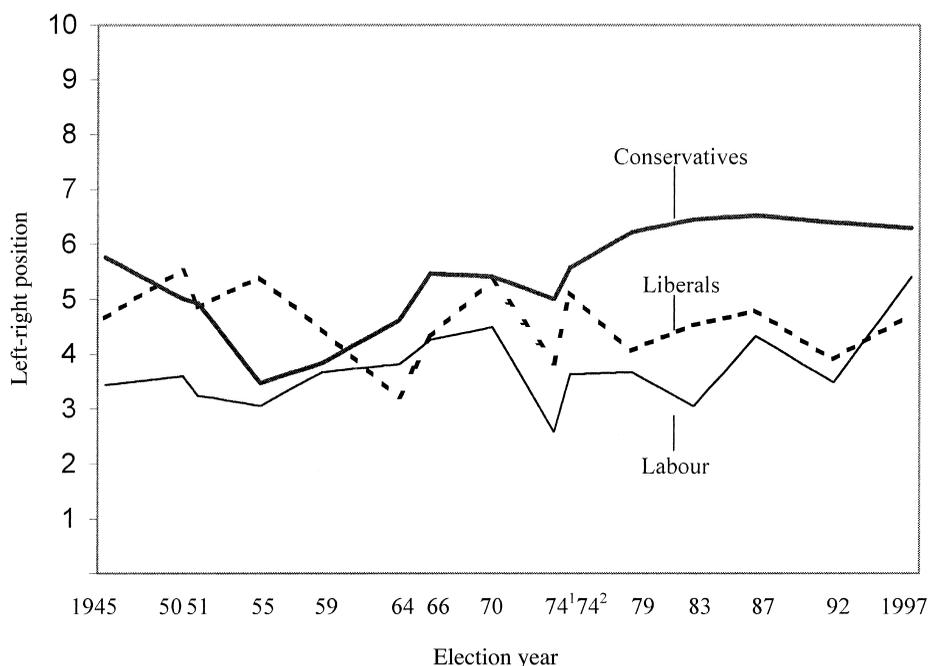


Fig. 1. Spatial mapping of British parties' ideological positions, as coded by the Comparative Manifesto Project Notes: The parties' left-right positions represent the CMP's codings of the party platforms in the year the election was held. Note that the CMP codings, which range from a minimum possible score of -100 to a maximum possible score of +100, have been recalibrated to a 1-10 scale. The positions ascribed to the Liberals encompass the positions of the Liberal party (1945-79), the Liberal-Social Democratic Alliance (1983-87) and the Liberal Democrats (1992-97). The yearly designations '74¹' and '74²' in the figure correspond to the February 1974 general election and the October 1974 general election, respectively.

right), the same range as the re-scaled party placements we derived from the CMP codings. We take the mean self-placements of the survey respondents from a given country in a given year as our measure of voter ideology. Analyses reported by Huber suggest that, with the exceptions of the data from Belgium, Germany and Ireland, Eurobarometer respondents' left-right self-placements can be meaningfully compared cross-nationally, and that they capture respondents' underlying beliefs about specific policy dimensions.²³ Accordingly, we base our empirical analyses on the set of all countries for which Eurobarometer data is available over at least a ten-year period between 1976 (the first year of the Eurobarometer surveys) and 1998 (the last year for which CMP data is available) *except* for Belgium, Germany and Ireland.²⁴ Table 1 reports the Eurobarometer respondents' mean left-right self-placements for the eight countries included in our analysis – France, Britain, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxembourg, Denmark, Greece and Spain – from 1976 to 1998.

²³ John Huber, 'Values and Partisanship in Left-Right Orientations: Measuring Ideology', *European Journal of Political Research*, 17 (1989), 599-621.

²⁴ Although we omit these three countries due to concerns about cross-national comparability, statistical analyses that included data from these countries support substantive conclusions that are identical to the ones we report below.

Model Specification

We take as our dependent variable the change in the party's left–right position in the current election – which we label election t – compared with the party's position at the last election, labelled election $t - 1$. Our initial specification allows us to evaluate Hypotheses 1–3 above, on the effects of public opinion and past election results on party ideologies:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Direction and magnitude of} \quad \text{Direction and magnitude of} \\ \text{harmful public opinion shifts} \quad \text{benign public opinion shifts} \\ \hline \Delta P_J(t) = b_1 + b_2[\Delta V(t) \times DISAD_J(t)] + b_3[\Delta V(t) \times (1 - DISAD_J(t))] \\ + b_4[\Delta P_J(t - 1) \times \Delta VS_J(t - 1)], \quad (1) \\ \hline \text{Electoral success of the party's} \\ \text{ideological shift at the last election} \end{array}$$

where:

$\Delta P_J(t)$ = the change in party J 's left–right position in election t compared with its position at election $t - 1$. Similarly, $\Delta P_J(t - 1)$ represents the change in J 's position in election $t - 1$ compared to election $t - 2$.

$\Delta V(t)$ = the change in the mean Eurobarometer respondent's left–right self-placement at the time of election t compared with the mean respondent placement at the time of election $t - 1$.

$DISAD_J(t)$ = 1 if the party clearly is disadvantaged by the shift in public opinion between election $t - 1$ and election t .
= 0 otherwise.²⁵

$\Delta VS_J(t - 1)$ = the change in Party J 's vote share in the previous election $t - 1$, compared with J 's vote share in election $t - 2$.

The linkage between this specification and Hypotheses 1–3 requires elaboration. We note first that the expressions $[\Delta V(t) \times DISAD_J(t)]$ and $[\Delta V(t) \times (1 - DISAD_J(t))]$ in Equation 1 are central to our evaluations of Hypotheses 1–2, on the linkages between public opinion and party ideologies. $[\Delta V(t) \times DISAD_J(t)]$ represents the direction and magnitude of the shift in the mean voter ideology between election t and election $t - 1$, $\Delta V(t)$, multiplied by a dummy variable $DISAD_J(t)$ that equals 1 if public opinion has clearly shifted away from the party's position and 0 otherwise. Thus $[\Delta V(t) \times DISAD_J(t)]$ takes on a value that represents the magnitude and the direction of the public opinion shift if the party is clearly disadvantaged by this shift, and 0 otherwise. We label this expression the *harmful public opinion shift* variable. Similarly, the expression $[\Delta V(t) \times (1 - DISAD_J(t))]$ represents the direction and magnitude of the shift in the mean voter ideology, applied to parties that are not clearly disadvantaged by this shift. We label this expression the *benign public opinion shift* variable. The Appendix to this article presents the list of political parties included in our analysis, as well as our codings classifying each party as a left-wing, right-wing or centrist party, which we used to determine whether the party was clearly

²⁵ If public opinion has shifted to the right since the last election, $DISAD_J$ equals 1 for left-wing parties and 0 for all other parties. Similarly, if public opinion has shifted to the left since the last election, $DISAD_J$ equals 1 for right-wing parties and 0 for all other parties. Our codings of the party designations as left-wing or right-wing parties – which we discuss below – are presented in the notes to the Appendix.

disadvantaged by the public opinion shift. This coding is based on the ‘party family’ classification provided by the CMP.²⁶

To the extent that the estimated coefficients b_2 and b_3 associated with the harmful and the benign public opinion shift variables in Equation 1 are both statistically significant, this will support the General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis (H1), that parties display a general tendency to shift their ideological positions in response to shifts in public opinion. However, to the extent that the estimated coefficient b_2 associated with harmful opinion shifts is statistically significant while the estimated coefficient b_3 for benign public opinion shifts is not statistically significant and is near zero, this will not support H1 but it will support the Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Hypothesis (H2), that parties respond to public opinion when opinion is clearly shifting away from them.²⁷

The expression [$\Delta P_j(t-1) \times \Delta VS_j(t-1)$] in Equation 1 represents the shift in party J 's ideology at election $t-1$ compared with election $t-2$, multiplied by the change in J 's vote share at election $t-1$ compared with election $t-2$. We label this expression the *past election results* variable. To the extent that the estimated coefficient for past election results is positive this will indicate that, *ceteris paribus*, parties which *gained* votes in the previous election tended to shift their ideologies in the same direction as the last time, while parties that *lost* votes at the last election tended to shift their ideologies in the opposite direction from the last time. Such a result would support the Past Election Results Hypothesis (H3), that parties adjust their ideologies in the current election in response to the electoral gains (or losses) associated with their ideological shift in the last election.²⁸

An Unavoidable Complication: Incorporating Lagged Party Shifts as Independent Variables

In order to evaluate Hypotheses 1–3 empirically, we must first confront a complicating factor relating to the relationship between our dependent variable, the party's ideological shift in the current election, and the party's ideological shifts in previous elections. The complication is that there are several reasons to expect that parties' ideological shifts in the current election, as measured by the codings of the CMP, will be in the *opposite* direction from their measured shifts in previous elections. Budge, who contends that party

²⁶ Specifically, parties that the CMP classified as members of the Communist, Social Democratic and Green party families were classified as left-wing parties in our analyses, while parties the CMP classified as belonging to the Conservative, Christian and Nationalist families were classified as right-wing parties. We classified parties belonging to the CMP's Liberal and Agrarian family classifications as centrist parties. We relied on the CMP classification scheme because this provided independent criteria for assigning ideological designations to political parties, so that our theoretical expectations would not contaminate our party classifications. We note that we performed additional analyses, based upon our subjective codings of the parties' left–right statuses, which supported substantive conclusions that were identical to the ones we report below.

²⁷ A possible objection to this line of reasoning is that the finding of statistically significant associations between shifts in public opinion and shifts in party ideologies need *not* necessarily indicate that parties respond to public opinion, but may be due to two alternative processes: one in which public opinion responds to shifts in party ideologies, and another in which parties and the public both respond to some third variable that we do not account for in our model (we thank Jesse Russell for pointing out this latter possibility). This objection is valid. However we shall argue below that these alternative processes cannot account for the statistical patterns that we uncover in our empirical analyses.

²⁸ We also estimated the parameters of an alternative specification for which the past election results variable was defined as the change in the party's vote share at election $t-1$, multiplied by a dummy variable which equalled 1 if the party had shifted to the left at election $t-1$, and 0 if the party had shifted to the right at election $t-1$. These analyses supported substantive conclusions that were identical to the ones we report below.

leaders may alternate the direction of their party's policy shifts as a deliberate strategy, advances the first reason.²⁹ Budge supports his 'alternation model' by arguing that there are in-built party dynamics that reward policy alternation, including the need to satisfy both hard-core supporters and moderate voters, and the necessity to respond to changing external conditions. A second argument, advanced by Adams, is that voters' nonpolicy-related attachments (such as party identification) have the effect of 'pushing' parties away when they approach too closely to a rival party's position.³⁰ Adams presents illustrative arguments and simulations on election survey data suggesting that this dynamic can motivate 'see-saw' patterns in parties' policy shifts over time, that resemble the behaviour predicted by Budge's alternation model. Thirdly, Burt points out that a pattern of policy alternation can be generated by a model in which, at each election, each party's ideology is randomly generated from a probability distribution centred on some central ideological tendency that is specific to that party.³¹ Burt's model plausibly captures the dynamics of intra-party competition in situations where, at each successive election, activists representing opposing ideological views within the party compete to determine the party's ideological orientation. Finally, we note that even if parties' 'true' ideological positions do not vary over time, to the extent that the CMP's estimates of these ideologies contain some measurement error, such errors can generate patterns similar to those produced by Burt's model.³²

The above considerations motivated us to incorporate two additional independent variables into our empirical specification: $\Delta P_j(t-1)$, which represents the party's ideological shift at election $t-1$ compared with election $t-2$, and $\Delta P_j(t-2)$ which represents the party's ideological shift at election $t-2$ compared with election $t-3$. We label these variables *party's ideological shift (t-1)*, and *party's ideological shift (t-2)*, respectively. In our subsequent analyses we will not ascribe substantive interpretations to the estimated coefficients associated with these variables because – as discussed above – several alternative processes can generate identical statistical patterns (but see footnote 36 below). Nevertheless, to the extent that any of these processes – Budge's and Adams's alternation models, Burt's random ideologies model and measurement error – account for parties' observed policy dynamics, failure to control for parties' past ideological shifts may produce biased estimates of the effects associated with the independent variables of interest, and should also inflate the standard errors associated with these estimates.³³

²⁹ Budge, 'A New Theory of Party Competition'.

³⁰ Adams, *Party Competition and Responsible Party Government*.

³¹ Gordon Burt, 'Party Policy: Decision Rule or Chance? A Note on Budge's New Spatial Theory of Party Competition', *British Journal of Political Science*, 27 (1998), 647–58. Specifically, Burt argues that his 'random ideology model' will generate patterns in which parties alternate the direction of their ideological shifts two-thirds of the time. To see this, note that if one randomly selects three successive party ideologies from the same random probability distribution, and one labels these ideologies as the right-most ideology *R*, the left-most ideology *L*, and the centre ideology *C*, four of the six possible orderings of these ideological positions produce a pattern of policy alternation: *LRC*, *CLR*, *CRL*, *RLC*. Only two orderings (*LCR* and *RCL*) produce a pattern in which the parties shift in the same direction in two successive elections.

³² To see this, consider the situation in which a party's actual ideology does not vary over time, and in which its observed ideology, as coded by the CMP, is randomly selected from a distribution centred on its true ideology but with a standard deviation that represents measurement error. Provided that the measurement errors are uncorrelated across elections, this model is observationally equivalent to Burt's 'random ideologies' model.

³³ As a check on this hypothesis, we estimated the parameters of a specification identical to that given in Equation 1 above, except that it omitted parties' past ideological shifts. The parameter estimates for the independent variables were similar to those we estimated for a fully-specified model (given by Equation 2 below) that incorporates parties' past ideological shifts, but as expected the standard errors associated with the parameter estimates were substantially higher for Equation 1 than they were for Equation 2.

Using the variable names described above and incorporating parties' previous ideological shifts into the model, our revised specification becomes:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Party's ideological shift}(t) = & \\ & b_1 + b_2[\text{harmful public opinion shift}] + b_3[\text{benign public opinion shift}] \\ & + b_4[\text{past election result}] + b_5[\text{party's ideological shift } (t - 1)] \\ & + b_6[\text{party's ideological shift } (t - 2)]. \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

EVALUATING HYPOTHESES ON PARTY IDEOLOGIES: EMPIRICAL RESULTS

To test our hypotheses we created a pooled dataset that incorporated data from all eight West European democracies listed in Table 1. The time period covered in our analysis was 1976 (the first year the Eurobarometer surveys were administered) to 1998 (the last year for which CMP codings of the parties' left–right positions was available). The resulting pooled dataset included 167 ideological shifts by parties and voters (the complete set of parties included in the analysis is reported in the Appendix). We emphasize that our analyses on this pooled data are only valid to the extent that the CMP estimates of parties' left–right positions, and Eurobarometer respondents' left–right self-placements, are comparable cross-nationally, and furthermore, that the same causal processes operate within each country. While prior studies suggest that such a pooled approach is valid,³⁴ here we report the results for several alternative specifications, in order to ensure that our substantive conclusions are robust.

Empirical Test of Hypotheses

In Table 2 the 'Basic' column reports our parameter estimates for the specification given in Equation 2 – which we label the *basic specification* – estimated using the pooled dataset. Recall that for these analyses both the parties' left–right positions and the Eurobarometer respondents' positions are located along identical 1–10 scales, so that – to the extent that the CMP party codings and the Eurobarometer respondent codings are comparable – a one unit shift in the mean respondent self-placement in a given country should have a substantively similar meaning to a one unit shift in a party's left–right position.

Note first that we find a statistically significant tendency for parties to respond when public opinion shifts away from them, i.e. the harmful public opinion shift coefficient is significant at the 0.01 level. Furthermore, the magnitude of this coefficient suggests that this effect is substantively significant: the estimated value, 0.80, suggests that when public opinion shifts by one unit along the 1–10 left–right scale, then, *ceteris paribus*, disadvantaged parties could be expected to shift about 0.80 policy units along this scale, in the same direction as public opinion – i.e. public opinion shifts are associated with ideological shifts of a similar magnitude by disadvantaged parties. This supports H2, the Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Hypothesis.

By contrast, the benign public opinion shift coefficient estimate is 0.19, which is near zero and does not reach statistical significance, indicating that parties did not display statistically significant tendencies to shift their ideologies in situations where public opinion was not clearly shifting away from them. This coefficient estimate does not allow us to accept the General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis (H1) – that parties show a general tendency to respond to shifts in public opinion – in preference to the

³⁴ Huber, 'Values and Partisanship in Left–Right Orientations'; Hearl, 'Checking the Party Policy Estimates: Reliability'; McDonald and Mendes, 'Checking the Party Policy Estimates: Convergent Validity'.

TABLE 2 *Explaining Parties' Ideological Shifts*

Explanatory variable	Basic	Country-specific intercepts [†]	Gabel-Huber data [‡]	Voter dispersion effects
Intercept	0.11* (0.05)	0.11* (0.05)	0.04 (0.18)	0.11* (0.05)
<i>Harmful public opinion shift</i>	0.80** (0.29)	0.86** (0.30)	0.88* (0.43)	0.82** (0.29)
<i>Benign public opinion shift</i>	0.19 (0.23)	0.22 (0.25)	0.10 (0.35)	0.19 (0.23)
<i>Past election results</i>	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.02)	0.01 (0.01)
Party's ideological shift ($t - 1$)	-0.49** (0.08)	-0.51** (0.08)	-0.44** (0.12)	-0.49** (0.08)
Party's ideological shift ($t - 2$)	-0.20* (0.08)	-0.23** (0.08)	-0.25* (0.12)	-0.22** (0.08)
Change in voter dispersion				0.87* (0.36)
Number of cases	167	167	109	167
Adjusted R^2	0.21	0.21	0.20	0.24

Notes: For these analyses the dependent variable was the party's ideological shift between election $t - 1$ and election t (the current election), based on the CMP codings of parties' left-right positions. The specifications used to estimate the parameters reported in columns 1-4 are given by Equations 1-2 in the text.

* $P \leq 0.05$, ** $P \leq 0.01$, two-tailed test.

[†] The estimated parameters for the country-specific intercepts were as follows (standard errors in parentheses): Italy, 0.23 (0.25) Britain, 0.37 (0.28); France, 0.18 (0.25); Greece, 0.05 (0.27); Luxembourg, 0.37 (0.29); Denmark, 0.04 (0.23); The Netherlands, 0.29 (0.25). Spain was used as the baseline country.

[‡] Parameter estimates are based on analyses using Gabel and Huber's 'vanilla method' to locate the parties along 0-10 left-right scales. The number of cases is limited in this analysis because the Gabel-Huber party placements were available only up to 1992.

null hypothesis, that there is no general tendency for parties to respond to public opinion.³⁵

The coefficient estimates for harmful and benign public opinion shifts are important for another reason: namely, they suggest that the statistical association we observe between harmful public opinion shifts and shifts by disadvantaged parties reflects a causal process in which the parties respond to public opinion, rather than one in which public opinion responds to the parties, or where both parties and the public respond independently to some outside influence that is not accounted for in our specification (see footnote 27). To see this, note first that to the extent that citizens adjust their ideologies in response to parties' ideological shifts, this should inflate the estimates for both the harmful public opinion shift coefficient *and* for the benign public opinion shift coefficient. Yet the benign public opinion shift coefficient estimate is near zero and is not statistically significant, while the harmful public opinion shift coefficient is near 1.0 and is statistically significant at the 0.01

³⁵ The difference between the estimated values for the harmful public opinion shift coefficient and the benign public opinion shift coefficient is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

level. These estimates are not consistent with a causal process in which public opinion systematically responds to shifts in party ideologies. Similarly, the alternative hypothesis that parties and public opinion each respond independently to some outside influence cannot account for the finding that only *disadvantaged* parties show statistically significant tendencies to shift in the same direction as public opinion. For these reasons, we conclude that our statistical analyses support the Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Hypothesis.

The coefficient estimate for the past election results variable has the expected sign, but it is near zero and is not statistically significant. Furthermore, a comparison of the coefficient estimate and its standard error strongly suggests that past election results do not have a *substantively* significant effect on party elites' ideological strategies in the current election. The upper bound on the 95 per cent confidence interval for the past election result coefficient is 0.03, a value that implies that, *ceteris paribus*, a party that had shifted its ideology one unit to the left (right) in the previous election and saw its national vote drop by 5 percentage points – an outcome that most party leaders would view as highly unfavourable – would only shift about 0.15 units in the opposite direction in the current election, along the 1–10 left–right scale. Thus even if the true value of the past election results coefficient is at the upper bound of its 95 per cent confidence interval, the impact of past election results upon party leaders' strategies appears substantively insignificant. We conclude that the Past Election Results Hypothesis (H3) is not supported and, furthermore, that the statistical evidence is sufficiently strong to reject the hypothesis that past election results exert a substantively significant influence on party ideologies.

Finally, note that we find significant tendencies for party ideologies, as coded by the CMP, to shift in the opposite direction to their ideological shifts in earlier elections, i.e. the estimated coefficients for the *party's ideological shift (t – 1)* variable and the *party's ideological shift (t – 2)* variable are both negative and statistically significant. We do not ascribe a substantive interpretation to this finding, for reasons discussed above.³⁶

Additional Empirical Tests

Country-specific effects. The three right-hand columns of Table 2 report parameter estimates for several additional pooled analyses, which we estimated in order to assure ourselves that our substantive conclusions were robust to alternative model specifications and to an alternative measure of our independent variable.³⁷ The first of these reports results

³⁶ An anonymous referee argues that a comparison of the estimated coefficients for the party's ideological shift ($t - 1$) variable (-0.49) and the party's ideological shift ($t - 2$) variable (-0.20) does not support Burt's random ideologies model or the measurement error hypothesis, since both models imply that political parties' two previous policy shifts should have similar relationships to their policy shifts in the current election. (The difference between the coefficient estimates for these two variables is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.) This finding, which lends support to the alternation models of Budge and Adams in preference to Burt's random ideologies model, is one that we plan to explore in future research. Here we forgo advancing a firm conclusion on this point, because we believe the resolution of this important puzzle requires a more searching evaluation of the statistical assumptions underlying our analysis.

³⁷ In addition to the results reported in Table 2, we estimated the parameters for several additional pooled data specifications, including specifications that controlled for changes in the national unemployment and inflation rates, specifications that controlled for differences in the variance of the CMP data across countries, re-estimates of the basic model on a country-by-country basis and omitting one country at a time, and a logit specification in which parties' ideological shifts between elections were coded as dichotomous variables which reflected whether the parties had shifted to the left or the right. All of these analyses supported substantive conclusions that are identical to the ones we report below. The tables for these alternative analyses are available from the authors upon request.

for a specification that was identical to the basic specification except that it included country-specific intercepts. Estimating these intercepts permits us to explore the possibility that country-specific variables that were omitted from the basic specification influenced parties' ideological shifts, an omission that could potentially bias the parameter estimates for the variables of interest.³⁸ The results show that all of the estimated country-specific intercepts were statistically insignificant (see the appropriate footnote to Table 2). More important for our purposes, the parameter estimates for the benign public opinion shift variable, the harmful public opinion shift variable, and the past election results variable show identical patterns to those reported above: namely these parameter estimates support the Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Hypothesis, but do not support the General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis or the Past Election Results Hypotheses.

Alternative measures of party positions. The next column in Table 2 reports results for a regression analysis in which our measure of the parties' left–right positions is based on estimates reported by Gabel and Huber.³⁹ Specifically, Gabel and Huber have developed an approach for using party manifestos to estimate party left–right positions (labelled the 'vanilla method'), which they argue is preferable to the CMP's left–right coding scheme. In order to ensure that our substantive conclusions were not an artefact of the CMP method for coding the parties' positions, we re-estimated the coefficients for the basic specification given in Equation 2, this time using the Gabel–Huber estimates of the parties' ideological shifts.⁴⁰ The estimated coefficients support substantive conclusions that are identical to the ones we reached based on the CMP's codings of party manifestos.

Accounting for dispersion in the voter distribution. One possible objection to our analysis of dynamic representation is that, to this point, we have focused exclusively on shifts in the *mean* voter left–right position, while ignoring changes in the degree of dispersion of respondents' left–right self-placements around the mean.⁴¹ Figure 2, which plots the distribution of Italian respondents' left–right placements in 1992 and 1994 (both of which were election years), illustrates this point. Note that the mean respondent self-placement shifts to the right between 1992 and 1994 (the mean self-placements are 4.85 in 1992 and 5.40 in 1994), but that the distribution of these self-placements is also significantly more dispersed in 1994 than in 1992 (the standard deviation of the self-placements is 2.35 in 1994 but only 2.06 in 1992). Intuitively, it seems plausible that the increased voter dispersion in 1994 might motivate Italian political parties at both ends of the ideological

³⁸ Another possibility is that we should treat our data as panel data, with thirty-seven parties observed over an average of 4.5 time periods. In this case we would be concerned with possible bias due to party-specific effects omitted from the model. Rather than estimate thirty-six party-specific intercepts (with the resulting loss of degrees of freedom), we estimated a fixed effects model, which transforms each variable into a deviation from its party-specific mean. A fixed effects model will yield the same coefficients on the variables of interest as there would have been had we included unit-specific intercepts (see Cheng Hsiao, *Analysis of Panel Data*, 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)). This fixed effects model supports our substantive conclusions. Further, an *F* test reveals that there is no significant difference between the fixed effects model and the pooled model we estimate in the first column ($F_{36,125} = 0.48, p = 0.99$), indicating that party-specific effects are not biasing our results.

³⁹ Gabel and Huber, 'Putting Parties in their Place.'

⁴⁰ We thank Matt Gabel and John Huber for making this data available to us. Because the Gabel–Huber codings stop in 1992, the number of cases in this analysis ($n = 109$) is smaller than the number of cases in the regression analyses based upon the CMP codings ($n = 167$).

⁴¹ We thank Paul Warwick and Nolan McCarthy for drawing our attention to this point.

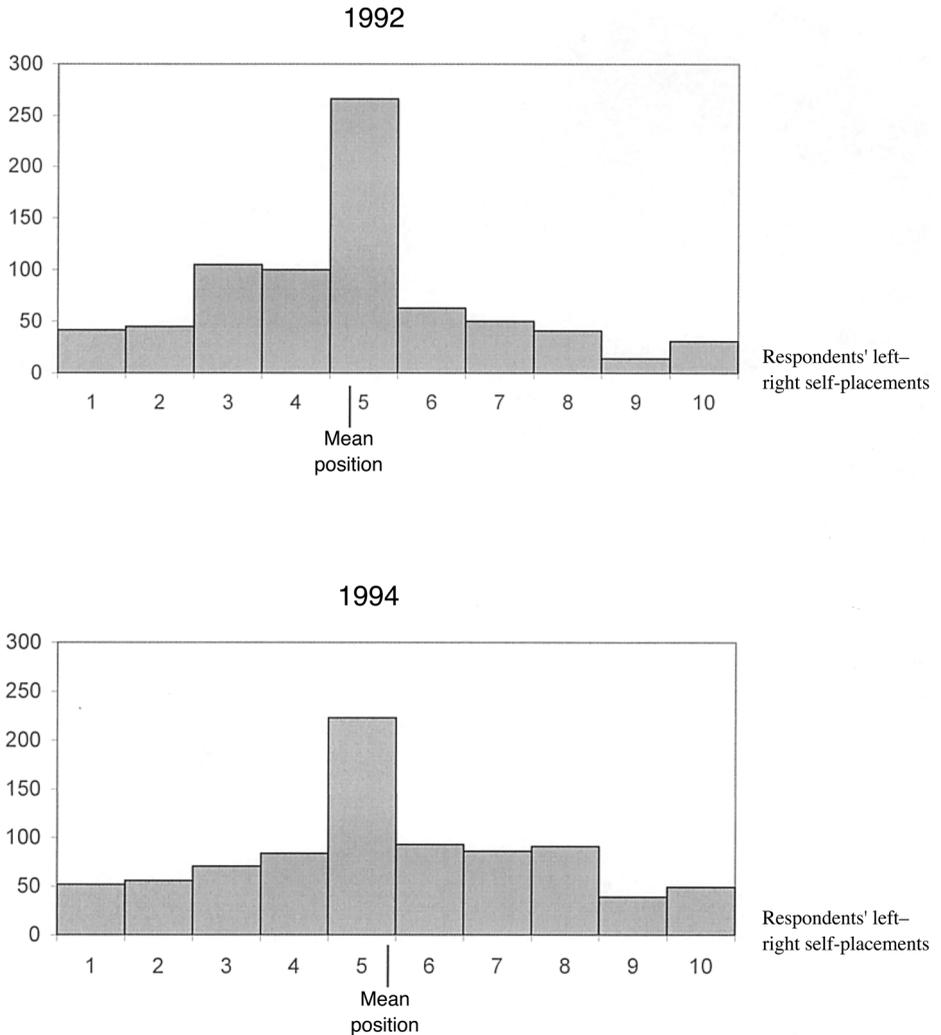


Fig. 2. Italian respondents' left-right distributions, 1992 and 1994

Sources: 1992 and 1994 Eurobarometer surveys.

spectrum – i.e. parties of the left and right – to disperse their own positions along the left–right dimension; the effect of this would be that leftist parties would have incentives to shift further to the left, away from the mean voter position, while right-wing parties would have additional incentives to shift rightward, further away from the voter mean. This intuition is supported by spatial modelling studies on multiparty elections by Cox and Merrill and Adams, which conclude that the more dispersed the voter distribution the stronger the ‘centrifugal incentives’ which push vote-seeking parties away from the mean or median voter position.⁴²

To explore the above hypothesis, we estimated the parameters for a specification that

⁴² Cox, ‘Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives in Electoral Systems’; Merrill and Adams, ‘Centripetal Incentives in Multicandidate Elections.’

was identical to the basic specification given in Equation 2 except that we included a *voter dispersion effects* variable, which was intended to capture party positioning incentives relating to changes in the dispersion of the voter distribution. This variable was defined as the change in the standard deviation of the voter distribution at election t compared with election $t - 1$ – which we denote $[\Delta s.d.(t)]$ – multiplied by the difference between two dummy variables: the variable *RPARTY* which equalled 1 if the party was a right-wing party and 0 otherwise, and the variable *LPARTY* which equalled 1 if the party was a left-wing party and 0 otherwise⁴³:

$$\text{Voter dispersion effects} = \Delta s.d.(t) \times [RPARTY - LPARTY]. \quad (3)$$

The final column in Table 2 reports the parameter estimates for the specification that includes the voter dispersion effects variable. The coefficient estimate associated with voter dispersion effects is positive and statistically significant, indicating that – as expected – increases in voter dispersion tend to be associated with more dispersed party configurations, with left-wing and right-wing parties shifting further away from the centre of the voter distribution. However, inclusion of this variable does not alter our substantive conclusions with respect to hypotheses H1-H3: the estimated coefficients associated with benign public opinion shifts, harmful opinion shifts and past election results are virtually identical to the estimates for the basic specification reported in the first column.

Overall, our empirical tests consistently support the Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Hypothesis (H2), that parties respond to public opinion when opinion shifts in a direction that is clearly disadvantageous to the party. However, our results do not consistently support the General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis (H1), that there is a general tendency for *all* types of parties to respond to shifts in public opinion. Furthermore, our results do not support the Past Election Results Hypothesis (H3), that parties adjust their ideologies in the current election in response to the electoral gains/losses associated with the party's shift in the last election; indeed on this point the statistical evidence is sufficiently strong that we can reject the proposition that past election results exert a *substantively* significant influence on parties' policies in the current election.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON THE DYNAMICS OF DISADVANTAGED PARTIES

From an empirical standpoint, our results on the dynamics of disadvantaged parties are relevant to the literature on dynamic representation, which emphasizes the linkages between party positions and public opinion.⁴⁴ Our findings suggest that European political parties respond to public opinion in some situations but not in others: namely, we find strong evidence that parties adjust their policies when public opinion clearly shifts away from the party's positions, but that otherwise parties do not systematically respond to shifts in public opinion. This suggests that in the context of European politics, the dynamic representation paradigm should be modified to consider not only *whether* political parties respond to public opinion, but also *in which situations* political parties can be expected to respond dynamically to public opinion shifts.

⁴³ Note that the voter dispersion effects variable is constructed so that if the estimated coefficient associated with this variable is positive, this will indicate that left-wing and right-wing parties tend to moderate their ideological positions when the voter distribution grows more compact, and that these parties tend to shift further away from the centre when the voter distribution grows more dispersed.

⁴⁴ Stimson *et al.*, 'Dynamic Representation'; Erikson *et al.*, *The Macro Polity*.

From a measurement standpoint, our finding on the dynamics of disadvantaged parties suggests that the CMP's codings of party programmes reliably capture shifts in parties' positions along the ideological spectrum. For if the CMP's codings do not capture these dynamics, it is difficult to explain why we find a strong, statistically significant association between shifts in the parties' positions – as coded by the CMP – and shifts in voters' positions, in situations where public opinion shifts away from the party. We believe this conclusion on the *temporal validity* of the CMP codings is important, in that it supplements previous analyses of the CMP's coding procedures which have been primarily concerned with the *cross-sectional* validity of these codings.⁴⁵

We note that up to this point we have presented evidence on how European parties adjust their ideologies in response to public opinion and to past election results, but we have not proposed to explain in detail *why* parties behave in this way. Here, we draw connections to two studies on how uncertainty and risk affect decision making. These may illuminate our findings on the dynamics of disadvantaged parties.

The first approach, associated with the work of Kahneman and Tversky, revolves around the experimental finding that individuals' tastes for risk increase with the losses (and decrease with gains) they experience relative to some psychologically-constructed baseline – the so-called 'risky-shift' effect.⁴⁶ This phenomenon suggests a possible explanation for our findings on the dynamics of disadvantaged parties. To see this, note that since parties typically lose votes when public opinion shifts away from them and gain votes when opinion shifts in their direction,⁴⁷ the risky shift effect implies that the leaders of disadvantaged parties will be more willing to adopt electorally-risky strategies than will the leaders of advantaged parties. Given that extensive empirical and theoretical work suggests that parties face considerable electoral uncertainty when they shift their policy positions,⁴⁸ this dynamic may explain the tendency for the leaders of disadvantaged parties to alter their policies sharply in response to shifts in public opinion, while the leaders of advantaged parties adopt a safety-first, 'stay-put' strategy.

The second approach, presented in an innovative paper by Smirnov and Fowler, addresses the effects of electoral uncertainty in situations where party leaders are

⁴⁵ See Hearl, 'Checking the Party Policy Estimates: Reliability'; McDonald and Mendes, 'Checking the Party Policy Estimates: Convergent Validity'.

⁴⁶ Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, 'Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decisions under Risk', *Econometrica*, 47 (1979), 313–27. We thank an anonymous referee for drawing our attention to the link between the Kahneman–Tversky results and our findings on the dynamics of disadvantaged parties.

⁴⁷ Stimson *et al.*, 'Dynamic Representation', provide empirical support for this proposition in the context of American politics, while Ezrow presents support for this hypothesis in the context of West European elections (see Lawrence Ezrow, 'Are Moderate Parties Rewarded in Multiparty Systems? A Pooled Analysis of Western European Elections, 1984–1998', *European Journal of Political Research*, forthcoming).

⁴⁸ In particular, theoretical work on spatial models of elections posits that shifts in parties' policy positions may affect the following election-related variables: party activists' and special interests' willingness to provide campaign resources (see Gary Miller and Norman Schofield, 'Activists and Partisan Realignment in the United States', *American Political Science Review*, 97 (2003), 245–60); rival political elites' decisions about whether to contest the upcoming election (see Thomas Palfrey, 'Spatial Equilibrium with Entry', *Review of Economic Studies*, 51 (1984), 139–56); voters' degrees of certainty about the party's policy positions (see Steven Callander and Simon Wilkie, 'Candidate Flexibility' (unpublished, Northwestern University, 2003)). In addition, empirical work by Alvarez and Nagler, and by Stokes, suggests that parties' policy shifts may alter voters' decision rules, by changing the electoral salience of policy distance *vis-à-vis* alternative considerations, such as the state of the economy (see R. Michael Alvarez and Jonathan Nagler, 'Party System Compactness: Consequences and Measures' (unpublished, California Institute of Technology, 2002)); Susan Stokes, *Mandates and Democracy: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

policy-seeking, i.e. where politicians seek office as a means of implementing their proposed policies rather than proposing policies in pursuit of office.⁴⁹ Using a spatial modelling approach, the authors demonstrate that a set-up in which party leaders' uncertainty over the distribution of voters' policy preferences decreases over time – as has plausibly occurred in post-war democracies due to advances in public opinion polling techniques – implies the dynamics of disadvantaged parties result. Roughly speaking, the logic underlying the Smirnov–Fowler result is that, while public opinion shifts motivate both advantaged and disadvantaged parties to shift in the same policy direction as the public, party leaders' greater certainty over the voter distribution exerts a centripetal effect, drawing parties of all ideological tendencies towards the centre of this distribution. For disadvantaged parties, both effects push party leaders to shift their policies in the same direction as the public; for advantaged parties, these two effects exert countervailing tendencies, so that the net effect of these strategic considerations is less pronounced.⁵⁰

Together, the Kahnemann–Tversky and the Smirnov–Fowler results suggest that a focus on how uncertainty and risk affect party elites' decision making is a promising avenue for future research. In particular, these studies demonstrate how approaches borrowed from psychology and from formal theory can be used to explain the results of our statistical analyses of parties' policy trajectories.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

We have reported empirical analyses of data from eight West European democracies on the linkages between parties' left–right ideologies, on the one hand, and public opinion and past election results on the other. Basing our results on the CMP codings of party ideologies and the Eurobarometer surveys of citizens' left–right self-placements, we find results that consistently support the Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Hypothesis, that political parties shift their ideological positions in response to public opinion when opinion clearly shifts away from the party. This conclusion is robust to a variety of aggregate-level analyses, including specifications that incorporate country-specific effects, voter dispersion effects and an analysis based on an alternative measure of party ideologies (the Gabel–Huber 'vanilla method').

By contrast, our analyses do not provide consistent support for the General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis, nor for the Past Election Results Hypothesis, that parties adjust their ideologies in response to the electoral outcomes associated with their ideological shifts in the last election. Indeed, the data on past election results is such that we can reject, at conventional levels of statistical significance, the proposition that past election results exert substantively significant effects on parties' ideologies.

Our findings raise several questions that we hope to address in future research. First, as we have emphasized above, our empirical focus on public opinion and past election results by no means exhausts the list of variables that plausibly influence party ideologies. There are several additional factors – including electoral laws, economic conditions and

⁴⁹ Oleg Smirnov and James Fowler, 'Moving with the Mandate: The Role of Margins of Victory, Uncertainty, Electorate Polarization, and Party Motivations in Dynamic Political Competition' (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, 2003).

⁵⁰ We note that the Smirnov–Fowler argument is couched in terms of two-party elections. However, it seems plausible that a similar dynamic obtains in multiparty elections, especially those which feature competition between two proto-coalitions which are identifiable to voters in advance of the election, as is the case in many West European democracies.

the nature of the party system – that may directly influence party ideologies, or that might mediate the impact of public opinion and past election results on party ideologies.⁵¹ While our statistical analyses have permitted us some limited insights into the impact of these factors, this is an area that requires further research. Secondly, it would be interesting to explore whether our conclusions – which rest on analyses of data from Britain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, Greece, the Netherlands and Denmark over the period 1976–98 – generalize to different party systems and time periods. In this regard, it seems plausible that the constraints on government policies entailed by membership in the European Union may alter the inter-relationships between party ideologies, public opinion and past election results in member countries. However, we will require years of additional data before we can evaluate this hypothesis.

Finally, we emphasize that while we have presented evidence on how European parties adjust their ideologies in response to public opinion and to past election results, we have not proposed to explain in detail *why* parties behave in this way. In the previous section we summarized results from the literatures on psychology and formal political theory, suggesting that the key to understanding party dynamics may lie in party leaders' informational environments and/or the perceived risks associated with changing policy direction. Alternatively, a satisfactory explanation for our findings may require 'thick' descriptions of party organizations that invoke the social and cultural contexts in which elites make their decisions. If any of these conjectures are correct, it suggests that the ultimate explanation for our findings lies outside the scope of the kinds of statistical analyses that we report here.

The above considerations notwithstanding, we believe that our empirical findings represent an important step in the search to understand the linkages between public opinion, past election results and party ideologies, for the first step in understanding *why* parties behave as they do is to perceive accurately *how* parties actually behave. Our finding of systematic evidence in support of the Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Hypothesis – and our finding that there is no systematic evidence to support the General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis and the Past Election Results Hypothesis – is no guarantee that we will eventually be able to explain these features of party behaviour. However, a failure to recognize parties' behavioural patterns would be a guarantee that we cannot explain them. Understanding how parties behave is not the end of the process, but it is the best beginning.

⁵¹ In addition, several readers have suggested that we investigate the hypothesis that parties respond to the ideological shifts of rival parties. While this hypothesis strikes us as promising – especially given that this assumption underlies virtually all spatial models of party competition – it is difficult to evaluate empirically given the limitations of our data. Specifically, to the extent that parties' ideologies are influenced by exogenous factors such as public opinion and past election results, *and* by the endogenous factor of rival parties' ideologies, we are forced to estimate a recursive model which can only be identified provided that we make strong assumptions that are difficult to justify empirically.

APPENDIX: PARTIES INCLUDED IN THE EMPIRICAL ANALYSES

<i>Denmark</i>	<i>Italy</i>
Socialistisk Folkeparti (Communist)	PCI (Communist)
Socialdemokratiet (Social Democratic)	PSI (Social Democratic)
Radikale (Liberal)	AN (National)
Konservative (Conservative)	DC (Christian)
Venstre (Liberal)	PLI (Liberal)
Fremskridtspartiet (National)	
	<i>Luxembourg</i>
<i>France</i>	KP/PC (Communist)
PCF (Communist)	LSAP/POSL (Social Democratic)
PS (Socialist)	CSV/PCS (Christian)
UDF/RPR (Conservative)	DP/PD (Liberal)
FN (National)	
	<i>The Netherlands</i>
<i>Great Britain</i>	PPR/PvDA/D'66 (Social Democratic)
Labour (Social Democratic)	CDA (Christian Democratic)
Social and Liberal Democrats (Liberal)	VVD (Liberal)
Conservative (Conservative)	GL (Green)
<i>Greece</i>	<i>Spain</i>
KKE (Communist)	IU (Communist)
PASOK (Social Democratic)	PSOE (Social Democratic)
New Democracy (Christian)	CIU/AP/CP (Conservative)
	CDS (Liberal)

Notes: The names in parentheses indicate the 'party families' to which the parties belong. Party family designations are taken from the Comparative Manifesto Project, where the third digit of the party identification code represents a party's family. We note that for the purposes of our empirical analyses, the parties that the CMP classified as members of the Communist, Social Democratic and Green families were classified as left-wing parties in our analyses, while parties the CMP classified as belonging to the Conservative, Christian and Nationalist families were classified as right-wing parties. We classified as centrist all parties belonging to the CMP's Liberal family classification.