



## Party performance explains disagreement between politicians and their parties

Gijs Schumacher & Christian Elmelund-Præstekær

To cite this article: Gijs Schumacher & Christian Elmelund-Præstekær (2018) Party performance explains disagreement between politicians and their parties, *West European Politics*, 41:2, 329-349, DOI: [10.1080/01402382.2017.1359013](https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1359013)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1359013>



© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



[View supplementary material](#)



Published online: 23 Aug 2017.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 3080



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 5 [View citing articles](#)

## Party performance explains disagreement between politicians and their parties

Gijs Schumacher<sup>a</sup>  and Christian Elmelund-Præstekær<sup>b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands;

<sup>b</sup>Department of Political Science and Public Management, University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark

### ABSTRACT


Are politicians more likely to disagree with their party after an electoral defeat or during a spell in opposition? If so, are they likely to advocate a more moderate or a more radical position than their party? In order to evaluate this, the article analyses the absolute distance between candidates for parliament and their parties on the left–right dimension. The sample used consists of 5614 politicians from 11 countries (Comparative Candidate Survey). Controlling for party system differences and individual characteristics, the results demonstrate that politicians take more moderate positions than their party after an electoral defeat. Also politicians of government parties are surprisingly more likely to disagree than politicians of opposition parties. These results overlap with predictions of party position shifts and inform the discussion on how intra-party dynamics bring about changes in party position. In addition, the article finds evidence of loss aversion, and differences in the responsiveness of elite and non-elite candidates.

**KEYWORDS** Party positions; candidates; electoral performance; intra-party politics; intra-party unity

After a political party has suffered a major electoral defeat, there is often a politician from that party who complains about the party's ideological position. The party has drifted too much to the left or to the right. Or it has become too moderate. Sometimes this criticism develops into legislative dissent, the emergence of a new party faction, a challenge to the leadership, and ultimately a shift in the party's policy agenda. But these are rare events and entail risk-taking. Party leaders do not take dissent lightly. More common, we believe, is the scenario in which politicians become dissatisfied with the party's ideological course because of a major electoral defeat or a party's ejection from government, but stay quiet.

From analyses of party position changes we know that performance matters and that political parties are more likely to change position if they have lost elections (Budge 1994; Somer-Topcu 2009), spend time in opposition (Riker

**CONTACT** Gijs Schumacher  [g.schumacher@uva.nl](mailto:g.schumacher@uva.nl)

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed here <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1359013>

© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

1982; Carmines and Stimson 1989; De Vries and Hobolt 2012), fear losing government (Schumacher *et al.* 2015) or fail to achieve their most important goal (Harmel and Janda 1994). It is likely that some of these changes are motivated from within; from politicians internally and externally critiquing the party leadership's course. Beyond some anecdotal evidence, we do not know whether poor performance motivates politicians to disagree with their party, and to support a more radical or a more moderate policy position. The goal of this article is to evaluate this relationship.

Why individual politicians? Even recent analyses of political parties (e.g. Allern and Saglie 2012; Ceron 2012; Meyer 2012) acknowledge that we do not know enough about politics within parties and that as a consequence we often treat intra-party politics as a 'black box' and assume parties to be unitary actors. Particularly on the question of why parties change position we lack a full understanding of the effect of intra-party politics on party position shifts. Harmel and Janda (1994) theorise that parties change position due to a failure to achieve goals such as office, votes or policy. Losing votes or getting stuck in opposition are examples of failures to achieve goals. In case of such losses, office-motivated politicians may lament the lack of interesting political offices; policy-motivated politicians may deplore their failure to implement their policy designs. We hypothesise in this article that these disappointed politicians are likely to claim that they are more radical or more moderate than their party. This might be because they believe (1) that their policy views differ from those of the party, (2) that disagreeing with your party is a good personal vote-seeking strategy, (3) that the party should adopt a more radical or more moderate profile, or (4) that they simply feel more loyal to their party when it is winning rather than losing.

What do we mean by performance? Winning or losing votes (electoral performance) and ensuring status as a government party (office performance) are performance measures that have been used to explain party position change (Budge 1994; Carmines and Stimson 1989; De Vries and Hobolt 2012; Harmel and Janda 1994; Riker 1982; Somer-Topcu 2009). We consider the direct effects of these performance measures on politicians' probability (a) to disagree with their party and (b) to be more radical or more moderate than their party. In addition, we apply findings from prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky 2007) to this case and ask whether loss aversion can explain politicians' response to poor performance. Finally, we analyse differences between elite and non-elite candidates.

We use data from the Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS) project (<http://www.comparativecandidates.org>), a post-election survey of election candidates. From this dataset we use 5614 surveys of politicians in 11 countries between 2005 and 2012. We use a self-placement question on the left–right scale and a party placement question on the same scale to develop our dependent variable, which indicates whether a politician is more moderate, more radical or at the same position as the party. We measure performance using the ParlGov

database (Döring and Manow 2016) and control for factors such as gender, age, electoral system and degree of party socialisation.

In the next sections we develop a range of hypotheses regarding performance and disagreement, we discuss our research design and data, and we present the empirical results. Finally, we draw general conclusions and suggest how they could inform future studies of party position-taking.

### **How party performance affects intra-party disagreement**

Like parties, it is common to think about politicians being motivated either by policy or by office (Carmines and Stimson 1986; Harmel and Janda 1994; Müller and Strøm 1999; Owens 2003; Riker 1982). In other words, politicians are motivated either by a desire to change policies with some specific agenda in mind or by instrumental needs such as money, privileges and prestige. Elections are means to realise (part of) the motivations of politicians. Parties need to do well in these elections to increase the chances for MPs to get elected (in proportional representation systems) and to increase the chances of getting into government and being able to distribute ministerial posts. A policy-seeking politician cares about parliamentary elections because more seats for the party mean more bargaining power over policy. An office-seeking politician cares about elections because of their instrumental rewards. In majoritarian systems vote gains and losses equal office gains and losses, but in non-majoritarian systems electoral performance relates poorly to the probability of joining a coalition government (Mattila and Raunio 2004). Often the largest party forms a government and a coalition is usually formed with parties that are ideologically proximate and small. Good electoral performance may even hinder participation in a coalition government. Regardless of the motivation of the politician, being part of a government party is great, either because it gives more leverage over policy or more access to interesting political offices. Like losing elections, losing government should be considered as a case of poor party performance. In sum, if we consider performance we should consider it in both the electoral and the governmental arena. We hypothesise that the performance of the party in both these arenas is important to the individual's political aspirations. The party's failure to perform should motivate politicians to try to alter the status quo in order to improve the chance that the party can ensure votes and/or office in the next election (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Harmel and Janda 1994; Riker 1982). One strategy to do this is changing the party's agenda and supporting a different position on the left–right dimension than the party leadership. Thus, we expect that:

H1: Poor party performance motivates politicians to disagree with their party.

One can also argue the reverse, i.e. that voters punish parties if they are internally divided. There is some evidence for this claim (e.g. Greene and Haber

2013). However, it has been suggested that candidates are punished for being too loyal to their party (Canes-Wrone *et al.* 2004; Carson *et al.* 2010). In Britain, some evidence supports this claim (Vivyan and Wagner 2012) and some evidence speaks against it (Pattie *et al.* 2009). In Denmark, there is weak evidence that candidates receive fewer personal votes if they disagree with their party (Elmelund-Praestekaer and Schumacher 2014). For our purposes two possibilities are relevant to consider. First, disagreement in a party is both cause and consequence of poor electoral performance. Parties in a state of anarchy are punished by voters, which in turn exacerbates the anarchy. Second, H1 is wrong; disagreement is only a cause – not a consequence – of poor electoral performance. In the analysis section we evaluate this option.

### **More moderate or more radical?**

But will politicians opt for a more radical or a more moderate position than their party? Individual politicians may support either direction because of their own policy convictions. A politician may support moderation for office-seeking or vote-seeking reasons. Generally, a more moderate position should translate into increases in vote share, because more voters cluster around the centre. Empirical research confirms that moderating the party position leads to vote gains (Ezrow 2005), although the electoral effect of moderation is delayed (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009) and confined to large (Calvo and Hellwig 2011) or mainstream parties (Adams *et al.* 2006). Also, a moderate position should increase the probability of joining a coalition government (Mattila and Raunio 2004; Warwick 1996) because in the centre there are more potential coalition partners to join forces with. These arguments suggest the following hypothesis:

H1a: Poor party performance motivates politicians to support a more moderate position than their party.

But politicians may also opt for more radical positions for vote- and office-seeking reasons. Some recent research suggests that radicalisation is a benign strategy for parties in a coalition government, because it highlights their distinctiveness from their coalition partners (Bawn and Somer-Topcu 2012; Fortunato and Stevenson 2013). Other work suggests that parties or politicians offer more radical positions when voters consider them to be less competent or integer than rivals: so-called valence-advantaged politicians – those who are perceived as competent and united – will challenge their rivals on their valence image. They moderate their ideological position and distinguish themselves by valence alone. The valence-disadvantaged candidate, however, will lose if he or she campaigns on valence, and therefore needs to campaign on issues. Because the valence-advantaged candidate occupies the centre, the disadvantaged candidate needs to radicalise in order to be distinctive (Groseclose 2001;

Macdonald and Rabinowitz 1998; Schofield and Sened 2005; Stone and Simas 2010; for alternative views see Adams and Merrill 2013; Clark 2009). This line of reasoning suggests the following hypothesis:

H1b: Poor party performance motivates politicians to support a more radical position than their party.

So far we have spoken of performance in general, but it is possible that party performance in terms of electoral outcomes and government participation affect politicians' propensity to disagree with their party to a different extent. Despite ample evidence that poor party performance prompts parties to change position, recent studies show that good performance in terms of government participation *also* can lead to party position change – at least Schumacher and co-authors (2015) demonstrate that first-time government parties are much more likely to change their election platform than parties with more experience. Against this backdrop it seems relevant to think of party performance in terms of not only vote share but also government participation when evaluating hypotheses 1 and 1a–b.

Hypotheses 1 and 1a–b assume that the possible effect of poor performance is linear, i.e. that better (or worse) party performance gradually decreases (or increases) the likelihood of politicians distancing themselves from their party. Prospect theory, however, claims that individuals are much more sensitive to losses than they are to gains (Kahneman and Tversky 2007; Tversky and Kahneman 1981). More precisely, loss aversion implies that individuals are more likely to take risks if a situation is presented in terms of losses than in terms of gains. A similar model of decision-making is presented in Bendor and co-authors' (2011) interpretation of Herbert Simon's model of bounded rationality (Simon 1956). They argue that parties are likely to change their strategy if their performance is below their aspiration level (i.e. their desired level of performance), and that parties stick to their strategy if performance equals or exceeds their aspiration level. Similar to prospect theory, the relevant implication is that change occurs in case of losses, but nothing happens in case of gains. For example, Ennser-Jedenastik and Schumacher (2015) demonstrate that while electoral losses predict a premature end to a party leaders' tenure, gains of a similar magnitude have no effect and thus do not necessarily improve the leaders' position. Hence, we expect that:

H2: Only poor – and not good – electoral performance motivates politicians to disagree with their party.

Finally, we find reason to believe that different segments of politicians within a party are affected differently by poor performance: clearly, politicians already elected to parliament or promoted to government are much more affected by electoral losses than candidates who have not been elected, as the former are about to lose their jobs, whereas the latter cannot lose a job they do not have. To put it differently, those politicians who are mere candidates may have lower

aspiration levels than politicians who have already won enough votes to ensure a seat in parliament (or even government). Thus, our final hypothesis reads:

- H3: Poor performance motivates elite politicians more than non-elite politicians to disagree with their party (by taking either a more radical or a more moderate position than their party).

## Data, design and methods

### Data

We use the Comparative Candidate Survey dataset (CCS 2013) that contains self-reported information on the background and the political preferences of parliamentary candidates. From this dataset we use 5614 surveys with candidates from 11 countries, 15 elections and 72 different political parties.<sup>1</sup> The dataset is based on post-election surveys. Since the surveys were conducted independently in each country, the administration, response rates and question formulation vary across the dataset. However, all country surveys adhere to a common core questionnaire ensuring identical wording in most questions. Moreover, all countries surveyed the entire candidate universe without sampling, and apart from Austria and Germany all countries conducted web surveys.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the CCS surveys share common procedures and questions allowing us to analyse the pooled data as one entity. Response rates are good for some countries (around or slightly above 50% in Canada, Denmark, Germany, Iceland and Switzerland) and acceptable (30–45%) in the rest, with Portugal (28%) at the lower end.<sup>3</sup> Non-response bias is difficult to assess since for obvious reasons we do not know much about the non-participating candidates. The biggest challenge of using the dataset, however, is that some questions were not asked in all countries – an issue we shall discuss in more detail below.

### Operationalisation of the dependent variables

Our hypotheses are concerned with (1) politicians in agreement or disagreement with their party, and (2) with the ‘direction’ of this disagreement. To measure the first dependent variable we compare politicians’ self-placement on the left–right scale and the politicians’ placement of their party on the same scale.<sup>4</sup> If the politician picks the same position for themselves and the party (code 0), the politician displays agreement with the party. If the politician picks a different position than for the party (code 1), the politician displays disagreement with the party. For the second dependent variable we coded ‘more radical’ if a politician took a position to the left/right of a party that was positioned on the left/right (left-wing positions are 0–4 and right-wing positions are 6–10). Likewise we coded ‘more moderate’ if a politician took a position closer to the middle of the distribution (5) than they placed the party. We did not include



the degree of disagreement with the party in our dependent variable. Our primary theoretical interest is the direction of disagreement, not the degree of disagreement. Also, few politicians (7%) place themselves more than two steps away from their party. Finally, we obtained similar results when running a negative binomial regression model with a dependent variable indicating the degree of disagreement.

What do our dependent variables measure? Candidates who place themselves in a different position than their party are motivated to convey a perception of disagreement with their party. We say ‘perception’ because there may not be an actual policy difference that motivates this disagreement. Also, it is irrelevant whether the politician misperceives the position of the party. What is relevant is whether in the politician’s experience they disagree with the party.

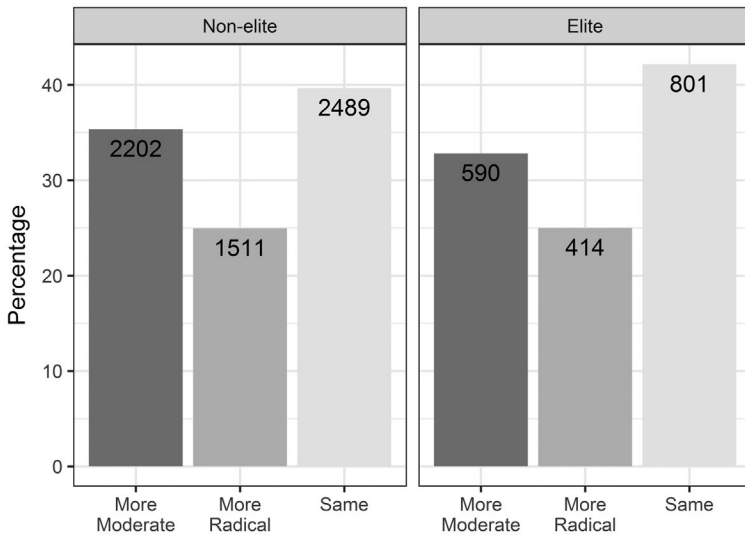
We use survey data because it is more valid and reliable than its alternatives. One such alternative is media reports of disagreement between politicians and their party. However, media reports are biased because (1) the disagreement might not be newsworthy (i.e. the disagreement is not new but a longstanding dispute) and because (2) there is a penalty for politicians to signal disagreement openly. Another option, legislative voting, is an excellent source of information for testing hypotheses about *parliamentary* party unity, and several studies report a relationship between unity and performance (Bergman *et al.* 2003; De Pauw and Martin 2008; Kam 2009; Sieberer 2006). However, legislative voting is probably not the best measure of a party’s general opinion structure, because many issues never make it onto the legislative agenda (Loewenberg 2008), and because there are severe costs associated with voting against the party (Carey and Shugart 1995). Moreover, roll-call data only informs us about the opinion structure at the parliamentary level of the party organisation and not in the party more broadly defined.

Figure 1 displays our second dependent variable, split between politicians with no chance to get elected (non-elite), and politicians with at least some chance of getting elected (elite), according to their own perception.<sup>5</sup> One-quarter of both groups chose a more radical position than their party while approximately one-third of both groups chose a more moderate position than their party. Hence, most politicians disagree with their party but there is hardly a systematic difference between elite and non-elite politicians.

### **Operationalisation of the independent variables**

We have proposed the following: (1) to split office and electoral performance, (2) to evaluate electoral gains and losses separately, and (3) to differentiate between elite and non-elite politicians. Table 1 lists all the variables we employ. Seat shares and government participation (after the election) are taken from the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow 2016).





**Figure 1.** Distribution of dependent variable by candidate type.

**Table 1.** Overview of performance variables.

Variable	Measurement
In opposition	0 = in government after election, 1 = in opposition after election
Change seats	Current seat share – Seat share previous parliamentary term
Seat gain	Change seats, with negative values set to 0
Seat loss	(Change seats, with positive values set to 0)*–1

By employing gains and losses in the same regression model as separate variables, the regression effects of both variables will refer to the same reference category that is the situation where a party neither gains nor loses.

### **Operationalisation of the control variables**

We added the following control variables: First, personal vote-seeking incentives may amplify the proposed effects of party performance. Some electoral systems foster these incentives more than others. To control for this we use an additive index of personal vote-seeking incentives in electoral systems (Farrell and McAllister 2006) which covers all countries in the CCS data. The index runs from 0 (no personal vote-seeking incentives) to 10 (strong personal vote-seeking incentives).<sup>6</sup> The index includes (1) the degree to which parties or voters control the ballot placement of candidates; (2) whether voters vote for lists or candidates; and (3) the size of the electoral district. Second, because parties put much effort into screening, training, educating, punishing and rewarding

candidates (King 1969), they are – to different degrees – socialised into their party. A candidate with a long track record in a party may be less likely to position themselves as ideologically distant from the party than a less experienced and less socialised candidate (King 1969). However, experienced candidates may also have more leeway to rebel. Tavits' (2009) analysis of legislative voting in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Poland documents that politicians with a strong local voter base are more likely to vote against their party in parliament. These parliamentarians act independently of their party because it boosts their local appeal and re-election chances, and because the party may need the votes such strong politicians attract in their region. Since national politicians with strong local power bases typically are experienced, we have no distinct expectation regarding the possible effect of experience, but we include four different variables to control for different kinds of party experience: (1) we use the question 'in what year did you join this party' and transform this into a 'years-of-membership' variable (to facilitate interpretation the variable is z-scored). (2) We construct an index from three questions gauging candidate experience as local, regional and national party office<sup>7</sup> (the variable is z-standardised). (3) We measure candidates' parliamentary experience (recoded to 0 = has never been in parliament and 1 = has been in parliament).<sup>8</sup> (4) To control for possible effects of a strong local power base we compile a variable on the basis of several questions on candidates' local careers in mayoral office, local or regional parliament, or government.<sup>9</sup> We sum the answers and to facilitate interpretation we also z-score them. To control for the fact that some parties are already very radical (or moderate) and therefore less likely to have politicians who take even more radical (moderate) positions, we have added a variable measuring the radicalism of the party. For this we took the absolute distance between the mean of the party position as estimated by the party's politicians and the middle of the scale.<sup>10</sup> Finally, we control for educational status – aggregated into three categories: (1) finished secondary school or lower, (2) finished tertiary education, and (3) finished university or higher).<sup>11</sup> Table 2 presents the descriptive information of our dependent and independent variables.

### **Statistical technique**

We perform three logistic regressions, one analysing disagreement (our first dependent variable) and two analysing taking more moderate and more radical positions (our second dependent variable), respectively. In all regressions the reference category is 'no disagreement'. We choose logistic regressions rather than a multinomial regression solution because the specific multilevel model we propose is not implemented in any statistical package. Also, contrasting 'more moderate' and 'more radical' to 'no disagreement' is mathematically the same

**Table 2.** Descriptives for dependent and independent variables.

Variable	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Disagreement	0.60	0.49	0	1
More moderate	0.37	0.48	0	1
More radical	0.46	0.50	0	1
In opposition	0.54	0.50	0	1
Change seats	-0.37	4.73	-14.29	17.00
Seat gain	1.49	2.84	0.00	17.00
Seat loss	1.86	2.96	0.00	14.29
Parliamentary experience	0.49	0.50	0	1
Worked for party	0.44	0.50	0	1
Education	2.53	0.68	1	3
Electoral system index	4.60	2.38	1.40	10.00
Years party member	-0.002	1.00	-1.20	4.50
Local experience	0.00	1.00	-0.53	13.13
Party radicalism	1.92	1.12	0.00	4.47

as a multinomial regression solution. To analyse our hypotheses we ran the two models listed below on the whole sample ( $n = 5614$ ), on just the group of non-elite politicians ( $n = 3524$ ), and on the group of elite politicians ( $n = 4201$ ).<sup>12</sup>

$$\Pr(Y) = \text{In opposition} + \text{change seats} + \text{controls} + \text{constant} \quad (1)$$

$$\Pr(Y) = \text{In opposition} + \text{seat gain} + \text{seat loss} + \text{controls} + \text{constant} \quad (2)$$

Our candidates are clustered within parties, which are clustered within countries. To control for this we choose a multilevel solution. We have a sufficient number of observations on the level of parties (80+), but we have only 11 countries – which is less than the recommended 20+ observations at a higher level (Meulemann 2002). Hence, we restrict the multilevel model to two levels: the individual level and the party level. Another data issue is the large number of missing observations.<sup>13</sup> Approximately 15–20% of the observations are missing on the individual political experience variables and the education variable. In multivariate analysis list-wise deletion aggravates the problem of missing values, reducing our sample size from 10,311 respondents to 5614. To evaluate the robustness of our results we re-analysed our results without the three most problematic variables. In these analyses we have 9688 observations. The results reported in Table A5 in the Online Appendix are very similar to the main analyses we will present in Table 3.

### **Do candidates disagree, radicalise or moderate in response to losses (H1, H1a–b)?**

We start by analysing the direct effects of poor performance (H1 + H1a–b) on the three dependent variables. We do this by evaluating the possible effects of performance in the domains of electoral outcome (i.e. change of seats) and in the domain of office (i.e. capture of office position) in turn (see Table 3). First,

**Table 3.** Odds ratios predicting disagreement, more moderate and more radical positions.

	Dependent variable:		
	Disagreement	Moderate	Radical
	(1)	(2)	(3)
In opposition	0.72* (0.10)	0.64* (0.15)	0.79* (0.12)
Change seats	0.97* (0.01)	0.96* (0.01)	0.98 (0.01)
Electoral system	1.04* (0.02)	1.05 (0.03)	1.03 (0.03)
Party work	1.08 (0.07)	0.96 (0.09)	1.12 (0.07)
Yrs member	0.96 (0.03)	0.93* (0.04)	0.98 (0.04)
Local experience	0.96 (0.03)	1.00 (0.04)	0.94* (0.03)
National experience	0.99 (0.06)	1.02 (0.09)	0.95 (0.07)
Tertiary ed	1.12 (0.10)	1.05 (0.14)	1.17 (0.12)
University	1.00 (0.09)	1.00 (0.12)	0.96 (0.10)
Party Radicalism	0.87* (0.04)	1.05 (0.07)	0.81* (0.05)
Constant	1.78* (0.16)	0.42* (0.24)	1.17 (0.20)
Observations	5614	3524	4201
Log likelihood	-3,689.77	-2,182.08	-2,817.34

Note: \* $p < 0.1$ .

we find that a change in the party's number of seats has a small, significant and negative effect on candidates' likelihood to disagree with their party (model 1, odds ratio (OR) = 0.97). This means that politicians in parties that lost seats (i.e. votes) display more disagreement with their party than politicians in parties that gained seats. This is fully in line with H1. Moreover, seat loss is associated with taking more moderate positions (model 2, OR = 0.96), not with taking more radical positions. This provides empirical support for H1a but not H1b. Second, we find that politicians of opposition parties are the *least* likely to disagree with their party's position (model 1, OR = 0.72). Also, on average opposition politicians are less likely to support more moderate positions (model 2, OR = 0.64) as well as more radical positions (model 3, OR = 0.79) compared to politicians of government parties. This finding partly rejects H1 because we expected politicians in poorly performing parties to be more eager to challenge their party's platform, by adopting either more moderate or more radical positions. Interestingly, and in line with existing findings at the party level: government parties change more than opposition parties (Schumacher *et al.* 2015) and politicians of government parties place themselves at more moderate and more radical positions than opposition politicians. In the domain of office performance our findings are inconclusive with regard to H1a and H1b as there

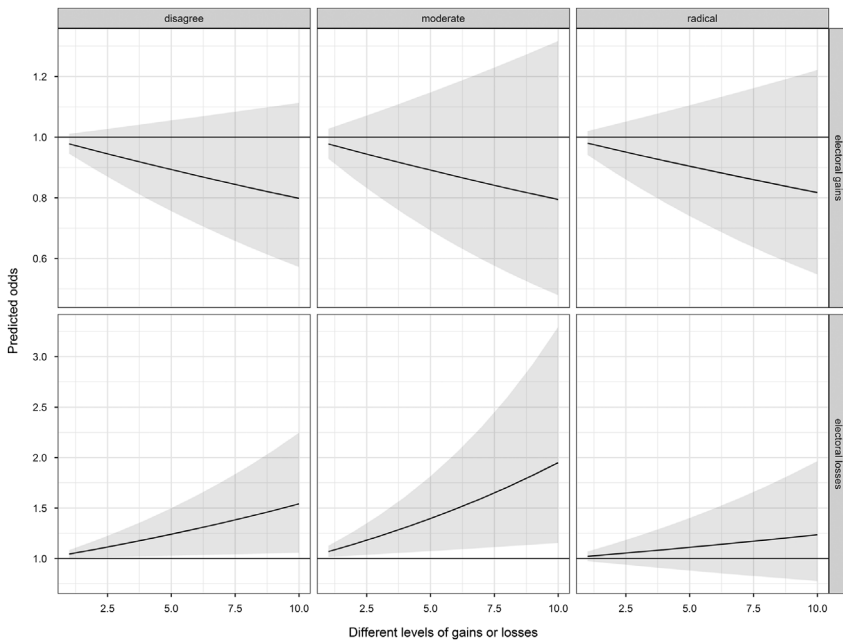
is no clear direction in the way office-gaining politicians position themselves vis-à-vis their parties. However, our results clearly show that it is important to distinguish between performance outcomes in terms of parliamentary seats and governmental office – and that our theoretical expectations primarily apply to the former type of performance.

As for the control variables in models 1–3, electoral systems with more personal vote-seeking incentives have more candidates disagreeing with their party, and radical parties are less likely to have candidates taking positions that are even more radical. Other effects are very small, inconsistent, or insignificant.

As mentioned in the theory section, what about the possibility that disagreement causes poor performance rather than the other way around? Other research demonstrates that party disunity prior to the elections explains electoral defeat (e.g. Greene and Haber 2013). It could be that disunity is both cause and consequence of poor electoral performance. Parties in a state of anarchy are punished by voters, which in turn exacerbates the anarchy. We cannot directly test this argument because our dependent variable is only measured *after* the election, not before. Alternatively, it could be that our interpretation of the correlation between party disunity after the elections and electoral performance is wrong. To evaluate this we restrict our sample to those parties that were going to gain seats in the election according to polls directly prior to the election.<sup>14</sup> For these cases there should be no correlation between party performance and individual disagreement. Even in these cases (see Table A1 in the Online Appendix) we found a consistent, positive relationship between poor electoral performance and disagreement. This suggests that disagreement also emerges in parties that were not about to lose elections. Since some of them eventually did lose seats in the elections, we can evaluate whether disagreement is produced by the defeat. The results in Table A1 are in line with this idea. In sum, disagreement does seem to be produced after elections, with the evidence from other analyses suggesting it is most likely that disagreement is both cause and consequence of electoral defeat.

## Does performance have a linear effect (H2)?

In the next set of regressions we kept the same model as above, but we split the change in seats variable in an electoral gains and an electoral losses variable (for table with regression results see Table B1 in the Online Appendix). With both gains and losses in the logistic regression analysis, we measure the effect sizes relative to parties that have no gains or losses (i.e. those that kept the same share of seats). Figure 2 displays the results, with each column representing output from one regression analysis. The top panel shows the effects of electoral gains in the three regression models. In all cases the 95% confidence interval is below and above 1, meaning that electoral gains have no effect on politicians' positioning vis-à-vis their party. The bottom panel displays the effects of electoral

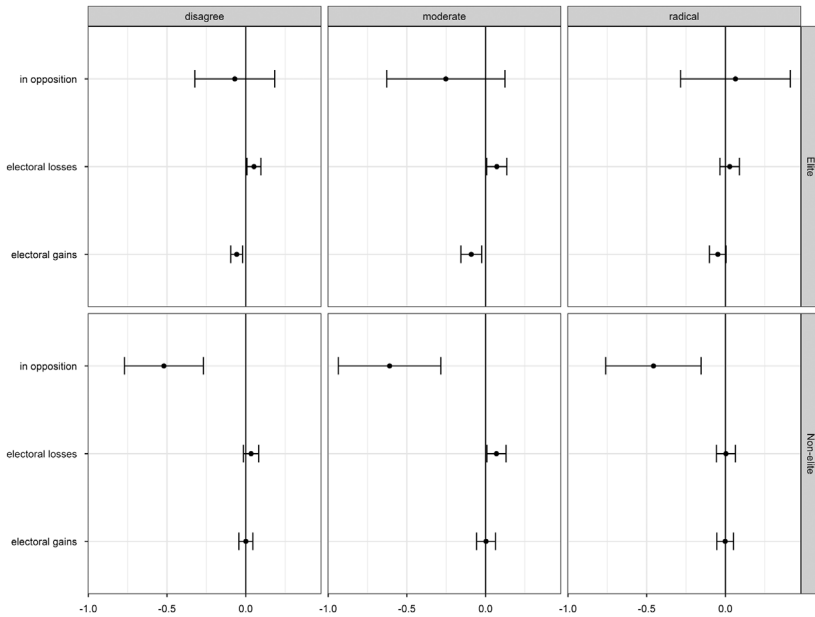


**Figure 2.** Odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals of effects of electoral gains and losses. Notes: Lines represent predicted odds at different levels of gains and losses. Grey areas represent 95% confidence intervals. The figure is based on three regression analyses, each column representing a single regression.

losses in the three regression models. In the first two models (with ‘disagreement’ and ‘more moderate’ as dependent variables) we find a significant and positive effect of losses. In the third case (i.e. ‘radical’) losses are insignificant. These results are parallel to the results of H1 described above and we can draw two conclusions: (1) electoral performance indeed does not have a linear effect, because only losses are significantly associated with politicians’ likelihood to disagree (as expected in H2) and (2) losses motivate politicians to take more moderate positions (as expected in H1a). To be precise, a politician of a party that lost 10% of its seats is twice as likely to take a more moderate position than their party compared to a politician of a party that did not lose seats.

### Is the effect of losses more pronounced with elite than non-elite candidates (H3)?

To evaluate whether the effects of electoral and office performance are more or less pronounced for elite than for non-elite politicians we re-ran the regression analyses reported in Figure 2 on a subset including only non-elite individuals and a subset including only elite individuals (for the results of all regression see Tables B2 and B3 in the Online Appendix). Figure 3 reports the main effects



**Figure 3.** Odds ratios and intervals of effects of electoral gains and losses for elite and non-elite politicians.

Notes: Dots represent marginal effect of losses and gains, bars represent 95% confidence intervals. The figure is based on six regression analyses; each box represents a single regression.

(dots) and the 95% confidence intervals (bars) of these re-analyses. We find that both elite and non-elite candidates are more likely to opt for more moderate positions than their parties in case of electoral losses. Elite candidates also become less likely to disagree and less likely to opt for a more moderate position in case of electoral gains, an effect we do not find for non-elite candidates. Office performance, interestingly, only has an effect in our analysis of non-elite candidates. We find a negative effect in all three analyses. This means that non-elite candidates in government parties disagree with their party and take both more radical and more moderate positions.

### Additional analyses

In this section we report a number of additional analyses that evaluate the robustness of our findings. Given space restrictions we limit ourselves here to the main conclusions of these robustness checks, and we have placed tables and figures in the [Online Appendix](#).

First, we evaluated whether gains and losses separately are linear predictors of disagreement. According to Kahneman and Tversky (2007) and Tversky and Kahneman (1981), the relationship between performance and risk-taking



follows an S-shaped distribution, with losses following a convex function and gains a concave one. This means that increasing losses are not associated with a similar decrease in agreement. Also, the increase in agreement from no gain (0%) to 1% of the vote is much higher than the increase in agreement resulting from a 1% increase in vote gain, from 9% to 10% of the vote. To evaluate this we added squared terms of electoral losses and gains to the regression analyses but none of the squared terms were significant (see Table A2 in [Online Appendix](#)). Thus, we find no support for a possible decreasing sensitivity to the performance of politicians.

Second, politicians may have different benchmarks for performance than the ones we use in our analysis. For office performance politicians may look to how parties have performed historically and thus it should matter whether the party is frequently in government or never in government. For electoral performance, politicians may not compare the party's last electoral results to the elections before the last one, but to the party's performance in opinion polls. In other words, they evaluate whether the party did better or worse than predicted by polls. Our analyses suggest that these alternative benchmarks have little effect. We find that only if parties perform worse than predicted by the polls are they more likely to opt for more radical positions than their parties (see Figure A3). All other relationships were insignificant. Along these lines we also evaluated whether being 'in office' prior to elections affects our results, rather than being 'in office' after the elections. We have added a variable indicating whether a party was in opposition before the election to our main model. It had a significant, negative effect ( $\beta = -0.28$ ,  $se = 0.12$ ). We performed a z-test to evaluate whether the latter effect significantly differs from the effect of being in opposition after the election ( $\beta = -0.21$ ,  $se = 0.11$ ). This produces a z-statistic of 1.5, forcing us to reject the alternative hypothesis of a difference in the effects of these coefficients. Being in opposition prior to the election has an effect, but this effect is *not larger* than the effect of being in opposition after the election. Moreover, controlling for a pre-election spell in opposition does not change our substantive conclusion regarding the effect of 'in opposition' after the election.

Furthermore we evaluated the effects of past party policy shifts (see Figure A3) and party organisation (see Table A4) and ran models to evaluate whether missing values influenced our result (see Table A5). Our main results did not change; furthermore, differences in party organisation and party policy shifts do not seem to explain politicians' disagreement with their party.

## Discussion

Table 4 summarises the main findings of this article. Surprisingly, the effects of office performance and electoral performance are quite different. We will now discuss these effects in turn.

**Table 4.** Overview of results.

	Effect of performance	Electoral performance	Office performance
H1	More disagreement	Accepted	Rejected
H1a	More moderate position-taking	Accepted	Rejected
H1b	More radical position-taking	Rejected	Rejected
H2	Only losses matter	Accepted	
H3	Differs for elite and non-elite politicians	Accepted	Accepted

First, poor electoral performance is associated with more moderate position-taking by the candidates surveyed in the Comparative Candidate Survey. This is in line with research which demonstrates that parties moderate their positions after electoral defeat (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Ezrow 2005). On the other hand, it is not the case that good performance explains the reverse: more radical position-taking. This suggests that loss aversion is at work: the responses to losses are stronger than the responses to gains. This also squares with earlier conclusions concerning the likelihood of party position change (Somer-Topcu 2009). Finally, we analysed whether the results differ if we split the sample between elite politicians and non-elite ones. In the analysis of electoral performance, we find clear differences between these two groups. Elite politicians are more responsive to electoral losses than the non-elite ones. This is to be expected because they suffer more from losing seats than the non-elite politicians, who have nothing or much less to lose. We add to the existing literature, that when parties moderate after electoral losses, the elite politicians push for this. In sum, our findings are in line with the party position literature and add to it by displaying deeper intra-party dynamics.

What about the effects of office performance? Here the results are very different than with electoral performance. In fact, we reject the hypothesis that poor office performance explains politicians' disagreement with their party (H1, H1a and H1b). Our study suggests the exact opposite: politicians are likely to describe themselves as more moderate and more radical than their party when they are in government compared to when they are in opposition. After digging deeper we found that primarily non-elite politicians are responsive to office. Non-elite candidates are both more radical and more moderate when in government. One potential explanation is that the non-elite politicians care less about office and more about policy than the elite politicians.<sup>15</sup> Except for Canada, all the countries in our sample have coalition governments or minority governments that need parliamentary support. This means that government parties need to find compromises (Sagarzazu and Klüver 2017). These compromises may dissatisfy politicians motivated by policy and in response they may be motivated to distance themselves from their party. In other words, the different motivations may explain the different findings regarding performance in office. Finally, our finding that politicians in government parties are dissatisfied with

the party's position matches Schumacher and co-authors' (2015) conclusion that government parties change more than opposition parties.

Our study demonstrates that pressures for change relate systematically to performance, although not always in ways expected a priori. Although we establish links between findings at the individual level and the party level, future works need to connect these two directly. Can rebellious politicians bring about party change and, if so, under what conditions? Ideally such an analysis is extended with data on media reports about disagreement and legislative voting behaviour. After all, voicing disagreement in a survey is one thing, voting against the party line in parliament is another. Still, intra-party change may come about by a silent route, with politicians working their way through internal committees to voice their disagreement, or it may come about by a noisy route, with politicians openly rebelling against the party line. A third option is that intra-party change is simply a top-down process steered by the party leader(ship). Step by step we are breaking open the black box of intra-party politics but many questions regarding the motivations of politicians and what produces incentives to act remain open. As such, whether politicians can really influence the party leadership and change the party's agenda remains a question open for debate.

## Notes

1. We use Canada 2008, Denmark 2011, Finland 2007 and 2011, Germany 2005 and 2009, Greece 2007, Iceland 2011, Netherlands 2006, Norway 2009, Portugal 2009 and 2011, Sweden 2010, and Switzerland 2007 and 2011. Australia, Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Hungary, Ireland and Romania dropped out of our analysis because some questions were not reported. The data is available at <http://www.comparativecandidates.org/>.
2. In three countries the online surveys were supplemented by postal, telephone, or face-to-face interviews in second rounds.
3. Only one party (the Dutch Freedom Party) refused to cooperate.
4. Questions C3 'In politics, people sometimes talk about the "left" and the "right". Where would you place your own views on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means the most left-wing and 10 means the most right-wing?' ( $n = 10.618$ ) and C3a 'Using the same scale, where would you place your party?' ( $n = 9.245$ ).
5. The candidates were asked to think back and answer the following question: 'In the beginning of the campaign, how did you evaluate your chances to win the mandate?' We aggregated response categories to: (0) I thought I could not win, (1) I thought it was an open race/I thought I could not lose. The CCS questionnaire also includes a variable indicating whether candidates were elected or not. This variable is only recorded in a few countries, and thus much is missing. The answers are in fact based on the self-reports of politicians using similar questions as we do.
6. Farrell and McAllister (2006) provide scores for all our countries except Finland. Based on the CSES data we scored Finland as 7.1.
7. A8a-c 'Please indicate for how many years you have held local/regional/national party office: Never (0), 1–2 years (1), 3–4 years (2) and more than 4 years (3).

In some countries respondents were asked to put down the exact number of years. To facilitate comparability we apply the ordinal scale in all countries.

8. A4a1–6 ‘In which years have you stood as a candidate for the [national parliament]’, A4b1–6 ‘and have you been elected in those years?’, and A9 g ‘Years served as member of the national parliament’. Because of missing variables in the series A4a1–6, A4b1–6 and A9g, we had to recode our parliamentary experience variable into a dummy.
9. A9a ‘Years served as mayor’, A9b ‘Years served as member of local government’, A9c ‘Years served as member of regional government’, A9e ‘Years served as member of a local assembly’, and A9f ‘Years served as member of a regional assembly’. Respondents could answer never (0), 1–2 years (1), 3–4 years (2) and more than 4 years (3).
10. We also use this variable to account for the fact that centrist parties are less likely to have politicians who take more moderate positions.
11. E6a ‘What is your level of education?’ Original categories: ‘primary not completed’, ‘completed primary’, ‘secondary completed’ (recoded as 1), ‘post-secondary trade/vocational school’, ‘university not completed’ (recoded as 2), ‘university completed’ (recoded as 3).
12. We use a split sample solution between elite and non-elite politicians instead of modelling an interaction term. We do this because the results of the split samples are easier to present than the results of a regression model including three two-way interactions. Similar results are obtained if we choose the interaction term solution.
13. In most cases the Comparative Candidate Survey indicates that questions were not asked.
14. We collected a dataset with opinion polls from various countries using Wikipedia.
15. This may be because they genuinely care more for policy, or because their current situation does not allow much fantasising about office.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the editors of *West European Politics* and the three anonymous reviewers for their excellent comments.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

*Gijs Schumacher* is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam. His research focuses on representation, intra-party politics, leadership, populism, personality and emotion. His publications include articles in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *Political Psychology* and the *European Journal of Political Research* [[g.schumacher@uva.nl](mailto:g.schumacher@uva.nl)].

*Christian Elmelund-Præstekær* is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Political Science and Public Management at the University of Southern Denmark. His

research is in the areas of political communication, social policy reform and political parties. His publications include articles in the *European Journal of Communication*, *Representation*, *Party Politics* and the *International Journal of Press/Politics* [cel@sdu.dk]

## ORCID

Gijs Schumacher  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6503-4514>

Christian Elmelund-Præstekær  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5095-8917>

## References

- Adams, James, and Samuel Merrill (2013). 'Policy-seeking Candidates Who Value the Valence Attributes of the Winner', *Public Choice*, 155:1–2, 139–161.
- Adams, James, and Zeynep Somer-Topcu (2009). 'Moderate Now, Win Votes Later: The Electoral Consequences of Parties' Policy Shifts in 25 Postwar Democracies', *Journal of Politics*, 71:2, 678–692.
- Adams, James, Michael Clark, Lawrence Ezrow, and Garrett Glasgow (2006). 'Are Niche Parties Fundamentally Different from Mainstream Parties? The Causes and the Electoral Consequences of Western European Parties' Policy Shifts, 1976–1998', *American Journal of Political Science*, 50:3, 513–529.
- Allern, Elin H., and Jo Saglie (2012). 'Inside the Black Box: Parties as Multi-Level Organisations in a Unitary State', *West European Politics*, 35:5, 947–970.
- Bawn, Kathleen, and Zeynep Somer-Topcu (2012). 'Government versus Opposition at the Polls: How Governing Status Affects the Impact of Policy Positions', *American Journal of Political Science*, 56:2, 433–446.
- Bendor, Jonathan, Daniel Diermeier, David A. Siegel, and Michael M. Ting (2011). *A Behavioral Theory of Elections*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Budge, Ian (1994). 'A New Spatial Theory of Party Competition: Uncertainty, Ideology and Policy Equilibria Viewed Comparatively and Temporally', *British Journal of Political Science*, 24:04, 443–467.
- Calvo, Ernesto, and Timothy Hellwig (2011). 'Centripetal and Centrifugal Incentives under Different Electoral Systems', *American Journal of Political Science*, 55:1, 27–41.
- Canes-Wrone, Brandice, David W. Brady, and John F. Cogan (2004). 'Out of Step, out of Office: Electoral Accountability and House Members' Voting', *American Political Science Review*, 96:1, 127–140.
- Carey, John M., and Matthew S. Shugart (1995). 'Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Ordering of Electoral Formulas', *Electoral Studies*, 14:4, 417–439.
- Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson (1986). 'On the Structure and Sequence of Issue Evolution', *American Political Science Review*, 80:03, 901–920.
- Carmines, Edward G., and James A. Stimson (1989). *Issue Evolution. Race and the Transformation of American Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Carson, Jamie L., Gregory Koger, Matthew J. Lebo, and Everett Young (2010). 'The Electoral Costs of Party Loyalty in Congress', *American Journal of Political Science*, 54:3, 598–616.
- CCS. (2013). *Comparative Candidates Survey – 2005–2012 [Dataset – Cumulative File]*. Lausanne, Switzerland: Distributed by FORS.
- Ceron, Andrea (2012). 'Bounded Oligarchy: How and When Factions Constrain Leaders in Party', *Electoral Studies*, 31:4, 689–701.

- Clark, Michael (2009). 'Valence and Electoral Outcomes in Western Europe, 1976–1998', *Electoral Studies*, 28:1, 111–122.
- De Vries, Catherine E., and Sara Binzer Hobolt (2012). 'When Dimensions Collide: The Electoral Success of Issue Entrepreneurs', *European Union Politics*, 13:2, 246–268.
- Döring, Holger, and Philip Manow (2016). 'Parliaments and Governments Database (ParlGov): Information on Parties, Elections and Cabinets in Modern Democracies. Development version', *ParlGov*.
- Elmelund-Praestekaer, Christian, and Gijs Schumacher (2014). 'Én for Alle Og Alle for én? Betingelser for Og Effekter Af Partiintern Uenighed Blandt Folketingskandidaterne I 2011', *Politica*, 46:3, 296–322.
- Ennsner-Jedenastik, Laurenz, and Gijs Schumacher (2015). 'Why Some Leaders Die Hard (and Others Don't): Party Goals, Party Institutions, and How They Interact', in William Cross and Jean Benoit Pilet (eds.), *The Politics of Party Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 107–127.
- Ezrow, Lawrence (2005). 'Are Moderate Parties Rewarded in Multiparty Systems? A Pooled Analysis of Western European Elections, 1984–1998', *European Journal of Political Research*, 44:6, 881–898.
- Farrell, David M., and Ian Mcallister (2006). 'Voter Satisfaction and Electoral Systems: Does Preferential Voting in Candidate-Centred Systems Make a Difference?', *European Journal of Political Research*, 45:5, 723–749.
- Fortunato, David, and Randolph T. Stevenson (2013). 'Perceptions of Partisan Ideologies: The Effect of Coalition Participation', *American Journal of Political Science*, 57:2, 459–477.
- Greene, Zachary D., and Mathias Haber (2013). 'The Consequences of Appearing Divided: An Analysis of Party Evaluations and Vote Choice', *Electoral Studies*, 37, 15–27.
- Groseclose, Tim (2001). 'A Model of Candidate Location When One Candidate Has a Valence Advantage', *American Journal of Political Science*, 45:4, 862–886.
- Harmel, Robert, and Kenneth Janda (1994). 'An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 6:3, 259–287.
- Kahneman, Daniel, and Amos Tversky (2007). 'Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk', *Econometrica*, 47:2, 263–292.
- Kam, Christopher J. (2009). *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- King, Anthony (1969). 'Political Parties in Western Democracies: Some Sceptical Reflections', *Polity*, 2:2, 111–141.
- Loewenberg, Gerhard (2008). 'The Contribution of Comparative Research to Measuring the Policy Preferences of Legislators', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 33:4, 501–510.
- Macdonald, Stuart Elaine, and George Rabinowitz (1998). 'Solving the Paradox of Nonconvergence: Valence, Position, and Direction in Democratic Politics', *Electoral Studies*, 17:3, 281–300.
- Mattila, Mikko, and Tapio Raunio (2004). 'Does Winning Pay? Electoral Success and Government Formation in 15 West European Countries', *European Journal of Political Research*, 43:2, 263–285.
- Meulemann, Heiner (2002). *Social Capital in Europe: Similarity of Countries and Diversity of People? Multi-Level Analyses of the European Social Survey*. Leiden: Brill.
- Meyer, Thomas M. (2012). 'Dropping the Unitary Actor Assumption. the Impact of Intra-Party Delegation of Coalition Governance', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 24:4, 485–506.
- Müller, Wolfgang C., and Kaare Strøm (1999). *Policy, Office or Votes? How Political Parties in Europe Make Hard Decisions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



- Owens, John E. (2003). 'Part 1: Cohesion,' *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 9:4, 12–40.
- Pattie, Charles, Edward Fieldhouse, and R. J. Johnston (2009). 'The Price of Conscience: The Electoral Correlates and Consequences of Free Votes and Rebellions in the British House of Commons, 1987–92,' *British Journal of Political Science*, 24:3, 359.
- de Pauw, Sam, and Shane Martin (2008). 'Legislative Party Discipline and Cohesion in Comparative Perspective,' in Daniela Giannetti and Kenneth Benoit (eds.), *Intra-Party Politics and Coalition Governments*. Abingdon: Routledge, 103–120.
- Riker, William B. (1982). *Liberalism against Populism. A Confrontation between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press.
- Sagarzazu, Iñaki, and Heike Klüver (2017). 'Coalition Governments and Party Competition: Political Communication Strategies of Coalition Parties,' *Political Science Research and Methods*, 5:02, 333–349.
- Schofield, Norman, and Itai Sened (2005). 'Modeling the Interaction of Parties, Activists and Voters: Why is the Political Center So Empty?,' *European Journal of Political Research*, 44:3, 355–390.
- Schumacher, Gijs, Marc van de Wardt, Barbara Vis, and Michael Baggesen Klitgaard (2015). 'How Aspiration to Office Conditions the Impact of Government Participation on Party Platform Change,' *American Journal of Political Science*, 59:4, 1040–1054.
- Sieberer, Ulrich (2006). 'Party Unity in Parliamentary Democracies: A Comparative Analysis,' *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 12:2, 150–178.
- Simon, Herbert A. (1956). 'Rational Choice and the Structure of the Environment,' *Psychological Review*, 63:2, 129–138.
- Somer-Topcu, Zeynep (2009). 'Timely Decisions: The Effects of past National Elections on Party Policy Change,' *Journal of Politics*, 71:1, 238–248.
- Stone, Walter J., and Elizabeth N. Simas (2010). 'Candidate Valence and Ideological Positions in U.S. House Elections,' *American Journal of Political Science*, 54:2, 371–388.
- Strøm, Kaare, Wolfgang C. Müller, Torbjörn Bergman, and Torbjörn Bergman (2003). 'Democratic Delegation and Accountability: Cross-National Pattern,' in Torbjörn Bergman, Wolfgang C. Müller and Kaare Strøm (eds.), *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 109–220.
- Tavits, Margit (2009). 'The Making of Mavericks: Local Loyalties and Party Defection,' *Comparative Political Studies*, 42:6, 793–815.
- Tversky, Amos, and Daniel Kahneman (1981). 'The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice,' *Science*, 211:4481, 453–458.
- Vivyan, Nick, and Markus Wagner (2012). 'Do Voters Reward Rebellion? The Electoral Accountability of MPs in Britain,' *European Journal of Political Research*, 51:2, 235–264.
- Warwick, Paul V. (1996). 'Coalition Government Membership in West European Parliamentary Democracies,' *British Journal of Political Science*, 26:04, 471–499.