Annex: Case Studies

1. United Kingdom

1.1 Labour Party

Background

When the British Labour Party came to power by a stunning electoral victory in 1945, it immediately pursued two major programs. One was the creation of an encompassing welfare state, based on the Beveridge Report, and the other was the nationalization of the 'commanding heights' of the British economy such as the railways, electricity, coal and gas, iron and steel, telecommunications, and, at least formally, the Bank of England. Even though this demonstrates that socialist ideas remained strong within the party, waning ideological fervor and public skepticism about the benefits of further nationalizations in the 1950s led Labour to build their economic policy around a less interventionist approach, namely Keynesian demand management. The famous Clause IV which called for the public ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange was retained, but Labour's real aim for the next 25 years was the achievement of full employment and social security through a Keynesian welfare state (Glennerster 1995: 98-121; Hall 1986: 70-80).

The Labour governments under Harold Wilson in the 1960s and 1970s expanded welfare programs and – like their conservative counterparts – supplemented their Keynesian approach by incomes policies to contain inflation. Unlike the Tories, Labour could hope to take advantage of its close ties to the unions to obtain voluntary wage restraint in exchange for union-friendly policies. This worked for some time, but as the demand-side policy proved more and more inadequate to deal with stagflation and the looming sterling crisis, the new Prime Minister James Callaghan conceded the failure of Keynesian policies to cure Britain's economic malaise. This 'reluctant conversion to monetarism' by the party leadership widened the already deep rifts within the party, whose more and more radicalized activists wanted to stick to the pledges about industrial democracy, economic planning and welfare expansion made in 'Labour's Programme 1973' (Kavanagh 1990: 160-167). The infighting finally escalated when a new round of proposed wage stops infuriated the unions and led to the 'winter of discontent' and electoral defeat in 1979 (Butler/Kavanagh 1980).

1979-1983

The next four years witnessed a bitterly fought factional battle between the party's left and right wings. While the right wing, severely weakened by the 1979 election, saw no alternative to the policies followed in the late 1970s, the 'hard left', led by the charismatic Tony Benn, blamed the former government's betrayal of socialist values for Labour's relegation to opposition. The advance of the Left resulted in the defection of some of the Right's most popular members to the Social Democratic Party (SDP), thereby further weakening the party's right wing. After Michael Foot, a member of the moderate left, became party leader in 1981, the 'Bennites' pushed for a further turn to the left. Although they did not succeed in taking control over the party, the Left's strength at the rank-and-file level gave it considerable influence over the ideological direction of the party (Shaw 1994a: 2-15). Hence, the 1983 manifesto, which was the most left-wing for many years, emphasized nationalizations, industrial democracy and economic planning and promised to bring about "a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families" (Labour Party 1983). This program proved much too radical for the electorate and resulted in Labour's worst electoral result since 1918 (Shaw 1994a: 23-28; Heath et al. 2001: 82-100).

How can Labour's electorally disastrous move to the left be explained? Although a faction of the Labour Party was driven by ideological zeal, this faction's success and Labour's resulting movement to the left originated from office considerations. "The left of the party argued that the Labour government had failed to deliver the goods for its working-class supporters" (Heath et al. 2001: 82) and therefore blamed the 1979 election defeat on Labour's move to the right under Callaghan. The logical result of the party's dissatisfaction was a swing back to the left. The magnitude of this shift was quite large as the party's institutional rules favored the 'Bennites', and as the resulting defection of many right-wingers strengthened the left wing even further. Finally, office considerations also put an end to Labour's radicalization, when the party's socialist stance led to a devastating defeat in 1983.

1983-1997

The election of Neil Kinnock as the new party leader marked the starting point of a transformational process that more than a decade later resulted in the rebranding of the party as 'New Labour'. The electoral disappointments of 1983, 1987 and 1992 served as catalysts for this 'great transformation' (Seyd 1993; Heffernan 2001: 65-84). In the first years of his leadership, Kinnock and Shadow Chancellor Roy Hattersley cautiously managed to tone

down many of Labour's policy commitments such as the calls for public ownership and industrial democracy. Nevertheless, the 'hard left' within the party remained strong and inhibited a keener renunciation of socialist principles. For all its softened rhetoric and image, Labour was still not trusted by the voters and suffered another shattering defeat at the polls in 1987 (Shaw 1994a: 41-52, 81-84). This deeply shocked the whole party and led the leadership to initiate a comprehensive Policy Review. The whole reform process was facilitated by the demise of the 'hard left' which was demonstrated when Benn in his 1988 bid for the party leadership was easily defeated by Kinnock. After more than a decade in opposition many party members were ultimately willing to sacrifice deeply held beliefs to put an end to Thatcherism (Seyd 1993: 81-83; Shaw 1994b: 162-163). Thus, the Policy Review marked the revision of many until then almost sacrosanct policies: public ownership ceased to be a priority, market forces were openly embraced, emphasis shifted from collective rights for unions to individual workers' rights and spending commitments were reduced (Labour Party 1989, 1992).

Despite all these changes and a pre-election lead in some polls, Labour suffered its fourth consecutive defeat in the 1992 election. The newly elected party leader John Smith chose a cautious approach and avoided further major changes, but when he surprisingly died in 1994 his successor Tony Blair without delay continued the modernization of the party. Blair as well as Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown blamed Labour's insufficient modernization for the last electoral defeat and, thus, decided to go much further than the former leadership (Thorpe 2008: 236-255). Clause IV of Labour's constitution was replaced by a much vaguer commitment to democratic socialism. In addition to this rather symbolic gesture, Labour now explicitly rejected Keynesianism, accepted low inflation as a cornerstone of its macroeconomic policy and abandoned its previous tax and spend commitments. Furthermore, Blair ended the special relationship with the unions, declaring to treat them "the same way Labour treated business" (Blair quoted by Gould 2011: 211). The electoral aim of these changes was to reach out beyond Old Labour's traditional base and to attract the expanding middle classes (Heath et al. 2001: 105; Driver 2011: 100-101). Thus, fundamentally changed and rebranded as 'New Labour' the party won in a landslide in 1997, returning to power after almost two decades in opposition.

The party's 'great transformation' is perfectly in line with the office hypothesis. As a whole, it illustrates the importance of cumulative electoral shocks as "Labour did not alter its appeal immediately on the morrow of defeat in June 1983 nor in April 1992; it did so over time as each successive external shock was registered internally" (Heffernan 2001: 93) by a more and

more cohesive party. Moreover, the extent of programmatic changes increased and the speed of the party's transformation accelerated with each further defeat. With each additional year of Thatcherism, an increasing number of "people in the party faced up to the dilemma of reconciling deeply held beliefs and the need to win power by opting for the latter" (Seyd 1993: 83).

1997-2010

In office, Labour first stuck to its promises of spending restraint to prove its fiscal credibility. This was seen as absolutely necessary by the party leadership as it feared nothing more than being portrayed as the old 'big spending' party by its opponents. Moreover, the party for the same reason even followed a strategy of 'credit avoidance' by obfuscating spending increases directed at the poor (Annesley/Gamble 2004). When the public dissatisfaction with public services like the NHS grew larger and larger the party reacted by considerable spending increases on health care. These policies, which were partly financed by what the opposition called 'stealth taxes', were immensely popular with the electorate and could, therefore, hardly be criticized by the conservative opposition. Furthermore, Labour's initially gained fiscal credibility in connection with the strong economy and the Conservatives inability to appeal to the voters (see below) allowed the next Labour governments to follow more expansive budgets. Like their conservative predecessors they favored to introduce popular measures in the run-up to general elections, even when fiscal policy experts advised against such measures (Zohlnhöfer 2007b: 1127).

The reaction of the Labour government to the global financial crisis was also in line with the office hypothesis. The Keynesian rescue package of 2009 was seen as economically as well as electorally necessary, since an imploding economy would have been blamed on the government. Subsequently, the Treasury feared that the stimulus would put too large a burden on public debt and, thus, pressured to start deficit reduction by cutting spending as soon as possible. Despite these warnings, the party leadership under Brown played down the fiscal burden and refused to give details about future spending cuts. The Brown administration confined itself to admit that "after 2011 tough spending cuts would be necessary, in other words, after the general election" (Kickert 2012: 173). Though this strategy failed in the end, it is another illustration of the extremely strong impact of office and vote considerations on New Labour's policies.

Summary

All in all, it can be concluded that while vote- and policy-seeking played a role in the changes of the 1970s and early 1980s, the 'great transformation' of the party afterwards was primarily driven by the will to regain office. The massive shift to the left from 1979 to 1983 was an (electorally devastating) reaction to the 1979 election, but also resulted from the strength of socialist beliefs within party. In contrast, the electoral defeats of 1983, 1987 and 1992 strengthened the willingness of the party leadership to move the party back to the center, an undertaking initially resisted by the rank and file. With each disappointing election this resistance waned and facilitated the reformers' task. The influence of pollsters and the importance of vote-seeking considerations for Labour's policy changes, especially under Blair (Heath et al. 2001; Gould 2011), demonstrate the explanatory power of the office hypothesis for this period. The same is true for Labour governments' policies from 1997 to 2010, which, at times, gave the impression of being part of a never-ending election campaign (Riddell 2001).

1.2 Conservative Party

Background

Since the beginning of the 20th century the British Conservatives experienced a struggle between market-liberals and advocates of active government and welfare for the control over the party. The stunning defeat in the 1945 election and the popularity of Labour's welfare reforms led the Conservatives to take a moderate stance. For the next few decades the party was dominated by 'One Nation Conservatives' like Rab Butler and Harold Macmillan who emphasized market forces but accepted the welfare state, an active role of the state in the economy and even most of Labour's nationalizations (Kavanagh 1990: 38-57). The party's move to the center is best illustrated by the term 'Butskellism' which was coined to describe how much the economic policies of Conservative Chancellor Rab Butler resembled the policies of his Labour predecessor Hugh Gaitskell.

Given the three consecutive electoral successes in 1951, 1955 and 1959 and the recovery of the British economy, incentives to change course remained weak. So it was not until the Tories lost power after 13 years in office and the election of Edward Heath as party leader that more market-liberal ideas gained momentum. Running on a platform that promised a tight rein on fiscal and monetary policy and marked in many points a clear break with the post-war consensus, the party won the 1970 election and regained office. By reducing taxes, cutting

spending and introducing new legislation on the unions the Heath government at first stuck to its promises but when unemployment rose above one million in 1972 the government performed a series of spectacular U-turns. A Keynesian stimulus package was initiated, struggling companies rescued by taxpayers' money and, later on, statutory wage controls introduced to fight inflation (Hall 1986: 80-93). While the stimulus led to a short-term boom, the wage controls resulted in an open conflict with the miners' union which ultimately brought down the Conservative government in the 1974 elections. So the U-turn in the end did not pay out for the party which by this time had lost its self-image as the 'natural party of government' (Butler/Kavanagh 1980: 60).

Nevertheless, the U-turn as well as the previous programmatic adjustments demonstrate the high importance of office considerations within the Conservative Party in the postwar period. Especially the Tories' significant move to the center after the crushing defeat in the 1945 election is perfectly in line with the office hypothesis (Crewe/Searing 1988: 378).

1974-1979

The party was still in a "state of shock" (King 1981: 58), when Heath who had lost three out of four elections was challenged by Margaret Thatcher for the party leadership. Thatcher openly criticized the British postwar consensus and embraced a laissez-faire approach to the economy, but her success in the race for the leadership was not so much a victory for her beliefs, as a result of dissatisfaction with her luckless predecessor: "Because she was the only serious candidate to oppose Mr. Heath it was necessary for MPs to vote for her if they wanted a change. This was a decisive consideration" (Butler/Kavanagh 1980: 62). Many go even further by suggesting that Thatcher "was elected leader of the Conservative party in February, 1975 not because she held those views, but largely despite the fact that she held them" (King 1985: 97).[1] Not the attraction of Thatcher's radical ideas but sheer dissatisfaction with Heath and, thus, office considerations laid the first corner stone for the party's turn to Thatcherism (cf. Crewe/Searing 1988: 371-372; Gamble 1994: 88-92; Blake 2010: 317-321)., as even close allies of Thatcher admit (Lawson 1992: 13).

Although many in the Conservative Party doubted the electoral wisdom of Thatcher's market-liberal and monetarist convictions, the party – being accustomed to support an authoritative leadership – more or less reluctantly united behind its new leader. Moreover, while Thatcher's rhetoric remained quite radical, the party's policy proposals on issues like incomes policy

[1] Heath refused to step down as party leader and the most promising candidates, who represented rather moderate policy positions, were loyal to Heath and, thus, refused to openly challenge him for the leadership (Gamble 1994: 90).

were more ambiguous. This was, on the one hand, a result of the influence of the still powerful 'one nation' conservatives, but followed, on the other hand, from the fact that Thatcher's "instincts and intellect pulled her to the right, but her assessment […] of what was politically acceptable pulled her another way" (Butler/Kavanagh 1980: 83).

Nevertheless, the Tories' market-liberal agenda remained rather unpopular with the electorate (Crewe/Searing 1988: 372-378). Thus, it was mainly external events that helped the Conservatives to garner support. First, the sterling crisis and Callaghan's renunciation of Keynesianism discredited Labour's economic policies. Next, Labour failed to call an early election in 1978 that would probably have ended in a Tory defeat. Finally, the 'winter of discontent' disproved Labour's ability to control the unpopular unions and enabled the Conservatives to benefit from the exploding public resentment over the strikes by hardening their already critical position towards the trade unions (Butler/Kavanagh 1980: 85; Gamble 1994: 103-104). Taking advantage of Labour's failures and mistakes, the Tories campaigned on a conspicuously watered down Thatcherite agenda in 1979. To regain office the party even accepted to honor the proposals of the 'Clegg Commission' concerning wage rises in the public sector – a clear sign that Thatcher, as one of her closest ministerial colleagues later open-heartedly admitted, "wanted to win that election as if there was no tomorrow" (Keegan 1985: 110).

In sum, while policy considerations were utterly important for Thatcher and her followers, the Conservative party adopted Margaret Thatcher – and, thus, as it turned out also Thatcherism – mainly for office reasons as she was the only alternative to the party's previous leader Edward Heath who had lost three out of the last four elections and had left the party "in a state of trauma" (Kavanagh 1997: 68) after the two electoral defeats of 1974. Even after Thatcher's advancement to the party leadership, the party's support for her policies depended highly on her electoral fortune. In other words, "everyone accepted that she was leader, at least until she lost an election" (Butler/Kavanagh 1980: 69). At the same time, the Thatcherites – in line with the office hypothesis – accepted programmatic compromises on several issues to boost the party's chances at the ballot boxes.

1979-1997

By implementing the proposed monetary and fiscal policies to curb public deficits and to control inflation, the Thatcher government soon ran into big trouble. The recession, worsened if not provoked by government policies, was deeper than expected and, as a result, unemployment skyrocketed in the early 1980s. Public dissatisfaction with the government

grew stronger and stronger, while the economy showed no signs of recovery (Hall 1986: 100-105). At this point, the 'wets' in the Cabinet and many party members demanded to ease the austerity measures (see e.g. Gilmour 1992). Thatcher, though, was not for turning and reacted by sacking some of her sharpest critics and, against the request of over 300 economists, by clinging to the restrictive policies. Again events turned in her favor. The victory in the Falklands War boosted the government's popularity, the British economy profited from the strong world economy after 1982 and Labour was shattered by the formation of the SDP. But the Conservatives also secured their reelection by easing austerity measures and announcing tax cuts in the run-up to the 1983 election. Thus, Thatcher's Conservatives easily defeated the divided opposition and the intra-party critics largely muted. Encouraged by the electoral success, the party subsequently followed a clearly Thatcherite agenda but tried to avoid highly unpopular measures like blatant welfare cuts (Boix 1998: 192-195). Moreover, the government deliberately designed its austerity policies in a way to avoid blame (Zohlnhöfer 2007b: 1123-1124).

How central vote-seeking considerations were within the party is further demonstrated by the party's coup against Thatcher in 1990 which largely resulted from fears of losing office in the looming election. As Thatcher was not willing to moderate unpopular policy measures, especially the odious 'poll tax', many in the party "believed that she had become an electoral liability and that the party would not win another election under her" (Gamble 1994: 137). Thatcher's replacement by John Major and the subsequent repeal of the poll tax were, from an office perspective, just logical consequences of the party's (and Thatcher's) collapse of support in the opinion polls. Under Major the party adopted a more benign tone, but did not really turn away from Thatcherite policies (Dorey 1999). Whereas the Conservatives were able to win the 1992 election in an uphill battle by fighting the ongoing recession with popular tax reductions, factional rifts within the party about Europe as well as social and economic issues deepened in the subsequent years. Unsurprisingly, the party went down to a crushing defeat in 1997 and was relegated to opposition after 18 years in office.

In sum, though Thatcherism was deeply rooted in ideology, the forward motion of the Thatcherite project was assured by four consecutive general-election victories. Moreover, it has to be recognized that whereas Thatcher, on the one hand, "often behaved like a traditional Conservative […] put[ting] party unity and vote-winning ahead of ideological objectives", the Conservative Party, on the other hand, "never became a Thatcherite party. It remained the Conservative Party led by Margaret Thatcher" (Gamble 1994: 212-213). In other words, the party only followed its leader as long as her radical policies proved electorally successful.

1997-2005

After 1997, numerous polls showed the Conservative Party out of touch with the electorate, for which reason many political observers as well as conservative thinkers advocated the Tories to move back to the center and shed its image as the 'party of greed and self-interest' (e.g. Gray/Willetts 1997; Scruton 1996). In fact, there was a halfhearted attempt by parts of the party leadership to fulfill programmatic shifts on issues like taxes and public services in the late 1990s, which manifested in a speech by the deputy leader of the party, Peter Lilley, in April 1999. The speech was, however, harshly criticized by party's activists as well as the parliamentary party, which was, at that time, dominated by Thatcherites. This immediately blocked any serious form of programmatic change as "the firestorm of internal and media protest at Lilley's speech put off anyone trying anything like that again for the foreseeable future" (Bale 2011: 93).

Consequently, though the party stood far to the right of the median voter on the eve of the 2001 election (Norris/Lovenduski 2004: 93-97), a great majority of party activists preferred to maintain the present position or to move even further to the right (Bale 2011: 127). The resulting electoral defeat neither led to the adoption of a more moderate stance as the party members chose the right-wing candidate Iain Duncan Smith over the Europhile and considerably more moderate Ken Clarke. Under the luckless Duncan Smith and his successor Michael Howard, who also belonged to the right wing of the party and as a former minister even more than Duncan Smith symbolized "the Conservatives' image as 'the nasty party'" (Dorey et al. 2011: 30), the Tories for another four years failed to change their direction and, unsurprisingly, suffered another defeat in 2005 (Bale 2011: 134-253).

The Tories' behavior in this period cannot be explained by the office hypothesis as countless surveys showed the party clearly out of touch with the voters. Instead of moving back to the center, as proposed by the pollsters, the party concentrated on its core voters, though evidence showed that this strategy was almost surely bound to fail (Hames/Sparrow 1997). An explanation for the party's failure to adapt is offered by the policy hypothesis. Accordingly, the selective perception by the party leadership impeded an appropriate reaction (Norris/Lovenduski 2004). The false perception resulted from the Thatcherite values held by many in the party leadership, who did not "seem even to consider the possibility – suggested by survey after survey which showed the average voter moving leftward at every election

after 1983 – that a significant proportion of the electorate might object as much to what they were proud of as what they were (ever so) slightly ashamed of" (Bale 2011: 81).[2]

2005-2010

The long delayed modernization was, finally, initiated under the new party leader David Cameron who, on his mission to 'decontaminate the Tory brand', distanced the party from Thatcherism and gave the party a friendlier and greener image. Besides a stronger focus on issues like the environment and cultural diversity, Cameron's Conservatives promised to fight poverty and social exclusion (Bale 2011: 283-362; Dorey et al. 2011: 60-67). This meant that tax cuts – a big conservative issue in the last elections – were taken off the agenda and that the Thatcherite faith in the market forces was replaced by a more communitarian perspective which emphasized that the role for the state was in "galvanizing, catalyzing, prompting, encouraging and agitating for community engagement and renewal" (Cameron 2009) to fix the 'broken society' (Bochel 2011: 8-16). Moreover, at the 2006 party conference, Cameron informed the public that "the days when the Party preoccupied itself with issues such as […] promoting private healthcare and prioritizing tax cuts over improving public services should be gone for ever" (Dorey et al. 2011: 63). With such declarations the party leadership hoped to shed the Conservatives' image as the 'nasty party' and to attract voters who had been alienated by the party's previous hard-heartedness. The party's modernization and its distancing from Thatcherite socio-economic policies were, thus, strongly driven by the new leadership's insight that it is the center ground "on which political success is built […] not the ideological wilderness, out on the fringes of debate" (Cameron 2006). Accordingly, the party's programmatic changes after the 2005 election mark a clear-cut break with the policy-driven stance of the previous period and a return to an office-seeking behavior which succeeded in the Tories' return to power in 2010.

Summary

In sum, the office hypothesis is largely vindicated by the case of the Conservative Party. Margaret Thatcher – though strongly driven by ideological zeal – profited in her election as party leader from her party's outstanding desire for a change after several election defeats.

[2] At least the initial failure to adjust the party's policy positions may also have to do with the perception that winning the elections was out of the question anyway. As one leading Conservative pointed out in one of our interviews: "We were laughed at. We were such a discredited government that any attempt to oppose Blairism, New Labour, the Third Way, Brown as the prudent Chancellor, was treated with derision by the press. …With hindsight it's easy to see that nobody could have won in 2001. The archangel Gabriel leading the Conservative party would have been thought to be inadequate compared with Blair and Brown and New Labour."

Later on, Thatcherism could only flourish as long as it proved electorally successful. Consequently, Thatcher had to go when she went too far with the poll tax, confirming the Conservative Party's image as an 'autocracy tempered by assassination' (Bale 2011: 17). The period from 1997 to 2005 marks a clear deviation from office-seeking as the absence of a strong reaction to the devastating 1997 election as well as the disappointing 2001 election hardly fits with the office hypothesis. Here, selective perception resulting from the policy beliefs held by leading party figures offers an explanation for the delay of a swifter shift back to the center which finally occurred under Cameron's leadership. This latest programmatic shift is again perfectly in line with the office hypothesis.

2. Sweden

2.1 SAP

Background

After coming to power in 1932, the SAP dominated Swedish politics for over 40 years, not leaving government until 1976. For all these years, the Socials Democrats based their social and economic policies on a programmatic stance accurately described as 'principled pragmatism' (Heclo/Madsen 1987), i.e. combining a dedication to classical socialist principles like equality and solidarity with a good deal of political pragmatism regarding the question of how to further these ideals within a capitalist system. In practice, this meant, above all, a commitment to full employment based on Keynesian demand management, active labor market policies and industrial policy as well as a strong welfare state financed by remarkably high income and sales taxes. This policy paradigm was accompanied by wage solidarity and, if necessary, wage restraint, engineered by the blue-collar workers federation LO (*Landsorganisationen i Sverige*), a close ally of the Social Democrats. As these policies proved highly successful economically as well as electorally there was no need for major programmatic changes until the 1970s. One qualification to this were the disappointing local elections in 1966 which, fueled by union pressure and broader anti-capitalist sentiments in Swedish society, eventually led to the adoption of a more egalitarian and state interventionist agenda (Hamilton 1989: 196-208). Thus, the party moved further to the left, a trend that was later reflected in a more radical party platform (SAP 1975).

1979-1982

In the economic crises of the 1970s the SAP clung to its Keynesian approach, fighting inflation with a restrictive fiscal policy and answering the first oil shock with expansive fiscal and monetary measures (cf. Scharpf 1991). While the loss of governmental power in 1976 was not attributed to programmatic failures and was rather seen as a temporary aberration, things changed after the SAP failed to regain office in 1979. The electoral defeat came as "a shock to Social Democrats at all levels" (Heclo/Madsen 1987: 68) and marked the beginning of a factional debate about the right way to restore the suffering Swedish economy. Reformers around the later finance minister Kjell-Olof Feldt made use of the shocking electoral defeat by claiming that traditional policies had failed and thus were responsible for the disappointing electoral results. The call for fiscal discipline to strengthen the competitiveness of the Swedish economy became manifest in an open letter entitled "Here is the bitter medicine" signed by six prominent SAP-associated economists (Eklund et al. 1981). Thereby, the young reformers openly challenged the Social Democratic postwar consensus which was defended by the left-wing of the SAP and LO economists, who saw a further expansion of the public sector and public investment through wage earner funds as the solution to the Swedish malaise (Heclo/Madsen 1987: 69-71). Though the ultimate economic program resulting from the debate represented a compromise between both positions (SAP 1981), 'the third way' pursued after the return to power in 1982 marked a clear deviation from former policy.

The programmatic change, which occurred in the early 1980s, is in line with the office hypothesis. The looming failure of traditional policies in the 1970s did not, as the Burkian hypothesis would expect, initially result in the adoption of new policies as the Social Democrats expected to return to power without major programmatic changes. In fact, modernization did not occur before the shock of the 1979 election, which shattered the SAP's self-perception as the natural party of government.

1982-1990

In the 1980s, fiscal consolidation took priority over a further expansion of the welfare state, but far from unifying the party the chosen course "proved the source of a left-right split that divided SAP from the levels of the cabinet and parliamentary group down to the grassroots" (Arter 1994: 78). Whereas the fiscal hawks in Feldt's Ministry of Finance (*kanslihushögern*) favored public sector restraint, supply side reforms and the introduction of market elements into the welfare state, other high-ranking Social Democrats and the LO under its new leader Stig Malm fiercely opposed this course and demanded a further expansion of the public

sector, especially when the Swedish economy recovered in the second half of the 1980s. This so-called 'war of the roses' (*rosornas krig*) took the form of a cold war, whose escalation was only prevented by successful elections in 1985 and 1988 and the fear of a new bourgeois government. Moreover, the impact of office considerations in this period is demonstrated by the expansion of annual holidays and parental insurance in 1987. The costs of these measures were neglected, as the popular programs were expanded to ensure the support by the LO and the electorate. Later on, the austerity-prone Feldt conceded that he was driven by election fever, when he approved the extension of parental insurance (Norrbom 1991: 111-113).

Thus, while office considerations had triggered a shift in the early 1980s, they now prohibited a more radical stance on cutting public spending as favored by the modernizers. Apart from the resistance by traditionalists within the cabinet, 'it was not easy to reconcile austerity with the types of election promise routinely demanded by SAP's party conference and LO's counterpart – promises that […] would unquestionably enhance the SAP's retaining power' (Arter 1994: 79). Thus, office ambitions foreclosed welfare retrenchment as well as open hostilities within the party, which would have damaged the Social Democrats' reputation with the electorate.

1990-1998

Things changed fundamentally when the government responded to the emerging economic crisis of the early 1990s with harsh austerity measures. Though highly unpopular with the electorate the austerity policy continued and, combined with a rapidly rising unemployment, led to a historical low at the ballot boxes, forcing the Social Democrats out of office in 1991 (Widfeldt 1992). Relegated to opposition, the Social Democrats faced the choice of supporting the bourgeois austerity packages to demonstrate their sense of responsibility or accusing the government of dismantling the welfare state. They opted for the former option and lent their support to two crisis packages, which included sensible spending cuts. With the next election drawing nearer, the SAP absented from backing further cuts and criticized the far-reaching reforms proposed by the 'Lindbeck Commission' (Lindbeck 1993). The polls showed that this went down well with the voters, but instead of promising an unconditional defense of the welfare state the election campaign saw the SAP outlining "austerity measures previously unheard of from that party" (Widfeldt/Pierre 1995: 481), notably unpopular cuts directed at families with children (SAP 1994).

While these announcements surely cost some votes in the 1994 general election, this was nothing compared to the discontent caused by the cuts implemented by the new Social

Democratic minority government. Despite loud protests, especially by its traditional electorate, the SAP continued the austerity policy of the bourgeois predecessors. The party leadership around Göran Persson saw the unpopular mix of spending cuts and tax increases, the so-called *stålbadspolitiken*, as the only way to consolidate public finances and, thereby, to strengthen the Swedish economy (Persson/Kask 1997). The party bitterly paid for the austerity measures with a loss of almost ten percent of its votes in 1998, but stayed in office as the SAP's losses were largely compensated by the gains of the Left Party that, together with the Greens, supported a Social Democratic minority government.

The support of these deeply unpopular policies in opposition as well as its continuation in office was mainly policy-driven, as the evidence shows. The SAP was willing to accept a temporary loss of votes in order to adopt policies that were seen as absolutely necessary to overcome the economic crisis. However, it has to be noticed that the Social Democrats could behave in such a policy-oriented manner as electoral losses, at that time, did not necessarily mean a loss of office. While the even more austerity-prone bourgeois parties posed no real alternative for disappointed SAP-voters, the Social Democrats could reckon upon the support of smaller left-wing parties who profited from the SAP's weakness (Kitschelt 2001: 290-292).

1998-2006

The budget surpluses of the following years allowed the SAP to pursue a slightly expansive fiscal policy, which at least partially reconciled core voters and gradually strengthened the SAP's poll numbers. The more welfare-friendly stance was also a reaction to the demands of the Left Party whose support was necessary for the survival of the Social Democratic minority government. Such concessions were crucial as the SAP's co-operation pact with the Left Party and the Greens was regarded as rather fragile by many experts (e.g. Pierre/Widfeldt 1999). The importance of the co-operation pact for the Social Democrats is demonstrated by their adoption of a 'green tax shift', a central demand by the Green Party, and the mentioned adoption of more welfare-friendly policies to satisfy the Left Party.[3] Furthermore, after the 2002 election the SAP reacted to the Green Party's demand for cabinet posts with the creation of 'observation posts' for the two minor parties in various ministries (Widfeldt 2000, 2002, 2003).

In sum, this period witnessed a clear vote- and office-seeking behavior by the SAP. The slightly expansive budgets went down well with the electorate, especially with the party's

[3] Moreover, in 2000, the SAP refused to strike a deal on the reduction of weekly working hours with the oppositional Liberals and Christian Democrats, whose acceptance would have endangered the support of the Left Party who demanded a sharper reduction (Widfeldt 2001: 422).

core voters. Moreover, by making concessions to the two minor left-wing parties the Social Democrats skillfully managed to safeguard their minority government and hold office until 2006.

2006-2010

The party's bitter electoral defeat in 2006 resulted in a change in leadership style, as the rather authoritarian Persson was replaced by the more consensual Mona Sahlin. The open debate initiated by the new party leadership did, however, not lead to a real shift in the party's programmatic stance. From an office perspective this seems rather odd, as the magnitude of the defeat should have caused an office-seeking party to change its direction. So why did no programmatic revision take place? The main answer lies in the SAP's good performance in the polls in the aftermath of the election. The bad election result was perceived as a result of the unpopularity of Prime Minister Persson and not of programmatic failure. Thus, when the SAP took a clear lead in the polls after the election there was no real impetus to radically change the programmatic position. For that reason, the party's reaction after 2006 is completely in line with the office hypothesis.

Nevertheless, the good survey results started to plummet when the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Left Party launched a red-red-green coalition pact in December 2008. Especially the hotly debated alliance with the former communists alienated many potential social democratic voters (Bengtsson 2010: 9-14). Despite its negative electoral effects, the SAP's strategy does not conflict with the office hypothesis as another Social Democratic minority government was ruled out by the minor left-wing parties and as the coalition pact was therefore seen as a strategic necessity by the SAP to regain office in 2010 (Santesson-Wilson 2010). However, this did not pay off in the 2010 election, which saw the SAP fall to a historical low and resulted in the disintegration of the red-red-green pact (Widfeldt 2011).

Despite this failure, the SAP's behavior after 2006 is another episode mainly driven by office considerations. The electoral defeat in 2006 did not cause a noticeable programmatic shift, as the polls promised a return to power in 2010. Moreover, the eventually vote-losing red-red-green coalition pact was seen a necessary reaction to the bourgeois 'Alliance for Sweden' (see below).

Summary

To sum up, programmatic change and continuity in the case of the SAP were in four out of five periods mainly driven by office-seeking considerations. This holds true for the party's

move to the center in the early 1980s, the following 'third way' policies in the 1980s, the shift to more welfare-friendly policies after 1998 and the absence of programmatic change after 2006. In contrast, the acceptance of austerity measures from 1990 to 1998 sacrificed votes in order to accomplish certain policy objectives. However, it has to be noticed that the then still advantageous position of the SAP in the Swedish party system allowed the Social Democrats to pursue unpopular policies as their "electoral losses […] did not substantially reduce […] their capacity to hold executive office" (Kitschelt 2001: 291).

2.2 Moderate Party

Background

The liberal-conservative Moderate Party (*Moderaterna)* is the most right-wing party of the bourgeois bloc, which today is fragmented into four parties.[4] But it was not until the late 1970s that the Conservatives managed to establish themselves as the leading party of the Right and, more recently, to attack the predominance of the SAP – something the party could not even have dreamt of in the 1950s and 60s. In the postwar years the Conservatives, back then still known as the Rightist Party (*Högerpartiet*), openly embraced conservative cultural values as well as economic liberalism and presented themselves as a force against any form of collectivism and socialism, an ideological stance that ensured financial and electoral support by Swedish employers but that, overall, isolated the party in social democratic Sweden. This self-chosen isolation not only ruined all office ambitions, the anti-statist rhetoric furthermore led to a declining electoral support in the 1960s (Lane/Ersson 2008: 254). Although losing more and more ground to the other bourgeois parties, the Conservatives held on to their rightist program until the late 1960s when, after the disappointing 1968 election, a factional debate broke out, which resulted in party modernization and a move closer to the center (Hylén 1991: 175-179). The party changed its name to Moderate Coalition Party (*Moderata samlingspartiet*), de-emphasized traditional conservative values and accepted the strong Swedish welfare state but kept its firm commitment to lower taxes, private enterprise and 'a democracy of property owners' (*ägardemokrati*) (Moderate Party 1969).

[4] Besides the Conservatives, the bourgeois bloc consists of the Center Party (the former Agrarian Party), the Liberal People's Party and – since the 1980s – the Christian Democrats.

1976-1981

The adoption of a more moderate agenda facilitated the collaboration with the more centrist bourgeois parties and, thus, improved the Moderates' chances of government participation. After the Moderates and the two other bourgeois parties had narrowly missed a majority in 1973, the 1976 election brought the first bourgeois government for 44 years, led by the Center Party but including a strengthened Moderate Party. In order to form and preserve the coalition with the more centrist parties the Moderates had to make hard concessions. The government program did not substantially deviate from social democratic policies of the past (Nilsson 2003: 25-26). Correspondingly, instead of cutting welfare expenditure and rolling back the state, the Moderates subsequently participated in fighting the international recession in Keynesian fashion by increasing welfare spending, industrial subsidies and deficits (Heclo/Madsen 1987: 60-62; Blyth 2002: 207-208).

Nevertheless, in contrast to the center-right parties, the Moderates verbal criticism of excessive government and their market-friendly rhetoric offered the voters a clear alternative to the Social Democrats. As a result, the 1979 election made the Moderates the largest bourgeois party in parliament, which allowed them to increase their influence on government policy, demonstrated by increases in consumption taxes and spending cuts in 1980. This period did, however, not come without another major concession as the party, despite its increased electoral strength, had to abstain from the post of the Prime Minister to participate in the government. The time of such office-seeking accommodations ended, when a conflict over tax reform arose in the spring of 1981. Faced with the alternative of staying in office by supporting a tax compromise closing loopholes for the rich or insisting on their own more radical and faster tax reduction plans and leaving the government, the Moderates chose the latter (Hadenius 1981: 242-295).

This abandonment of government participation after five years of office-driven concessions should, however, not be seen as overly policy-driven as the Moderates principled attitude was also quite popular with the electorate. While the party could have accepted the tax compromise with regards to its content, such a compromise would have severely damaged the party's credibility and endangered its leading position within the bourgeois bloc. Though policy-seeking was not completely absent in the withdrawal from the coalition in 1981, the party's maneuvering within the bourgeois governments was, thus, mainly driven by office- and vote-seeking considerations.

1981-2002

Back in opposition and thereby freed from being considerate of their coalition partners, the Moderates further sharpened their profile. After explicitly dissociating themselves from Keynesianism (Moderate Party 1982, 1984), their 1985 election campaign called for "a 'system change' to replace the social democratic order with the market economic alternative" (Blyth 2002: 209) which included lower taxes, more competition in the public sector and the privatization of publicly owned enterprise. Gradually adopting a more neoliberal stance the Moderate Party established itself as the leading party of the Right in the 1980s (Lane/Ersson 2008: 254; Nilsson 2003: 42-82). Although the elections of 1985 and 1988 showed somewhat disappointing results for the Moderates, a move to the center was no appealing alternative as possible gains of such a strategy were rather unsure and would have come at the expense of the center-right parties, which were needed as coalition partners.

The Moderate Party's time finally came when the Social Democrats fell over the deep economic crisis of the early 1990s. Carl Bildt became the first Conservative Prime Minister since World War II when the bourgeois parties returned to power in 1991. Faced with high inflation, rising unemployment and mounting deficits his bourgeois minority government implemented severe spending cuts by, amongst other things, curtailing public services and cutting sick pay and unemployment benefits, privatized state-owned companies and initialized a major overhaul of the pension system. Furthermore, in the 'tax reform of the century' the government reduced the tax burden for private businesses and lowered the overall tax ratio (Steinmo 2002: 850-851). While these measures went down well with conservative voters, as demonstrated by the Moderates' good result in the 1994 election, the electorate punished the center-right parties for the austerity policy (Widfeldt/Pierre 1995). Thus, relegated to opposition but at once corroborated by the voters the Moderates stuck to their neoliberal agenda and postulated further spending cuts and deregulations to bolster the still suffering Swedish economy.

As the pursuit of a market-liberal agenda helped to establish the Moderate Party as the leading party of the Right and to lead the bourgeois government in the early 1990s, the party's gradual shift to the right is in line with the office hypothesis. Welfare state retrenchment and tax cuts were also seen as the right policies to stimulate the Swedish economy but – as shown below – these policies were only propagated as long as they proved to be electorally successful.

2002-2006

When the economy recovered in the late 1990s the Moderates, in accordance with their neoliberal agenda, widened their tax cut promises. Under Bildt's successor Bo Lundgren they proposed tax cuts of 130 billion crowns to restore 'Swedish freedom' (Moderate Party 2002), apparently hoping to profit from public discontent with the high tax burden. To the surprise of the pollsters as well as the party leadership the 2002 election ended in a mere disaster for the Moderates. The party fell to 15 per cent and lost one third of its votes (Widfeldt 2003). Already on election night an internal debate started which in 2003 led to a renewal of the party executive and the election of Fredrik Reinfeldt as new leader. Once a harsh critic of the 'Swedish model' of high taxes and a strong welfare state (cf. Reinfeldt 1993), Reinfeldt now declared that "doubts of many voters about the compatibility of the Moderates' tax cut proposals and good public finances were one of the reasons for the party's loss of voters in the 2002 election" (Reinfeldt et al. 2004; our translation). Consequently, the new leadership fundamentally changed the face of the Moderates in the following years. Under the modern label of 'New Moderate Party' (*Nya moderaterna*) the party toned down its demand for tax reductions, promised to defend the welfare state and to curb unemployment by new labor market measures. The party even frontally attacked the Social Democrats by praising itself as the 'new Swedish workers' party' (Jochem 2010: 231-232). Moreover, under the guidance of the Moderates the four bourgeois parties intensified their collaboration and launched the 'Alliance for Sweden' to resolve inter-party differences, unite the traditionally fragmented Right and prepare for forming a stable coalition government (Allians för Sverige 2006).

The abrupt and significant move to the center after the 2002 election is a prime example of vote- and office-seeking. Triggered by the crushing electoral defeat, the Moderate Party departed from its radical tax cut agenda and, by portraying itself as the 'new Swedish workers' party', openly addressed traditional social democratic voters. The newly formed 'Alliance for Sweden' points in the same direction as it implied the abandonment of more radical policies and, thus, further underlined the party's office ambitions. The policy hypothesis, in contrast, provides no explanation for this fundamental programmatic shift as it can hardly be seen as a reaction to some kind of policy failure.

2006-2010

All of the mentioned changes were sharply criticized by the right wing of the Moderate Party, but steadily growing support in the opinion polls facilitated Reinfeldt's intra-party reforms. In the 2006 election the more moderate stance proved highly successful and Reinfeldt became

the leader of a coalition government dominated by his party (Widfeldt 2007). Analyses of the election showed the success of the Moderates' strategy to attract social democratic voters as the historically unparalleled amount of eight per cent of former SAP voters switched to the conservative party (Jochem 2009: 67). Sticking to their pre-election commitments the Moderates followed a softer form of their traditional agenda. They abstained from radical tax cuts for the rich and compensated for rather unpopular reforms like cuts in unemployment insurance by tax reductions for lower income groups – a strategy that further strengthened their position and brought them on par with the struggling Social Democrats in 2010.

The policies after 2006 marked a clear continuation of the previous move to the center. As the changed rhetoric and softened policies on taxes and the welfare state proved highly popular with the electorate and fundamentally strengthened the Moderate Party's position, the party – in accordance with the office hypothesis – saw no reason to abandon its new course. This interpretation holds true regardless of the fact whether one sees the Moderates' programmatic change as the ultimate victory of social democracy (e.g. Rothstein 2006) or rather a strategic adjustment to gradually change Swedish society in the long run (e.g. Lindbom 2010).

Summary

In sum, the Moderate Party's programmatic changes were predominantly driven by vote and office considerations. This is first shown by the Moderates' willingness to make far-reaching concessions to participate in the bourgeois governments from 1976 to 1981. It is secondly demonstrated by the party's adoption of a more market-liberal profile in the 1980s and 1990s, which strengthened the party's position with the voters and led to the first Conservative-led government for decades. The probably clearest examples of the office hypothesis are the Moderates' abrupt turn to the center after the disastrous 2002 election and the adherence to the new course after the electoral success in 2006. Finally, even in 1981 when policy considerations were present in the Moderates' withdrawal from the bourgeois government, vote considerations had an important impact as the party sacrificed office for policy and votes.

3. The Netherlands

3.1 The Dutch Labour Party (PvdA)

Background

The Dutch Social Democrats (PvdA) were in an uncomfortable position in the pivotal party system of post-war Netherlands. While the Christian democratic parties belonged to every government coalition until 1994, government participation of the PvdA critically depended on the willingness of the Christian parties to form coalitions with the Social democrats.

1967-1986

Once the pillarization of Dutch society (Lijphart 1975) substantially weakened from the late 1960s onwards, the PvdA embarked on a polarization strategy which aimed at winning a majority left of the bourgeois parties (cf. Wolinetz 1995a: 116-120; van Kersbergen 1999; Marx/Schumacher 2013: 157-9). Thus, the PvdA emphasized its political differences with the Christian parties, explicitly campaigned for a coalition with left-liberals (D66) and radicals and insisted on the full adoption of its core policy positions in coalition negotiations.

This strategy was successful as far as vote and seat shares were concerned which indeed went up substantially (from 23.7 percent of the votes and 37 seats in 1967 to 33.3 percent of the votes and 52 seats in 1986). Nonetheless, the social democrats and its non-bourgeois allies continued to fall way short of a majority of seats in the *Tweede kamer*. At the same time, the polarization strategy decreased the chances of the Social democrats to be included in governments because the bourgeois parties did not want to be committed to the PvdA core policy positions (Wolinetz 1995a: 119). Not surprisingly, therefore, the governments of that time in which the PvdA participated (den Uyl, van Agt II) were not particularly successful. Of particular importance in that respect was the short-lived van Agt II coalition, a coalition government of Christian democrats (CDA), D66 and PvdA that fell over a conflict on budget consolidation after less than nine months in May 1982. As a result of the PvdA's unwillingness to accept expenditure cuts and the consequent breakdown of the government, the Christian democrats, i.e. the pivotal player in the Dutch coalition game, started perceiving the PvdA as unable or unwilling to adopt unpopular but necessary reforms (Green-Pedersen 2002: 95). Thus, the CDA increasingly perceived the PvdA as unable to govern and thus avoided coalitions with the Social democrats in the 1980s (Timmermans/Andeweg 2000: 368; Pennings 2005: 39).

Despite its lack of success in terms of office seeking and despite the fact that the adoption of the polarization strategy was to a substantial extent driven by the emergence and growing influence of the new left faction (cf. Wolinetz 1995a) it has to be interpreted as a "strategy to obtain policy *and* office pay-offs" (Marx/Schumacher 2013: 158; emphasis added). While some argue that ultimately ideology was more important than office (Marx/Schumacher 2013: 158) we agree with Wolinetz (1993: 98) that the polarization strategy "served multiple purposes: maximizing electoral strength by forcing voters who wanted progressive policies to opt for the PvdA or one of its allies; increasing PvdA influence in coalition formations; dividing the Protestant and Catholic parties and preventing the formation of a single interconfessional party; building a more adversarial party system". Thus, all of these purposes were relevant for vote or office ambitions at least as much as they were relevant for policy purposes. Therefore, we classify the case of the PvdA until 1986 as policy and office seeking.

1986-1989

Although the polarization strategy had been officially abandoned already in 1982, a revision of the PvdA's programmatic position only started in earnest after the 1986 elections. In that election, the PvdA was once more able to gain votes and received the second best result in its history; but again it was excluded from government as the CDA saw it as unable to adopt the fiscal and social policy reforms that the Christian democrats deemed necessary to fight the 'Dutch disease'. Thus, despite excellent election results, the PvdA had only been in government for nine months since 1977. Given that a majority left of the CDA was not in sight despite the good results for the Social democrats, a coalition with the Christian democrats was still the only viable strategy to regain government participation. At the same time, it had become entirely evident that the other parties, particularly the pivotal Christian democrats, would not let the PvdA participate in the coalition game in the foreseeable future unless the Social democrats changed their programmatic positions, particularly regarding economic and social policy. These considerations thus triggered a process of programmatic revision among parts of the party leadership around the new party leader Wim Kok: "An influential elite faction started to accept the need for fiscal responsibility, particularly as a means towards regaining power" (Green-Pedersen/van Kersbergen 2002: 517; cf. Wolinetz 1995a: 120).

Therefore, the party leadership embarked on a broad reform process by appointing three commissions dealing with the current state of party organization, party strategy and policy positions and working out suggestions for improvements in these areas (cf. Wolinetz 1995a:

121f. for the details). As a result of this reform process, the party increasingly focused on demonstrating its ability to govern to the Christian democrats. First and foremost this meant to leave the image of a free-spending party behind and to accept the necessity to reduce the government deficit (cf. Hillebrand/Irwin 1999: 127; Green-Pedersen/van Kersbergen 2002: 517). The programmatic re-positioning was successful insofar as the PvdA was indeed able to convince the CDA that it was ready to accept tough decisions and was thus allowed back to the coalition game. Therefore, in 1989, the social democrats joined the government together with the CDA and PvdA leader Wim Kok was appointed minister of finance. Kok's appointment was to emblematize the PvdA's newly found orthodox fiscal policy position.

This development is clearly in line with the office hypothesis as it was not a lack of success of the previously held policies that convinced the PvdA to abandon them as the party even lacked the opportunity to adopt them due to the lack of government participation. Rather, it was the permanent exclusion from government that incited a change in the programmatic position.

1989-2002

This new policy position was seriously put into question by social democratic party members and voters in the following legislative period, when the coalition of Christian democrats and social democrats decided to reform disability pensions – a policy that was seen by many voters and party members as being at odds with the long-term policy objectives of the PvdA. In the coalition agreement of 1989, CDA and PvdA had concluded that budget consolidation was to be achieved without resort to higher taxes or social security contributions. Given that the number of people qualifying for disability pensions and thus the respective expenditures increased much faster than those of any other welfare program and that there existed evidence for systematic abuse of the program by the social partners it was difficult to avoid cuts to that program – at least if the coalition agreement was to be obeyed which was essential for the PvdA in order to safeguard its position as reliable coalition partner of the CDA. Therefore, the plans to retrench the program were presented jointly by prime minister and CDA leader Lubbers and minister of finance and PvdA leader Kok (for the following Hillebrand/Irwin 1999: 130-133).

The reaction of members and voters of the party was extreme disapproval. The PvdA plummeted in the opinion polls and was predicted to lose 28 of its 49 seats in parliament in August 1991 which would have meant that the party would become only the fourth strongest party in parliament (Hillebrand/Irwin 1999: 131). Furthermore, one third of the party

members left the party in the course of the reform process (Visser/Hemerijck 1997) and others formed an inner-party faction aiming to commit the party to a more pronounced welfare-oriented policy position. This inner-party opposition initially met with some success as the parliamentary party made clear that the reform proposal would not find its support (Seils 2004: 147).

Finally, a decision was taken at a party conference in September 1991 at which around 80 percent of the delegates voted for the reform (Hillebrand/Irwin 1999: 133). The prime reason for the endorsement of the reform by the delegates was that a rejection would have meant not only the end of the coalition with the CDA but that such a decision would have put the PvdA's ability to govern into serious question again and would thus in all likelihood have meant the exclusion from government for the foreseeable future. The fact that the leader of the CDA parliamentary party, Elco Brinkman, negotiated a reform of disability pensions with the liberal party (VVD) at the same time that the PvdA discussed how to deal with the reform (Lepszy/Koecke 2000: 210) shows that this was a real possibility. Thus, although the reform of disability pensions was highly controversial inside the PvdA and was certainly not a vote-winner the party adopted it in order to make sure that the other parties, particularly the CDA, perceived it as a party with sound and responsible fiscal policy positions – a precondition to remain a player in the coalition game.

Interestingly, the PvdA remained faithful to these somewhat orthodox fiscal policy positions even after the coalition with the CDA had ended in 1994 when it formed a coalition with both liberal parties, the so called 'purple coalition' (cf. Marx/Schumacher 2013: 160). What is more, in the coalition agreements of 1994 and 1998 the PvdA accepted rather strict fiscal policy rules (the so-called Zalm norm) which left only very limited room for expenditure increases (cf. Hallerberg 2004: 125 for details) – which for a long time had been at the heart of the social democratic policy agenda. When the fiscal room for maneuver widened as the economic situation improved in the late 1990s, rising revenues could not be used for expenditure increases due to the Zalm norm. In this situation, large parts of the PvdA wanted to change the fiscal policy framework in order to permit higher spending. In the end, however, the party leadership accepted the fiscal policy framework and started pursuing tax cuts for lower incomes (which were in accordance with the framework) as a substitute for expenditure increases. Again, the reason for this course of action was not only that the failure to accept the Zalm norm would have brought the coalition down immediately but that the long-term ability to form coalitions would be impaired, should the PvdA break the coalition agreement (Seils 2004: 187).

2002-2010

The PvdA responded somewhat inconclusively to the disaster of the 2002 elections in which it lost almost half of its previous vote share (Becker/Cuperus 2010: 105). The party grew increasingly disillusioned with the market-oriented policies it had pursued under the purple coalition. In his prominent den Uyl lecture, then-party leader Wouter Bos (2010: 7, 12) argued that the proponents of market-oriented policies in the PvdA "went to bed while there was a reasonably controlled free market, but awoke with an unchained monster" and demanded "to shield public interests from the market". Nonetheless, in terms of tangible policy positions, "the PvdA continued a moderate stance vis-à-vis the labor market and the welfare state, supporting occasional retrenchment when deemed necessary" (Marx/Schumacher 2013: 160).

The fact that the party uttered criticism regarding its own previous policies without revising them must be seen as a clear rejection of the policy hypothesis. A policy oriented party would have changed the policies it felt were unsuccessful. In contrast, the office hypothesis is able to explain why the PvdA stayed put despite the dramatic defeat in the 2002 election.

First, the party soon recovered from the defeat and was able to win back most of the votes it had lost in 2002 in the next election which was held less than a year later. Moreover, government participation was secured again in early 2007. Thus, the party had recouped from the 2002 setback before it could engage in a process of programmatic revision. Second, and probably more importantly, the PvdA faced a strategic dilemma in the 2000s: On the one hand, a majority for the center-left was still not available. Nevertheless, the Socialist party grew much stronger, winning more than 16 percent of the vote in the 2006 elections, thus making a left-wing government a real possibility while at the same time gaining votes from the PvdA. These developments incited a move to the left. On the other hand, when push came to shove, it turned out again in 2006 that a coalition with the Christian democrats was the safest bet for gaining government participation. As the Christian democrats had moved to the right under Balkenende (see below), however, this meant that a move to the left was out of the question. In sum, the office hypothesis is able to explain the absence of programmatic change in the PvdA in the 2000s.

Summary

In sum, the case of the Dutch Labor party clearly corroborates the office hypothesis. The polarization strategy was abandon when it became evident that it made government participation difficult. Moreover, when policy seeking and office orientation collided, the latter clearly prevailed as the case of disability pensions showed. It was the party leaders'

utmost interest to prove the PvdA's willingness and ability to see unpopular reforms through and to remain committed to coalition agreements as this was seen as essential to remain in the coalition game.

3.2 The Dutch Christian Democrats (CDA)

Background

As a consequence of the strong pillarization that prevailed in the Netherlands until the mid-1960s, three Christian democratic parties existed, the catholic KVP, the slightly progressive protestant ARP and the more conservative protestant CHU. Politically, these parties were highly successful in the immediate post-war period as they won close to half of the seats in the *Tweede kamer* until 1967 and at least two of them belonged to all Dutch government coalitions that were formed until 1994. Despite some cooperation among them, however, they acted independently and also held differing policy positions. For example, while KVP and ARP had joined the 'progressive' government led by Social democratic leader Den Uyl in 1973, CHU remained in opposition. Nonetheless, as a consequence of dramatic electoral defeats in the late 1960s and early 1970s – the three parties combined had suffered a vote loss of more than 13 percentage points between 1967 and 1972 and of almost 18 percentage points between 1963 and 1972 – the three parties decided to join forces. Thus, at the elections in 1977 they presented a common list and they finally merged in 1980 to become the CDA. As could be expected, the differences in the policy positions of the three original parties made themselves felt in economic policy in the early days of the party as 'the separate denominational parties did not have a great deal in common apart from their affirmation of the need for confessional parties and the fact that each was in precipitous decline' (Rochon 1999: 109). Thus, the coalition of the CDA with the liberals (VVD) that was formed in 1977 (government van Agt I) was bedeviled by internal conflicts within the CDA (cf. Toirkens 1988; Braun 1989). Even though that government had formally committed itself to budget consolidation in the coalition agreement, it was unable to meet the targets it had set itself due to internal conflicts within the CDA. For example, seven CDA MPs declared that they were unable to accept the coalition agreement between CDA and VVD (Lepszy/Koecke 2000: 150) – which severely circumscribed the government's leeway given that it only held a majority of two seats. Furthermore, even though minister of finance Andriessen and minister of social affairs Albeda both were members of the CDA, they were in constant conflict over the

direction of economic and social policy which culminated in Andriessen's resignation in 1980.

1982-1994

As the 1980s progressed, the CDA's policy stance with regard to economic and social policy became less controversial internally. The party had settled for a course of budget consolidation via expenditure cuts (including some welfare retrenchment) and of supply-side policies to improve the country's competitiveness (Visser/Hemerijck 1997). This outcome was less a result of an extensive decision-making process within the party but rather came about as a side-product of other developments. First, the number of Christian democratic MPs from the party's left wing had substantially declined after the 1982 election. Second, the failure of a coalition with the Social democrats (PvdA) in 1981/82 made it clear for the party that there was hardly any credible alternative to a coalition with the VVD and thus also to the policies of supply-side improvements and budget consolidation. Finally, the majority of the Christian-liberal coalition was larger in 1982 than in 1977 which made dissenters less influential.[5]

The CDA did not question this general economic and social policy stance during the rest of its period in government until 1994. To the contrary, some, like the leader of the parliamentary party, Elco Brinkman, argued for more far-reaching reforms, particularly with regard to the welfare state. In the electoral campaign of 1994, Brinkman, at that time the party's candidate for prime minister, even announced that the CDA wanted to freeze all social security benefits, including pensions. This announcement provoked a storm of protest and led (among other things) to a historical defeat of the CDA in the 1994 elections (Irwin 1995: 12f.; Wolinetz 1995b: 190-192). As a consequence of the electoral result, the Christian democrats lost government participation for the first time since 1918.

In sum, the CDA essentially behaved policy-oriented between 1982 and 1994. Although many of its policies, particularly the welfare cuts, were unpopular, the party did not change its position because party leaders deemed these policies necessary in order to overcome what was called the "Dutch disease". Even after the adoption of the extremely unpopular disability reform the party demanded further restructuring of the welfare state – a demand that eventually led to the electoral defeat in 1994. Nonetheless, acting policy-oriented was less risky for the CDA in that period than for most comparable parties thanks to the logic of the

[5] Indeed, in December 1983 two MPs left the CDA because of disagreement on economic and social policy but above all on defense policy (Lepszy/Koecke 2000: 193) which did not result in any policy change.

Dutch party system (cf. Green-Pedersen 2001, 2002). The Christian democrats were the party system's pivotal party as Liberals (VVD) and Social democrats (PvdA) ruled out a coalition between themselves until 1994. Therefore, in the 1980s, the CDA could expect to be part of the next government almost irrespective of the result of the next election. Thus, as office and vote ambitions were of minor importance as government participation seemed assured, the party could concentrate on policy seeking.

1994-2002

Because the electoral defeat and the exclusion from government were blamed on the party's recent welfare reforms, particularly the highly unpopular reform of disability pensions, and the announcement of more welfare retrenchment, the CDA's reaction was a move to the left in economic and social policy (cf. Laver/Mair 1999: 54; Duncan 2007: 78ff.). This is a clear corroboration of the office hypothesis as the party did not react to policy failures but to electoral defeat and exclusion from government. Nonetheless, this programmatic revision did not convince the voters as can be seen from survey data as well as from the results of the 1998 election which were even worse than the results of the previous election (cf. Irwin/van Holsteyn 1999: 136; van Holsteyn/Irwin 2003: 44f.). There are two main reasons for this lack of success. On the one hand, the party had severe problems to find its role as an opposition party which in turn caused tremendous internal conflict (cf. Duncan 2007: 76ff.; van Kersbergen 2008). This evidently reduced the party's attractiveness to the voters. On the other hand, the sheer success of the government coalition of Social democrats and the two liberal parties (VVD and D66) which essentially pursued Christian democratic economic and social policies without the CDA made it difficult for the CDA itself to criticize government policies in the socio-economic realm and to make a mark of its own.

This pattern is a clear corroboration of the office hypothesis as the party changed its programmatic position after the first exclusion from government for a very long time. In contrast, the policy hypothesis fails to explain the programmatic change: It certainly cannot be argued that the CDA changed its programmatic position because the policies it used to advocate were evidently failing. Quite the contrary, even the purple government of PvdA, VVD and D66 stuck to the policies of the previous, CDA-led governments (cf. Hoogerwerf 1999: 175; Green-Pedersen 2002: 106) and was enormously successful with these policies. Thus, from the point of view of a pure policy-seeker no revision of social and economic policy positions would have been necessary. The fact that such a revision occurred nonetheless thus lends support to the office hypothesis.

2002-2010

Opinion polls continued to find rather low levels of support for the CDA until the fall of 2001 when a leadership crisis broke out which made the prospects for the next election look even less promising (van Holsteyn/Irwin 2003: 44f.). In the face of a likely third crushing election defeat and the continuing exclusion from government that seemed probable, the CDA chose its – relatively unknown – spokesman for fiscal policy, Jan-Peter Balkenende, as frontrunner for the pending election. While the party's election manifesto for the 2002 election was rather welfare-state friendly (cf. van Kersbergen/Krouwel 2006: 41) its policy position dramatically changed after returning to government in 2002. As van Kersbergen (2008: 282) points out: "Christian democratic concepts such as public justice and solidarity have either entirely disappeared or have become irrelevant… In short, with respect to economic issues the party has embraced a neoliberal agenda" (cf. also van Kersbergen/Krouwel 2006: 44-51).

How can this swift change of policy positions be explained? Why did the CDA abandon its pro-welfare stance? Again, an office interpretation provides the answer to this question as one important point was that the welfare-state-friendly policy position did not pay off in or at the polls. The 1998 election result was worse than the one four years earlier and opinion polls did not indicate an improvement until the end of 2001. So the CDA failed to develop a programmatic stance that attracted voters in its entire opposition period. Instead, the party was on the verge of losing the third consecutive election and to remain excluded from government. Thus, there was a very real sense of crisis inside the party which in turn widened the room for maneuver for the new frontrunner. Balkenende in turn used his leeway to commit his party to a much more liberal economic and social policy than the party had advocated during its period in opposition. The major reason why the party accepted this programmatic revision was that most actors believed that – after a long period of opposition and numerous leadership crises – it was essential for the CDA to be perceived as united and backing its leader. As one leading Christian democrat explained in one of our interviews: "…there was still this very strong, I think, in CDA that feeling after the difficult years during purple [purple coalition, i.e. the coalition of PvdA, VVD and D66 during which the CDA was in opposition]: now we have to support our first man. … There were hesitations in the party, but when it came to the decisions they supported him." Again, this development can be seen as evidence for the office hypothesis as the party was willing to accept almost any policy in order to return to government.

Summary

In sum, the case of the Dutch Christian democrats clearly corroborates the office hypothesis. The CDA only adopted substantial changes of its programmatic positions after dramatic election defeats and after being excluded from government for a substantial period of time. The significant move towards the left in the mid-1990s was a reaction to the electoral disaster of 1994. When it turned out that this new programmatic stance would not safe the party from a prolonged stay in opposition, it was willing to adopt a much more liberal economic and social policy position to back its party leader and underline an image of unity.

4 Germany

4.1 The German Social Democratic Party (SPD)

Background

The SPD's policy positions in the immediate post-war period were still substantially influenced by Marxist thinking (for the following cf. Heimann 1984). As the party failed to gain government representation in 1949 and hardly made any progress with regard to votes in the following elections in 1953 and 1957, the Social democrats substantially revised their programmatic positions at the party conference in Bad Godesberg in 1959 and accepted many decisions of the bourgeois government which they had initially criticized, including the system of the social market economy – an early but nonetheless very clear case of office-seeking programmatic change.

As a consequence of the Bad Godesberg programmatic revision, the election results of the SPD improved substantially in the following elections and the party was finally able to secure participation in the federal government, first in 1966 as a junior partner of the Christian democrats, and from 1969 onwards as the dominant partner in a coalition with the liberals. The social policy reforms of the first years of these governments were rather popular and allowed the party to further increase its vote share, culminating in 1972 when the SPD became the largest party for the first time in postwar history.

1980-1982

With the onset of the economic crisis after the first oil shock in 1973 and the emergence of the post materialist green party in 1980, social democratic electoral results worsened. Furthermore, as unemployment continued to grow and public finances deteriorated, internal

conflicts regarding economic and social policy spread from the end of the 1970s and became increasingly intense. Thus, the party rank-and-file refused to follow the party's own chancellor and finance minister when the government introduced spending cuts (not least to some welfare programs) in order to get the budget deficit under control. For example, a party conference in April 1982 demanded a number of fiscal and labor market policy provisions that explicitly contradicted the policy of the government led by the own party (cf. Merck 1987: 395; Niclauß 2004: 218). Nevertheless, when push came to shove, the parliamentary party voted for all austerity measures the government introduced because the liberals as coalition partner had made it clear that they would terminate the coalition and form a new government with the Christian democrats should the SPD block these spending cuts. So the SPD clearly behaved office-oriented as it accepted austerity measures for the sake of government participation against the resistance of substantial parts of the party. Only when it became evident that the liberals were about to change coalition partners did the SPD break the coalition in September 1982. The reason for this decision on the part of the SPD was entirely strategic, however, as the social democrats wanted to blame the liberals for the break-down of the government which they hoped would help them electorally (Zohlnhöfer 2004a: 629-30).

1982-1990

After the SPD was relegated to opposition in 1982 and lost the 1983 elections, the party distanced itself from many of the austerity measures the previous SPD led government had adopted and harshly criticized the new bourgeois government for what was essentially a continuation of the economic and social policies of the Schmidt government (Gohr 2001). This strategy was successful at some regional elections, most notably the state election in North Rhine-Westphalia in 1985 (Feist/Krieger 1985), but it did not prevent the SPD from losing the 1987 general election. This election showed that the SPD was lacking a credible option for taking over the Federal government. The SPD had only won 37.0 percent of the vote, so an absolute majority was out of the question in the foreseeable future under the German PR system. Even worse for the party, even a coalition with the liberals had become very unlikely as both parties had moved in completely different programmatic directions. In addition, the two parties would not have won enough seats to form a government in 1987 as had already been the case in 1983. Thus, in the absence of any real alternative a coalition with the Greens was seen as the only viable power option and this perception guided the SPD's move towards more post materialist positions in its 1989 Berlin program (Egle/Henkes 2003: 68). Thus, the development of the SPD after 1982 clearly corroborates the office hypothesis:

The party distanced itself from the economic and social policies it had adopted in government which were continued by the new coalition. It did so because these policies were seen as unpopular even though they were successful, in particular regarding the reduction of the budget deficit. Moreover (although slightly outside our focus on economic and social policies), the SPD modified its programmatic stance in order to create new options for gaining power, a coalition government with the greens, by embracing post-materialism.

1990-1998

Unfortunately for the SPD, the post-materialist Berlin program had become obsolete as soon as it was adopted in December 1989 because it did not give any answers to the new problems that were about to emerge with the ongoing unification of Germany. What is more, the SPD did not succeed in finding answers to the problems of the 1990s (including unification, globalization, demographic aging etc.) for the rest of its opposition period until 1998 (Stöss/Niedermayer 2000: 5; Busch/Manow 2001; Egle/Henkes 2003: 68). Given that the party suffered two more defeats at general elections in 1990 and 1994 this lack of programmatic initiative could be taken as evidence against the office hypothesis – obviously these electoral defeats did not incite the party to further revise its programmatic stance. Nonetheless, this conclusion might be somewhat premature. Rather, the signals voters sent to the SPD in the 1990s were far from unambiguous. While the defeats at the federal elections could be interpreted as a rejection of the SPD's policy by the voters, the SPD got very different signals from the elections at the Land level. As the CDU in the 1970s, but contrary to the social democratic experience in the 1980s, the SPD won many elections at the Land level in the 1990s and thus managed to win a majority in the second chamber and in turn was also able to influence government policy at the Federal level. Given these successes, further programmatic revisions did not seem to be necessary.

1998-2002

The downside of the SPD's programmatic non-development was that the internal conflict about economic policy was not solved. The party was torn between the rivaling factions of the "traditionalists" close to the labor unions, who sought to defend the welfare state against the alleged attacks of neo-liberal challengers, and the "modernizers", who argued that an adaptation of the Social Democratic economic policy instruments to the new challenges of globalization, Europeanization and societal change was inevitable (Meyer 2007; Raschke/Tils 2007: 498f.; Zohlnhöfer 2010: 327-330). The SPD managed to cover up these programmatic

differences during the electoral campaign in 1998 by arguing for both: "innovation" and "justice", as their slogan suggested. However, the price for the triumph at the ballot box in 1998 was that it left the programmatic ambivalence unresolved and once in office, it turned out that the SPD hardly knew what it wanted to do regarding economic policy.

The policies the Social Democratic government pursued in the first few months after assuming office can essentially be interpreted as a victory for the "traditionalist" faction (for the following cf. Zohlnhöfer 2004b). As time progressed and the 'modernizer' wing grew more influential, however, government policy was slightly reoriented. Nonetheless, in many respects – and particularly regarding employment policy which should be at the heart of any social democratic party – the government did not produce significant reforms.

A lasting programmatic reorientation of the party did not emerge, however. In 1999, chancellor and party leader Gerhard Schröder attempted to provide a theoretical underpinning for this kind of reorientation by co-authoring a policy paper with British prime-minister and fellow-social democrat Tony Blair (Schröder/Blair 1999). The two party leaders criticized "traditional" Social Democracy for being too state-centered while underestimating the importance of personal effort and the individual's responsibility. They espoused a stronger role for the market at the expense of the state and demanded lower taxes on enterprises, less social expenditure and more flexibility for the labor market. The resistance within the SPD against the paper was widespread. In particular, it was the party's left wing factions that opposed the proposals made in the paper and demanded a more marked emphasis on social justice. In order to reconcile the differing positions, a party conference in December 1999 decided to start a revision of the old party program – a process which turned out to be extremely time consuming without producing noteworthy results (cf. Meyer 2007; Egle 2009).

Faction politics goes a long way in explaining the programmatic stalemate that the SPD experienced during the first four years in government. But this is not the whole story. The experience of the years 2003-2005 shows that the modernizer wing was indeed able to become dominant. The fact that it chose not to push its policy position through prior to 2002 can be explained by vote seeking. Committing the party to the policy positions of the Modernizers would have meant factional strife which in turn would have harmed the party and would have made re-election much more difficult. Thus, comparable to the situation of the Swedish Social Democrats in the 1980s (see above), both party wings accepted the programmatic stalemate as long as the chances for re-election were intact.

2002-2005

From 2002 onwards, the economic and social policy position of the German social democrats changed dramatically. Most importantly, welfare entitlements were reduced in almost all social security systems (and particularly so for long-term unemployed) and the labor market was liberalized. At least in part these reforms thus revoked regulations the same government had adopted only a few years earlier. This liberal turn in economic policy can again be explained by the office hypothesis. In the electoral campaign of 1998, the SPD had promised to reduce unemployment to 3.5 million by the next election in 2002. As the party hardly knew what it wanted to do in economic policy it is of little surprise that it did not succeed in bringing down unemployment. Thus, the SPD was likely not to be able to keep its most prominent election promise. To avoid this electorally damaging outcome, the party leader appointed an expert commission that was asked to work out proposals for labor market reforms. This commission reported back shortly before the next election and thus allowed the government to document its will to fight unemployment (which was essential in order to win the next election). The SPD's traditionalist wing also rallied behind the commission's recommendations as internal conflicts about labor market policy shortly before the election would have had a devastating effect on the party's competence rating and thus also on its election result.

Thus, although factional politics were also relevant, the relevant literature points out that the more liberal policies the SPD committed itself to in 2002 were hoped to improve the party's competence rating in the field the election was likely to be fought about, namely unemployment, and thus help the SPD win the next election (Zohlnhöfer 2004b; Raschke/Tils 2007: 519; Hassel/Schiller 2010: 219, 227; Hegelich et al. 2011: 26). This is again corroboration for the office hypothesis. A policy perspective, in contrast, would have difficulty in explaining the far-reaching reforms. One could certainly argue from a policy perspective that the rising unemployment made the SPD aware of the failure of its previous employment policies which induced the party to change course. As we have seen in the previous section, however, the SPD deliberately refrained from any substantial labor market and welfare reforms until 2002 in order to avoid internal strife as well as conflicts with the trade unions. Thus, as the party did not seem to care much for these reforms as long as re-election was not put into question and started putting these reforms on the agenda precisely when the dismal employment performance threatened the SPD's office ambitions, we conclude that these reforms were essentially office driven.

2005-2010

The SPD's policies since 2005 again unambiguously corroborate the office hypothesis. The far-reaching welfare and labor market reforms adopted after 2002 turned out to be highly unpopular among the electorate. Therefore, the Social democrats tried to distance themselves from these reforms in the run-up to the 2005 federal elections – even though according to most economists the reforms were highly successful and one of the reasons for Germany's surprisingly good employment performance since the mid-2000s. Nevertheless, with the exception of the increase in the pension age, the Social democrats, both as a junior partner in a coalition with the Christian democrats (2005-9) and as the largest opposition party (since 2009), focused on popular social policy issues like pension increases, an extension of the unemployment benefit entitlement period or the introduction of minimum wages, even though these policies at least partially revoke reforms adopted by the previous SPD-led government (cf. Raschke 2010 and Zohlnhöfer 2010 for details).

While the office hypothesis is thus well able to explain the SPD's programmatic change after 2005 a policy perspective would have expected the SPD to stick with these policies irrespective of popular discontent as they helped achieve one of the principle goals of the party, namely the reduction of unemployment. The fact that this did not happen is strong corroboration for the office hypothesis.

Summary

Changes in the programmatic position of the SPD can be explained by the office hypothesis. In almost all cases, programmatic change was a reaction to exclusion from government. This was already the case when the party bid farewell to Marxism and became a 'people's party' in 1959 to overcome its opposition status. Similarly, the shift towards post-materialism in the 1980s was meant to establish a coalition option with the Green party. Again, this was hoped to help the party return to government. The move away from the unpopular welfare and labor market reforms of its own government after 2005 is a particularly interesting case as these reforms were successful in policy terms – unemployment went down substantially – but were highly unpopular. Moreover, the programmatic stability of the 1960s, 70s and 90s is also in line with what can be expected from an office perspective: Electoral results (even though only at the Länder level in the first half of the 1990s) were improving or allowed the party to remain in government and thus the party did not see the necessity to change its programmatic stance. Finally, the policy change that happened during the period of government participation

in the early 2000s cannot be understood without reference to the SPD's attempts at re-election although in this case internal politics also played an important role.

4.2 The German Christian democrats (CDU)

Background

The CDU[6] had shaped the economic and social policies of the first 20 years of the Federal Republic without much programmatic groundwork (for the following cf. Schmidt 1983). Rather than fighting for particular ideological positions, the party's program basically was what the government did. The concept of a 'Social Market Economy', which became immensely popular among the voters as the alleged foundation of the post-war 'economic miracle', was a somewhat uneasy compromise between the rather liberal economic policy ideas of the long-term minister of economic affairs and later Chancellor Ludwig Erhard and an emphasis on welfare state expansion by the (at the time) strong labor wing of the party.

1970s-1982

In the long period of opposition on the federal level (1969-1982) the CDU, which hitherto in some respects still resembled an elite party, became a party with mass membership. This was not, however, accompanied by a substantial revision of the party's economic policy positions. The party simply did not see a reason for any changes to its economic policy stance. When the CDU had lost power in 1969 the economy was in an excellent shape. Thus, the deterioration of many indicators of economic performance between 1969 and 1982 was blamed on the economic policies of the government led by the Social democrats and the CDU expected that a return to the concept of Erhard's 'Social Market Economy' would again improve the economic situation substantially. Even the fact that the CDU was unable to re-gain government in four consecutive federal elections was not seen as rendering the traditional economic policy stances as obsolete because economic performance developed in line with own expectations. These observations seem to corroborate the policy hypothesis as the CDU stuck to its policy positions even in the absence of electoral success. The case is not quite as unambiguous as it may seem at first glance as the party was also able to secure many election victories at the state level (which helped win and extend the majority in the second chamber of parliament) and did even rather well at Federal elections, e.g. winning 48.6 percent of the

[6] We restrict our analysis to the CDU and do not consider its sister party CSU because the CSU is active in only one German state, Bavaria.

votes (together with the CSU) in the 1976 Federal election. Thus, we coded this case as policy- and office-seeking.

1982-1996

After the party had finally returned to government in 1982, the economic and social policies the government adopted were seen as much too moderate by its business wing (cf. Zohlnhöfer 2001: 47-50). Thus, in the mid-1980s, politicians of that faction started circulating policy papers that proposed much more far-reaching reforms to the tax system, the labor market and the welfare state. These initiatives did not in any substantial way influence the party's policy positions in the 1980s, however. One reason for this was the opposition of the CDU's labor wing that strictly rejected these proposals. More importantly still, given the continued improvement of the economic situation in the second half of the 1980s, a programmatic revision seemed unnecessary and even electorally risky given the reluctance of the German voters with regard to liberal economic or welfare reforms.

After German unification in 1990 the Christian democrats' economic policy position hardly changed, either. To the contrary, the party believed that the problems of the economic transition in East Germany could be cured by the same medicine that was successful in the immediate post-war period in the West, i.e. the Social Market economy. What is more, the party was able to convince the voters with that concept as it won the elections in 1990 and 1994.

This behavior confirms the office hypothesis. While economic performance was satisfactory in the 1980s, it became very clear early in the 1990s that the government's (and thus primarily the CDU's) strategy of economic transition had failed as industrial production in East Germany broke down within month and unemployment skyrocketed in the former GDR. A policy-oriented party would thus have changed its policies in order to achieve a better performance. The fact that the CDU stayed put as long as enough voters supported the party to win elections thus clearly shows that the CDU was primarily office-seeking.

1996-1998

A substantial programmatic revision only took place after 1996. In the winter 1995/6 the number of unemployed exceeded the threshold of 4 million for the first time in German post-war history. This clearly put the government's re-election at risk as voters started questioning the party's economic policy competence– the party's most important electoral asset. Facing this situation, the party started adopting remarkable economic and social policy reforms that

went substantially further than anything that had been implemented in the previous 14 years (Zohlnhöfer 2001). Thus, because the government feared to be voted out of office in the next election due to the bad economic performance it risked the implementation of far-reaching unpopular reforms because it hoped that these reforms might improve the economic performance and secure the coalition's re-election. This again is in line with an office interpretation of programmatic change: As long as the CDU believed that it could win the next election without changing its programmatic stance, it stayed put; only under the impression of a looming electoral defeat the party changed positions.

1998-2005

The more far-reaching reforms that were adopted between 1996 and 1998 were unable to prevent the government's defeat in the 1998 federal election. Surprisingly, this defeat did not induce the party to move away from the more liberal economic and social policies pursued since the mid-1990s. In contrast, after another defeat at the 2002 Federal elections, the CDU tried to modernize its policy stance and to present itself as a force devoted to economic and social reforms (Schlieben 2007; Schmid 2007; Zohlnhöfer 2007a). One way to build this image was to convene an expert commission under the chairmanship of former Federal president Roman Herzog that was asked to work out proposals for the restructuring of the social security systems for the CDU. The commission's report recommended substantial changes to the welfare state that were rather unpopular.[7] Furthermore, by proposing a new income tax tariff with much lower tax rates (including a much lower top income tax rate) and a greatly reduced number of tax exemptions the CDU tried to make a mark as a liberal reform party, too. Even though both of these reform proposals were rejected by the majority of the voters as being socially unfair and were somewhat controversial even within the CDU, they were adopted as official party policy by the 2003 party conference in Leipzig. In modified form they also resurfaced in the party manifesto for the 2005 federal election, along with a number of other unpopular proposals regarding the liberalization of employment protection or the increase of VAT.

This behavior which constitutes a substantial departure from the traditional economic and social policy stance of the CDU is difficult to explain from an office-seeking perspective as the voters were clearly reluctant to accept these kinds of reforms. So, this is a case in which the policy hypothesis fares better: The Christian democratic leadership believed that more

[7] Examples include the increase of the statutory pension age from 65 to 67 years, the abolition of the pay-as-you-go-system in long-term care insurance, the abolition of certain instruments of active labor market policy as well as flat rate contributions to health insurance funds.

liberal reforms were necessary to solve Germany's economic problems. The adoption of this policy position was facilitated by two factors, however: First by the fact that the social democratic government pursued similar policies, so voters did not seem to have a choice anyway; and second the CDU was doing so well in the polls and in elections at the state level that a victory in the next elections seemed certain (Zohlnhöfer 2007a). So, as the party leadership felt that vote- and office-seeking considerations could take a back seat for the time being, policy seeking dominated.[8]

2005-2010

The result of the 2005 election was extremely disappointing for the CDU as it did not allow forming a coalition with the liberal FDP (that would have been willing to support the reforms the CDU had proposed). Instead, a 'Grand coalition' had to be formed with the SPD that was more than unwilling to adopt the liberal reforms the CDU had put forward.

Since most observers (including the CDU leadership as well as the party's rank-and-file) saw the liberal reform agenda as the main reason for the bad result in the election, the party's programmatic stance changed once again after 2005 (cf. Zolleis/Bartz 2010: 55-60). In most areas of economic and social policy, the CDU moved closer to the position of the social democrats. Thus, the party accepted an increase of the top income tax rate, the introduction of sector-specific minimum wages as well as an increase in a number of welfare benefits. Interestingly, the 'lesson of 2005' that liberal economic and social policy positions will in all likelihood lead to electoral defeat is influential even after the end of the Grand coalition, as the CDU has not come back to most of its liberal ideas in the new coalition with the liberals since 2009.

Again, this is a clear indication of office seeking behavior as the policies the party had proposed in 2005 had not been tried and thus did not even have a chance of failing. Rather, the fact that the liberal stance in economic and social policy led to a disappointing result in an election that the party had believed was impossible to lose sufficed to dismiss these plans and come back to a more pro-welfare stance.

Summary

Programmatic change in the CDU was mainly driven by electoral considerations. Given good electoral results at state elections and the SPD-led government's lack of economic success the

[8] Moreover, the adoption of these positions was facilitated by the continued weakening of the party's labor wing since the early 1990s (cf. Dümig et al. 2006)

party's program remained unchanged in the 1970s. Similarly, as long as enough voters seemed to support the party's economic policy after the change of government in 1982 to ensure future government participation, a programmatic revision appeared unnecessary. Only from the middle of the 1990s on, when economic performance deteriorated substantially and put the government's re-election at risk, the CDU started modifying its policy stance (which was facilitated by the weakness of the party's labor wing). The new policy stance remained in place even after the defeat in the 1998 election, not least because the new government came back to ideas not too dissimilar to the ones the CDU was proposing after a few months in office. What is more, from 2003 on, the CDU sought to be seen as a force of liberal reforms. The shock of the poor election result in 2005 that was seen as the voters' reaction to the party's liberal position in economic and social policy then led to another programmatic revision, this time a tacit revocation of the liberal reform ideas and a social-democratization of many policy positions.

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