

Electoral Defeat and Party Change: When do Parties Adapt?

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Abstract:

Electoral defeat has sometimes been called the mother of party change, but is this reputation warranted? In this paper we investigate whether party characteristics such as government status, party systemic origins, or ideological family affect how parties respond to defeat. Examining 73 parties in 28 countries, considering party efforts to change their leadership, their programs and their organizations, we conclude that only systemic origin (post-communist vs. West European countries) is a relevant factor affecting depth of party change. Parties take some corrective actions after electoral defeat, however, they are not likely to be a wholesale reforms. Thus, it would be more accurate to describe electoral defeat as a midwife of a party change, not as its mother.

Keywords: electoral defeat, political parties, party change, Europe

Introduction

Existence of any political party involves taking part in electoral competition, either as an individual player or as a member of a coalition. Difficulties are inevitable, particularly in rivalry democratic systems. Without understanding defeat and its influence on ensuing performance in political career, knowledge about the mechanism of winning would be incomplete (Bolleyer

2013: 2; Anderson et al. 2005: 1-2). The way political party deals with defeat affects its further existence and sometimes is even a matter of survival, hence commonly recognised belief about defeat as a ‘mother of party change’ (Janda 1990: 5; Deschouwer 1992: 9) seems reasonable. The collection of studies by Lawson and Poguntke (2004) discloses that challenges parties face, which translate into a decline in support, induce party transformation. Also, according to Harmel and Janda (1994) electoral defeat is a common trigger for party change. But the question remains why for some parties it is truer than for others, why some parties change more than others, what party characteristics is responsible for the difference?

Before the above issues will be addressed, the key category needs to be explained. We operationalized electoral defeat based on the three criteria: level of electoral support, quantity of parliamentary representation (number of seats got), party status in terms of its relation toward government (party in government versus opposition party). In these terms, an electoral defeat occurs:

- 1) Regarding a party in government: when as a result of an election the party is no longer the governing or co-governing party, irrespective of the quantity of attained seats or electoral support,
- 2) With an opposition party: lower electoral support or decrease in parliamentary representation. In those cases, not becoming a member of a governing coalition will not be considered as a defeat, provided that the party receives higher or the same number of votes (in a majority voting system) or percentage share of votes (in a proportional voting system).

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Explaining party change after electoral defeat is a complex task which requires analysis of factors internal and external to the party (Harmel & Janda 1994; Harmel 2002: 127-128; Gauja 2017: 7-9). Theoretically then, electoral defeat is a rich source of hypotheses, but surprisingly the topic has been approached not as autonomous, but as a secondary object of the analysis (Norris & Lovenduski 2004; Langston 2003; Fell 2009; Paczeńskiak & Bachryj-Krzywaźnia 2019; Louault & Pellen 2019).

Alteration within party organisation has been researched mostly within three theoretical approaches: the ‘life-cycle approach’, the ‘system-level trends approach’ and the ‘discrete change approach’, which deal with different changes in terms of depth and time-perspective (Panebianco 1998: 181-236; Harmel 2002; Gherghina & von dem Berge 2018: 211). But there is also a body

of research which does not invoke any theoretical paradigm, and yet it can be singled out under an umbrella term “electoral incentive approach”. What they have in common is that they are anchored in the same line of reasoning, which assumes that a desire to improve electoral performance is one of the primary motivators for a party to change, which turns into a widespread question, whether political parties change after political defeat (Gauja 2017: 50). The problem is that these studies vary in terms of dimensions of change (Moskovic 2011; Van Der Velden et al. 2017), size of the sample of analysis, including single case studies (Ágh 2000; Fraser 2007), presence of cross-national perspective (Cyr 2016, Bosco & Morlino 2006) and other than defeat alone factors taken into account like party inner-actors, leaders and factions (Harmel et al. 1995), they discursive practices (Gauja 2017: 13-15), the party’s office aspiration level (Schumacher et al. 2015) or balance of power within a party (Schumacher et al. 2013). Some researchers analysing the consequences of electoral defeats for political parties emphasize a kind of inertia of the defeated, manifesting in resistance to implementing changes and inability of drawing conclusions collectively (Budge 1994; Norris & Lovenduski 2004).

The above studies make reasonable to adopt a position that electoral performance, and electoral defeat in particular, is one of the most important factors influencing party alteration. However, the question remains whether and on what conditions and circumstances it leads to a complete party makeover, or just superficial emendation, or something in between. In this context the above-cited idea of defeat as a ‘mother of party change’ seems to be very categorical and too general statement. In this very paper we intend to verify validity of the claim and to overcome shortcomings of the above-cited research. Therefore, we have included in the analysis most of EU countries plus United Kingdom, Norway and Switzerland, and defined party change in a multidimensional way. We also introduced additional variables, that may affect party change after electoral defeat, such as 1) the political status of the party prior to losing elections, 2) the systemic origin of the party, and 3) the party’s ideological profile.

Originating from the observation that electoral decline can affect political parties in several ways, we ask why for some parties does a defeat end with a complete downfall, while for others it provides a boost to regroup and solidify their positions in the party system. What party characteristics causes the difference?

The scope and depth of a party change depends on its catalogue of political goals, as suggested by Harmel and Janda’s (1994). Since we have declared that the core idea of our approach is that the main motivator for change is a party’s desire to improve electoral

performance, we focus on the first two-party goals on their list: winning votes/election and gaining executive office (Harmel & Janda 1994: 272-273). Electoral defeat definitely affects the party's electoral vote share and ability to exercise power, but the study on how it affects party change are often inconsistent with one another. Some research suggests that parties do not adjust in response to election results (Adams et al. 2004), others prove the opposite (Sommer-Topcu 2009; Van Der Velden et al. 2017). Schumacher et al. claim that 'government parties, on average, change their platform more than opposition parties' (2015: 1051). These findings are therefore contrary to the previous literature, arguing that opposition parties are more likely to change (Bendor 2010). Schumacher et al. have proved that dependency between electoral loss and changes in party platform is mediated by another variable: level of office aspiration. However, for our research, these findings are of limited use, as it considers a party change in a perspective of expected electoral results. This very research, on the other hand, approaches to a party change as motivated directly by experience of defeat instead of foreseen electoral gain, the change which occurs in response to an actual electoral outcome

In our analysis we included: 1) parties which gave up power after election and moved to opposition (ruling or co-ruling prior to election); 2) parties which had already been in opposition and in result of election experienced further decline in vote share or parliamentary representation. For both types, electoral defeat implies decline in electoral support and parliamentary seats. However, parties in government additionally lose the ability to form government and shape state policy. Therefore, we assume that changes, implemented after experiencing electoral failure, varies in opposition parties compared to those which have just lost their place in a governing coalition. We assume that for the latter the sense of loss is more acute, which renders defeat stronger stimulus for change. Therefore, our first hypothesis stipulates that:

H1: Electoral defeat induces deeper changes in parties which give up power than in parties which remain in opposition.

Many studies show that political parties in Western Europe differ from parties in Central and Eastern Europe (Kopecký 1995; Lewis 1996; van Biezen 2003). The latter have a relatively short period of existence on the political scene, and, except of the group of parties originating from the previous regime, were created in a top-down manner in the parliament, which remained the main space for their formation and activity. Being rather elitist than mass parties with underdeveloped organisational structure, and leaders and communication efforts as the primary element determining their election result, they are also characterised by poor rooting in society.

In terms of Harmel and Svåsand's (1993) party development stage, parties from CEE countries are relatively young and thus less-institutionalised, compared to parties from western democracies. Having less petrified and inert structure, their organisations are more flexible and prone to implement major changes after a negative electoral shock. This tendency may be also intensified by post-authoritarian 'genetic imprint', which in case of parties from non-CEE post-authoritarian regimes, makes them more efficient in adopting changes aimed at improving electoral performance (Lisi 2010). Thus, it can be concluded that parties in Central and Eastern Europe because of their younger age, higher volatility of party systems, weaker party rooting in the social system and less well-grounded relations between parties, should be more prone to change after electoral defeat. Hence, our second hypothesis is:

H2: The changes in parties from the post-communist countries are deeper after the defeat than in parties from the countries of the Western Europe.

Despite vigorous debate among scholars about increasing concurrence between parties in terms of ideological stance (Bobbio 1994), ideological divisions are still lively and are constantly the most vital and universal method of classifying political parties. According to Elay (2002) left-wing political tradition is a critical review of changes in society, economy and politics, an attempt to reform these spheres, and advance democracy against tradition and hierarchy. Similar critical imprint marks left-libertarian parties as well (Kitschelt 1988, 1993; Redding & Viterna 1999). Therefore, it seems reasonable to claim that the change is somewhat inscribed in nature of parties, which falls into a broad understanding of the left. Left-wing parties are and have always been open to cooperation with various types of organisations promoting the rights of the excluded or the weaker. We believe thus the dependency between the party's readiness to implement changes and its ideological profile is worthy to be tested, therefore our third hypothesis is:

H3: The changes after defeat within the left and centre-left parties (social democratic, radical left, green and liberal) are deeper than within the right and centre-right parties (Christian democrats, conservative, nationalist).

Research design

Data and methods

The sample of analysis includes 28 European countries and consists of 73 political parties, which experienced electoral defeat between 2011 and 2017. The parties selected for analysis have lost electoral support measured by the share or number of casted votes compared to the previous election. This was translated into a reduction in the number of seats in the parliament. An

additional condition for including the party in the analysed cases was the status of the opposition party after losing the election. The comparative analysis is based on the dataset collected at the turn of 2018 and 2019 by 30 political scientists with expertise on particular national political scene and parties from each country. The data collectors filled out a questionnaire composed of 15 closed and open-ended questions. The first part was devoted to leadership after the electoral defeat. The second part concerned the causes of the defeat and their assessment. Third and fourth parts were focused respectively on changes in membership and internal organization. And in the final, fifth part of the survey we asked about programme changes in the political parties. We attach the list of the experts participating in the survey in the appendix.

Setting the starting point of analyse in 2011 we applied the criterion of cognitive accessibility, assuming that some facts and nuances about more temporally distant elections, may not be easy for an expert to recall and analyse. As for the ending point in 2017, we relayed on the common observation that changes within a party takes time. Therefore, we assumed that we need at least a year for them to actually occur and be become observable.

The hypotheses assume that the depth of changes taking place in political parties after electoral defeat is influenced by the political status of the party prior to losing elections, the systemic-origin of the party, and the party's ideological profile. Our sample comprises 73 parties which includes: 39 opposition parties and 34 (co)ruling parties. 23 parties are from post-communist countries and 50 parties from non-post-communist countries (West Europeans ones). Regarding parties' ideological profile, 21 were identified as social democratic, 20 Christian democratic, 9 liberals, 8 greens, 7 nationalistic, 6 radical left, and 2 conservatives.

Variables

The independent variables in the presented research are: (1) the political status of the party prior to losing elections, (2) the systemic origin of the party, and (3) the party's ideological profile. As regards the first variable, we considered all the parties in government which formed a single-party cabinet or were members of a governing coalition (either as a senior or junior partner). Parties supporting government (e.g. by parliamentary voting), but without formal status of coalition partner or cabinet representation, we exclude from this category. In a category of opposition party, we included those holding seats in parliament prior to election but not taking part in government nor governing coalition. For a second variable, amongst 28 countries included in the study, 10 of them are Central and Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic,

Slovakia, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Croatia, and three Baltic states). Whereas to determine the third variable, i.e. the ideological profile, parties were assigned to particular ideological group based on self-identification, expressed in their charters, political manifestos or presented on official website. When this criterion turned out to be confusing, an additional one was applied. In such cases we attributed ideological profile to the party because of their membership in transnational party organizations (as the international party organizations, and the Europarties called formally the political parties at European level).

The dependant variable in our research is the depth of party's change after electoral defeat. Such change may occur in various areas of party functioning therefore we constructed an index which covers five different dimensions of potential change: (1) change of leadership; (2) party decomposition; (3) change of power balance in the party; (4) programme changes; (5) structural changes. In all these dimensions each expert's statement was scored either 0, 1 or 2 points, according to schema presented below (Table 1).

Table 1: Range and indicators of change in political parties

Dimension of change	Indicator of change	Score	Indicator of change	Score	Indicator of change	Score
Change of leadership	no change	0	change of leader resulting from the party's electoral calendar	1	accelerated leader exchange or resignation of the leader	2
Party decomposition	no secession of activists	0	activists leave the party but do not form a new one	1	activists leave and form a new party	2
Change of power balance in the party	no change	0	marginal	1	significant	2
Programme changes	no programme changes or other distribution of emphasis on programme issues or development of a programme strategy for the future by the party	0	the emergence of the new issues or disappearance of certain issues	1	party move to the left-right axis	2
Structural changes	no creation of new bodies	0	establishment of new bodies which did not have a visible impact on the party	1	establishment of bodies that have actually taken up the programme/communication/strategic work	2

Source: own elaboration.

In the leadership dimension '0' point is assigned in case when there is no change of the party leader. In case of the second dimension – party decomposition – the same score means that secession of activists did not happen. Respectively, in other dimensions, '0' stands for lack of change in the party's power balance as well as in the programme and organizational structure. A change in leadership is ranked '1' if the leaders leaving is not an immediate result of the defeat but occurs due to scheduled party election. In terms of party decomposition such score signifies that although some activists left, they did not create a new grouping and respectively a change of power balance was marginal. In the last two dimensions score '1' shows respectively minor alterations in party agenda and creation of new bodies in the party structure, though they could not deliver visible impact on the party functioning. Modifications such as sped up change of leadership, activists' secession including establishment of a new party, significant shift on the left-right axis and in the balance of power in the party or structural makeover exerted actual impact on the party functioning, were scored as 2.

Accordingly, depth of the party change can range from 0 to 10. However, in a case of several parties there was a lack of data for one or two dimensions. Because of this we converted total change score for each party to avoid spurious result stemming from the simple fact that in some case total change score would be respectively overrated or underrated by a different number of elements in the sum. Therefore, the sum of change value in particular dimensions was divided by the number of data for each party. Total party change index for each party varies from 0 to 2. It should be noted though that the index reflects overall changes in a party. It means that sometimes party may experience a change in some above dimensions, whereas in other it can be scored either 1 or 2. What the index presents is the average of these changes for each party.

Results of analysis

As it turns out, sometimes after electoral defeat political parties introduce many changes at once, and sometimes are reluctant to make any of them. Analysing the behaviour of political parties following the election defeat, several regularities arose. Furthermore, alterations within parties are of different extent in particular analysed dimensions. None of the analysed parties scored maximum value of the index. In 9 cases no transformation followed party electoral defeat. The average index value within the whole set reached 0,78, being less than half of the maximum, which may be interpreted by the fact that parties are reluctant to introduce far-reaching changes. However, taking into account average value of change in respective dimensions, a more nuanced picture emerges. Table 2 consist data about post-defeat changes observed in all 73 parties.

Table 2: Index of change within 73 European political parties (in details)

	Code	Acronym	Change of leadership	Party's decomposition	Change of power balance in the party	Programme changes	Structural changes	Index of change
1	AT	GRÜNE	2	1	1	no data	0	1,00
2	AT	SPÖ	2	1	2	no data	1	1,50
3	BE	VB	2	1	0	0	1	0,80
4	BE	PS	2	0	0	1	1	0,80
5	BE	Sp.a	1	0	2	2	0	1,00
6	BE	Ecolo	2	0	0	0	2	0,80
7	BG	DPS	0	0	0	no data	0	0,00
8	BG	BSP	0	0	2	2	2	1,20
9	BG	ATAKA	0	0	0	0	0	0,00
10	CH	CVP/PDC	2	0	0	2	0	0,80
11	CH	GPS/PES	0	0	0	no data	0	0,00
12	CH	BDP/PBD	0	0	0	no data	0	0,00
13	CH	GLB/ PVL	2	0	1	2	2	1,40
14	CZ	ČSSD	2	1	0	0	0	0,60
15	CZ	KSČM	0	0	0	0	0	0,00
16	CZ	KDU-ČSL	0	0	0	0	0	0,00
17	CZ	TOP 09	1	0	2	0	0	0,60
18	CY	AKEL	0	0	0	0	2	0,40
19	CY	EDEK	0	0	0	0	no data	0,00
20	CY	DISY	0	0	1	0	2	0,60
21	DE	FDP	2	0	0	0	2	0,80
22	DE	Die Linke	0	0	0	no data	1	0,25
23	DE	Die Grüne	1	0	0	2	0	0,60
24	DK	SF	0	0	2	2	0	0,80
25	EE	EER	2	0	0	1	1	0,80
26	EE	ERL	2	1	2	2	2	1,80
27	EL	PASOK	0	1	1	2	0	0,80
28	EL	DIMAR	2	1	1	2	no data	1,50
29	EL	ND	0	1	1	2	2	1,20
30	EL	To Potami	0	1	0	2	0	0,60
31	ES	Ciudadanos	0	0	0	2	0	0,40
32	ES	PSOE	0	no data	0	2	0	0,50
33	FI	SDP	0	0	0	no data	no data	0,00
34	FI	Vas.	1	0	1	1	1	0,80
35	FI	KD	1	0	0	no data	0	1,25
36	FR	PS	0	2	2	2	0	1,20

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37	FR	LR	2	2	2	2	1	1,80
38	FR	EE-Les Verts	0	0	0	0	0	0,00
39	HR	SDP	2	0	2	2	0	1,20
40	HR	HL	1	0	2	2	0	1,00
41	HU	LMP	2	0	2	2	0	1,20
42	IE	Lab	2	0	2	0	1	1,00
43	IE	Green	2	0	0	2	1	1,00
44	IE	Fianna Fail	2	0	0	2	2	1,20
45	IT	Forza Italia (2013)/The people of freedom	0	2	0	0	0	0,40
46	IT	LN	1	0	0	1	2	0,80
47	IT	UDC	0	0	0	1	2	0,60
48	LT	DP	2	1	1	0	1	1,00
49	LT	TT	2	2	2	0	1	1,40
50	LV	SSP	0	0	no data	0	2	0,50
51	LV	ZZS	0	0	2	0	1	0,60
52	MT	PN	0	0	2	0	1	0,60
53	NL	PvdA	1	0	1	2	2	1,20
54	NL	SP	2	0	0	0	0	0,40
55	NO	Ap	0	0	0	2	0	0,40
56	NO	KrF	0	0	1	2	2	1,00
57	PL	PO	1	0	2	0	1	0,80
58	PL	PSL	2	0	2	0	1	1,00
59	PL	SLD	2	2	2	2	1	1,80
60	PL	PiS	0	2	2	2	0	1,20
61	PT	PSD	0	0	0	no data	1	0,25
62	PT	CDS/PP	1	0	0	0	0	0,20
63	RO	PNL	2	0	2	0	0	0,80
64	SE	M	2	0	0	0	2	0,80
65	SE	C	2	0	0	no data	2	1,00
66	SE	FP	0	0	0	0	1	0,20
67	SE	KD	2	0	0	0	0	0,40
68	SK	KDH	2	0	2	no data	1	1,25
69	SK	SDKÚ-DS	2	0	2	no data	1	1,25
70	UK	Lib Dem	2	0	0	1	0	0,60
71	UK	SNP	1	no data	no data	0	0	0,33
72	UK	UKIP	1	0	2	0	2	1,00
73	UK	Labour	2	0	2	2	2	1,60
Average			1,04	0,31	0,82	0,94	0,80	0,78

Source: own elaboration.

It turned out that changing leader is the most common reaction after lost election. The average index value amounts to 1,04. In less than half of the cases (30 among 73 parties) the leader remained on position. In the rest of cases, parties decided to exchange their leader immediately after a defeat in sped up mode (31 cases), or due to scheduled party election (12 cases).

The second most prevailing change after electoral defeat were agenda shifts. The average index value for this dimension reached 0,94. Though 29 parties did not make any programme changes after losing election, other 26 made substantial and decisive changes, deep enough to move the party on the left-right axis in the party system. Only in small number of parties (5 cases), platform changes were rather shallow, limited to introducing certain new issues or withdrawing from others, which, according to experts collecting data, did not imply shift on left-right axis.

In the third dimension, change of power balance in the party, most of them did not record or introduce any changes (37 cases), only political parties implemented lesser adjustments, 24 parties experienced more substantial changes. The average index value for this dimension reached 0,82.

In terms of structural changes, also the majority (32 political parties) have made no correction. In the case of 20 parties while new bodies appeared but did not have a visible impact on the party. Then, 18 political parties established new bodies that have actually taken over the responsibility for the program, communication, or strategic work within the party. Here index value equals 0,80. A closer look at table 2 suggest that the least probable consequence of electoral failure is decomposition of the party, which reflected by low index value 0,32. In only 6 of analysed cases some members left the party and created a new political entity. In 10 other cases, some activist left their current organization. Other parties did not experience any of such an occurrence. However, it should be clear that the result does not report this aspect of party change accurately, which is a consequence of method of cases selection. Firstly, the study takes into account only those parties which survived electoral defeat and did not perish in the aftermath from a political scene as an independent political brand. Secondly, because a decrease in electoral support, which in the study is one criterion of identifying defeat, was concluded by reference to electoral result prior to the one marked as defeat, only those parties could be included, which had taken part in at least two consecutive elections. Therefore, the research does not include parties debuting in electoral competition. In other words, average index value to this aspect of party

change, does not imply that party decomposition is the least likely consequence of electoral defeat. At the most perhaps amongst the well institutionalized parties, present on political scene for an extended period, this is the least probable that could follow electoral defeat.

The above numbers prove that parties experiencing electoral defeat most willingly change in those aspects which are the most easily to be noticed by external observers, transformations involving party structures occur less likely. New face of party leadership, changes in party platform, are the most easily perceptible and communicable facets of organizational change. This may explain why parties under scrutiny were more inclined to adopt such a way to account for defeat. However, we are aware that such a result could be, to some extent, a consequence of applied method of data collection. Though political scientists, compared to a common observer, present more thorough and sophisticated analytical attitude, they look at the party from outside.

They are not insiders - activists, MP's, board members. It is possible then, that despite their efforts and meticulousness, in case of some parties they could not report on party internal changes fully adequately, like in case of change of power balance and structural changes.

The crucial data, in terms of research objectives were presented in table 3. The table comprises information on index values change, relevant to the previously formulated hypotheses.

Table 3: Hypothesis verification

	Variable	Number of parties	Index of change	Change of leadership	Party's decomposition	Change of power balance	Programme changes	Structural changes
H1	Opposition	39	0,80	1,00	0,27	0,92	1,09	0,79
	Government	34	0,75	1,03	0,35	0,71	0,78	0,81
H2	West European countries	50	0,73	0,94	0,27	0,55	1,05	0,87
	Post-communist countries	23	0,87	1,17	0,39	1,41	0,75	0,65
H3	Left & centre-left	35	0,77	0,97	0,30	0,82	1,23	0,63
	Right & centre-right	29	0,80	0,97	0,38	1,00	0,58	0,90

In case of third hypothesis liberal parties have been excluded because in various countries they can be positioned differently on left-right continuum, usually as centre parties, sometimes centre-right, in case of social-liberal also as centre-left.

Source: own elaboration.

Results obtained for hypothesis 1 have not confirmed predicted dependency. It turned out that the opposite is true, opposition parties are more likely to change (index value 0,80) after electoral defeat compared to governing parties (index value 0,75). It should be noted though that index value in both cases is very similar, which suggests that the analysed variable is not relevant in determining post-defeat party change. Governing parties are slightly more likely to change their leader and implement structural changes and experience decomposition, whereas in other two dimensions are more likely to introduce change.

The collected data have confirmed second hypothesis. Numbers prove that parties from post-communist countries are more flexible, changes they carry through are distinctly more substantial than those observed in West European parties. We should note though that this is not true for all five dimensions. As regards programme changes, parties from post-communist countries are more restrained compared to West European equivalents. This is true also for organizational changes.

We have not confirmed the third hypothesis. Left and centre-left parties, with index value 0,77, turn out to be less eager to implement post-defeat changes than right and centre-right parties, which score 0,80 on change index. But like in case of the first hypothesis, in both party subsets index values is very similar, which suggest that position parties occupy on a left-right continuum, does not affect their inclination for post-defeat change. Though considering structural changes alone, left and centre-left parties are slightly more restrained, at the same time they are much more flexible, compared to right and centre-right parties, as regards programme changes.

Concluding remarks and Discussion

An electoral defeat is a kind of a test for every political party. How effectively a political party deals with a defeat is a measure of its success in the next election. After analysing the behaviour of 73 political parties after their electoral defeats, we can make a general conclusion, that in the most cases political parties are taking some corrective action. However, parties are most likely to implement changes voters can easily notice. Structural changes, definitely more engaging, demanding and less spectacular in terms of party image, are less common. Leaving the party and starting a new one, is the last option.

Only one of three stipulated hypotheses has been confirmed. Amongst three variables analysed in the study, only systemic origin of the party turned out to be a relevant factor in

affecting scale of party change. The other two: political status of the party and party's ideological orientation, do not affect post-electoral defeat party transformation in the way the hypotheses predicted. However, more detailed analysis, which take into account given dimensions separately, brings a more complex picture. First, party transformation cannot be reduced to one aspect only and should not be considered as an indivisible, single phenomenon. The fact that in case of two hypotheses overall index change was approximate in value, whereas single-dimensional differences were more sharply outlined, suggests that a study of a party change requires more refined and subtle tools and methods. Second, we are also aware some change happens anyway, even for victorious parties. It means that a broader comparison could also bring interesting conclusions, like to compare the reactions of parties that have failed during elections with parties that have no defeat in their account, because after winning elections or maintaining the electoral status quo changes may also occur. But we investigated the parties that suffered electoral failures, so as not to obscure the relationship between defeat and changes in the parties.

To summarize, though electoral defeat in most cases induces party transformation, in the light of above findings the change itself, and the mechanisms behind it, are not as obvious and overwhelming as one may expect. Catchy idea of defeat as a mother of party change seems to overrate the role electoral failure play in giving birth to the new in party life. Until further research refines the findings the less spectacular role of a midwife seems to be more suitable.

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