

The challenges of new parties in the age of populism

Blended Intensive Programme | 18.06.2025

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Outline

- Definition of new parties
- Theoretical approaches
- Typologies of new parties
- Characteristics of new parties
- New parties' performance and success
- Explaining new parties' success
- Impact of new parties

A new era?

This image of electoral change is largely mythical. It is a popular image, and even an exciting image; above all, it is a new image, and newness is always very appealing to our fashionable profession; but like many new, exciting, and fashionable images, it is also lacking in foundation, bearing little or no relation to the actual patterns of electoral alignments in contemporary Europe

(Mair 1997: 78).



Why Study New Political Parties?

- **Contemporary Political Transformation:** European democracies are experiencing unprecedented party system volatility and fragmentation, fundamentally altering the landscape of political representation
- **Key Indicators of Change:**
 - Rise of anti-establishment movements across Europe since 2008 financial crisis
 - Decline of traditional mainstream parties (Social Democrats, Christian Democrats)
 - Emergence of new issue-based parties (Pirate, Digital parties)
 - Growth of populist and nationalist movements challenging EU integration
 - Technological disruption enabling new forms of political organization
 - **Electoral Impact:** New parties have gained significant representation in national parliaments and European Parliament, reshaping government formation and policy agendas.

Defining new parties

Characteristics of "Newness":

- **Organizational Innovation:** Digital-first campaigning, horizontal decision-making structures, direct democracy mechanisms
- **Issue Entrepreneurship:** Championing previously neglected or emerging issues (climate change, digital rights, immigration)
- **Anti-establishment Positioning:** Challenging traditional political elites and conventional policy approaches
- **Personnel:** proportion of party elites with no previous political/party experience

Temporal Definition: Political parties established after 1990 (or 1960), coinciding with the end of the Cold War and acceleration of European integration processes

Temporal Distinction: Distinction between "genuinely new parties" (completely new organizations) and "transformed parties" (existing parties with major ideological shifts).

Typologies: Ideological Classification

1. Radical Right Populist Parties

- Examples: Alternative for Germany (AfD), Lega (Italy), Vox (Spain)
- Core Issues: Immigration restriction, national sovereignty, EU skepticism
- Electoral Base: Working-class voters, rural communities, economically insecure groups

2. Green and Ecological Parties

- Examples: Europe Écologie (France), GroenLinks (Netherlands), Left-Green Movement (Iceland)
- Core Issues: Environmental protection, sustainable development, social justice
- Electoral Base: Educated middle class, urban professionals, younger voters

3. Liberal Centrist Parties

- Examples: En Marche! (France), Ciudadanos (Spain), Venstre (Denmark)
- Core Issues: Pro-European integration, economic liberalization, technocratic governance
- Electoral Base: Urban professionals, educated voters, pro-EU constituencies

A different approach

- Lucardie/Rochon/Zulianello:
- **Purifiers** (or challengers): clings to an existing ideology, which it feels is diluted or betrayed by one (or more) of the established parties
- **Prophetic**: a party that addresses a new cleavage (*mobilizers*)
- **Prolocutors**: a party that tries to articulate particular interests without reference to an explicit ideology
- **Idiosyncratic**: a party that serves to solve the personal problems of the founders, rather than any significant social problems
- Any example?

Typologies: organizational forms

1. Movement-Parties

- **Examples:** Citizens' Movement (Iceland); Syriza (Greece), Podemos (Spain)
- **Characteristics:** Emerged from social movements, maintain activist networks, hybrid organizational structure
- **Strategy:** Mobilization both inside and outside electoral arena

2. Entrepreneur Parties

- **Examples:** Freedom Party (PVV), Lega (Italy), Jobbik (Hungary)
- **Characteristics:** Top-down dynamics, leadership centralization, charisma
- **Appeal:** Outsider status, authentic representation claims

3. Digital-Native Parties

- **Examples:** Pirate Parties, Five Star Movement (Italy)
- **Characteristics:** Online participation platforms, direct democracy mechanisms, transparent decision-making
- **Innovation:** Liquid democracy, digital primaries, crowdsourced policy development

Patterns of emergence

1. Crisis-Driven Formation

- **2008 Financial Crisis:** Triggered emergence of anti-austerity parties (Syriza, Podemos) and anti-establishment movements (Five Star Movement, LAOS/Independent Greeks)

2. Issue-Based Mobilization

- **Environmental Crisis:** Green parties gaining prominence (German Greens reaching 20%+ in polls)
- **Migration Crisis (2015):** Boost for radical right parties across Europe
- **Digital Rights:** Pirate Parties emerging in response to internet governance issues

3. Institutional Triggers

- **Electoral Reform:** Proportional representation systems facilitating new party emergence
- **EU Integration:** Creating both pro-European and Eurosceptic party opportunities
- **Devolution:** Regional autonomy movements spawning new territorial parties

Why new parties?

Theoretical Approaches:

- **Supply-Side Theories**

1. **Political Entrepreneurship:** Charismatic leaders identifying market gaps (Mudde, 2007)
2. **Institutional Opportunities:** Electoral systems enabling new party emergence (Tavits, 2006)
3. **Resource Mobilization:** Access to funding, media, and organizational capacity (Bolleyer 2013)

- **Demand-Side Theories**

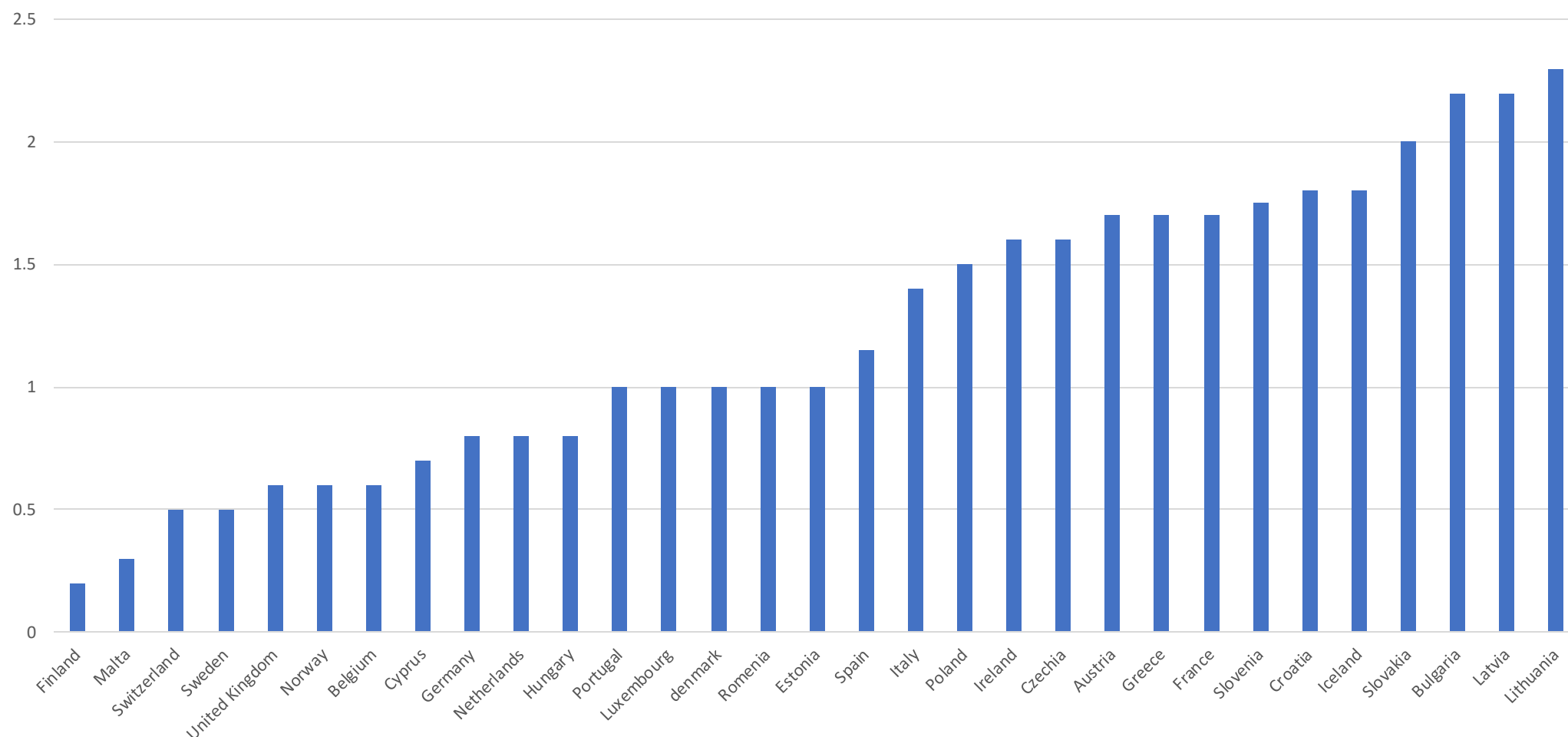
1. **Issue Evolution:** New societal challenges requiring political representation (de Vries & Hobolt 2020))
2. **Dealignment:** Weakening of traditional party-voter linkages (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000)
3. **Cultural shifts:** ex: post-materialist values (Inglehart, 1977); distrust

- **Integrated Approach:** Contemporary scholarship emphasizes interaction between supply and demand factors, considering both structural opportunities and strategic choices in party formation (Hug, 2001; Meguid, 2005).

New parties in European democracies (1960-2005)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Elections</i>	<i>New parties</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Austria	13	2	0.15	17
Belgium	14	17	1.21	4
Denmark	18	8	0.44	15
Finland	12	9	0.75	9
France	11	5	0.45	14
Germany	13	2	0.15	17
Greece	9	8	0.89	6
Iceland	12	7	0.58	12
Ireland	13	10	0.77	8
Italy	11	21	1.91	1
Luxembourg	9	7	0.78	7
Netherlands	13	17	1.31	3
Norway	12	6	0.50	13
Portugal	9	6	0.67	10
Spain	7	10	1.43	2
Sweden	14	3	0.21	16
Switzerland	11	13	1.18	5
United Kingdom	12	8	0.67	10
Total	213	159	0.75	

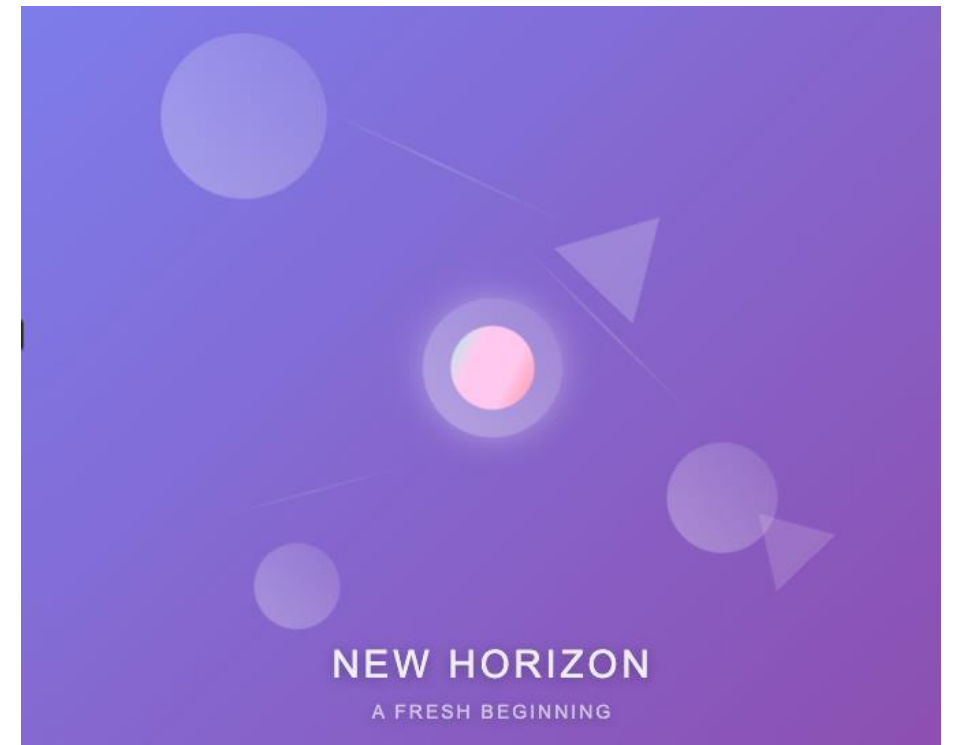
New parties in XXI Europe



Averag number of new parties by election, 2000-2020

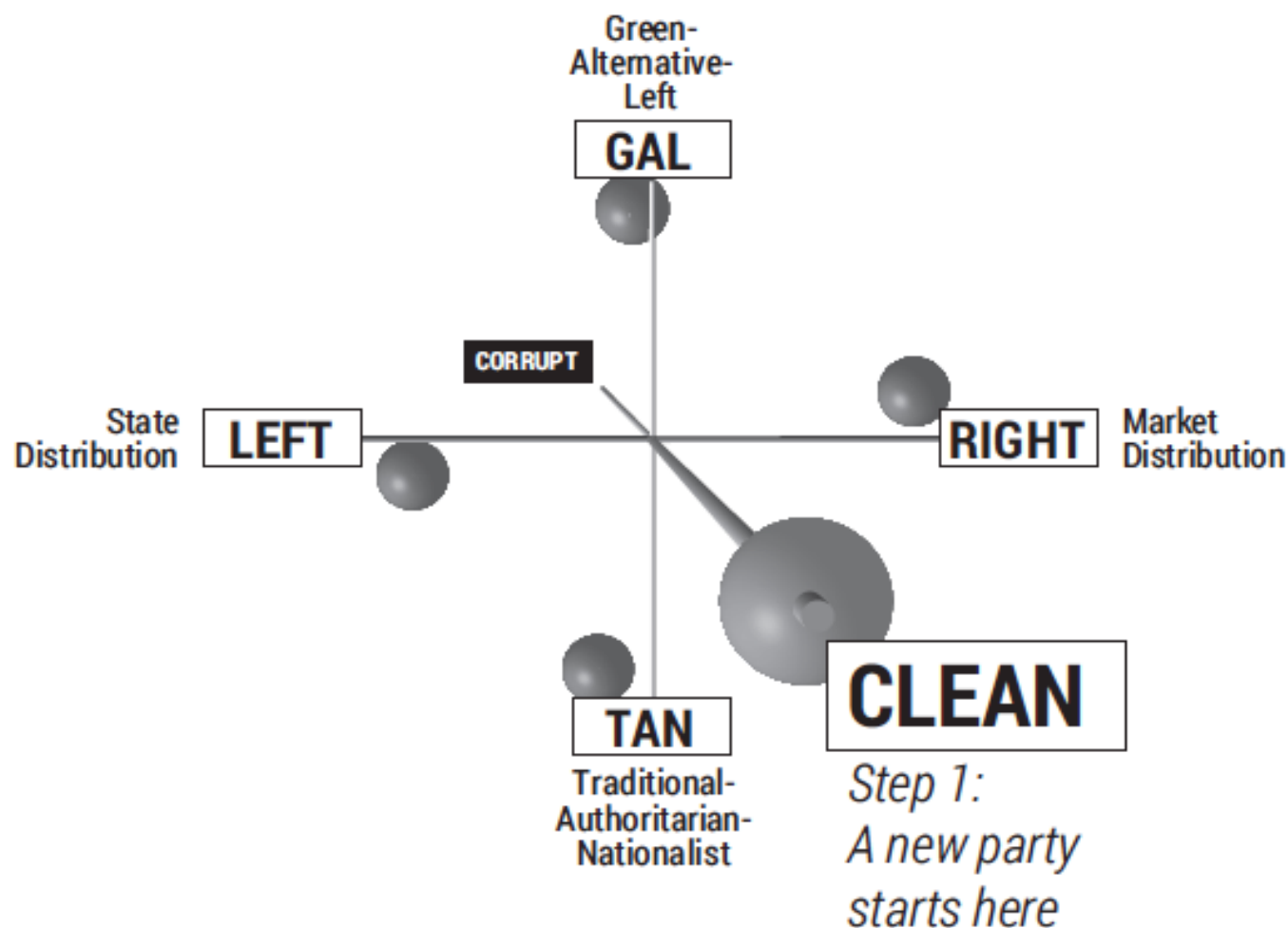
The old and the new

- What are new parties like?
 1. Programmatic orientations
 2. Electoral basis of support
 3. Organizational models



Salvation Union National Movement Courage
 Action Direction Resurrection Save Personalities
 Way Party PAR Owns YES Publica
 ANO Citizens Dissatisfied Ordinary State
 Bulgaria Different Ordinary Res
 People Society New cent Independent Romania

New parties, new appeal



New parties' programmatic orientations

- Salience of major issues is a fairly significant difference between newer and more established parties (Rohrschneider and Whitefield)
- The newer a party, the more likely it is to emphasize corruption and opposition to the establishment
- **Anti-establishment discourse**: anti-system; anti-political elite; anti-technocratic; generic anti-elite
- Competence is also important (De Vries and Hobolt 2018)
- Distinct communication style: easier and broader appeal to voters

Who votes for new political parties?

- Gender: no impact
- Young adults are more likely to support new parties
- Education: mixed findings (more educated for new green or liberal parties; less educated people vote more for populist right parties)
- Geographic divide: urban-educated vs rural-working class split

The importance of political attitudes

Primary Motivational Factors:

- Political Dissatisfaction: Declining trust in traditional political institutions and established parties
- Cultural Backlash: Resistance to multiculturalism, immigration, and social liberal values
- Economic Insecurity: Globalization fears, job displacement, and income inequality concerns
- Identity Politics: National identity vs European integration tensions
- Democratic Deficit: Desire for more direct democracy and authentic representation
- Issue Salience: Climate change, EU sovereignty, and traditional values prominence

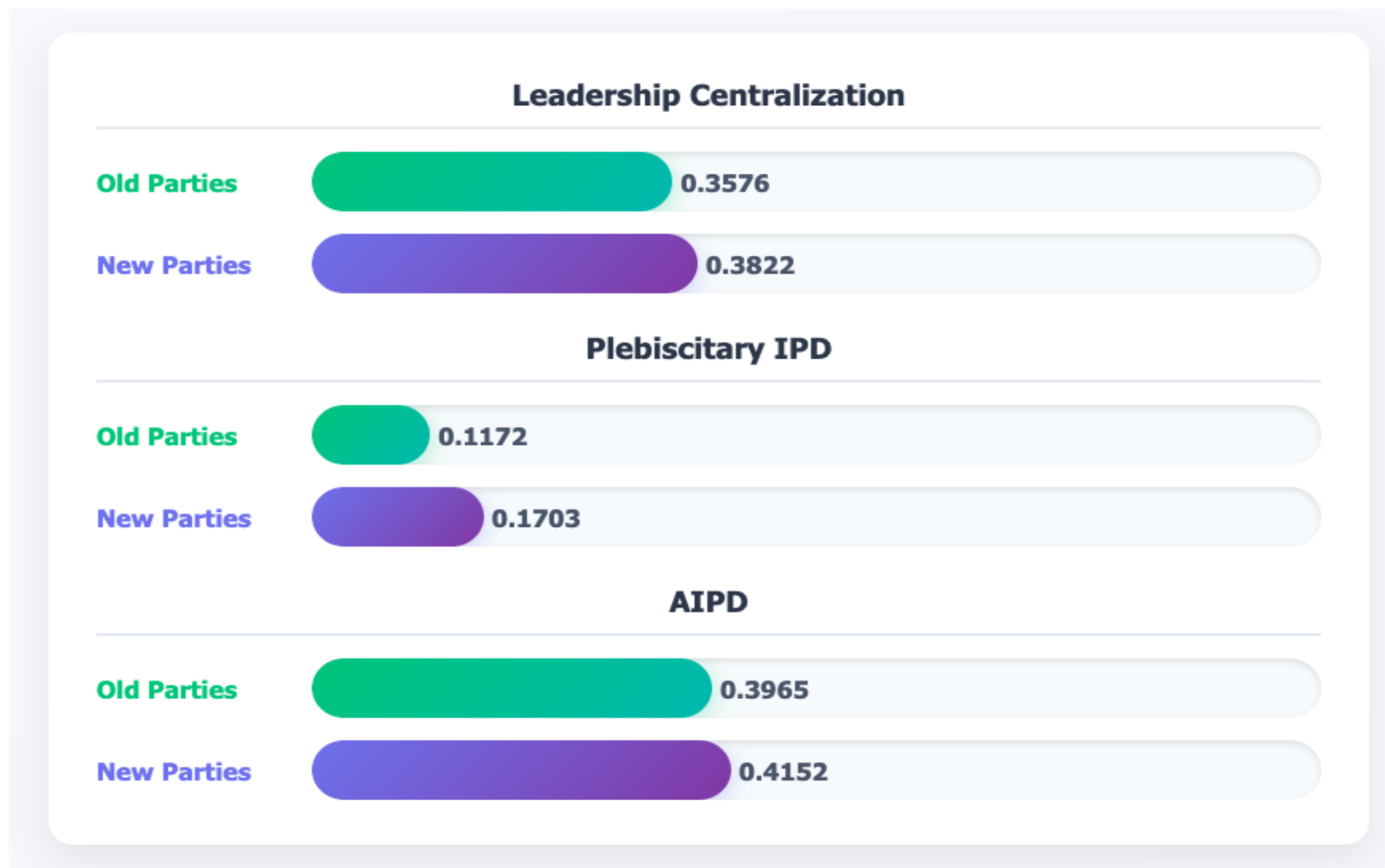
Do new parties adopt distinct forms of organization?

- Strategic Challenges of New Parties:
 1. Limited resources, weak brand recognition, no established voter base
 2. Need for rapid responsiveness and adaptability
 3. Often operate with minimal, flexible infrastructure
 4. Risks of leadership centralization and internal conflict
 5. Need for rules, member engagement, policy development over time

Examining party models

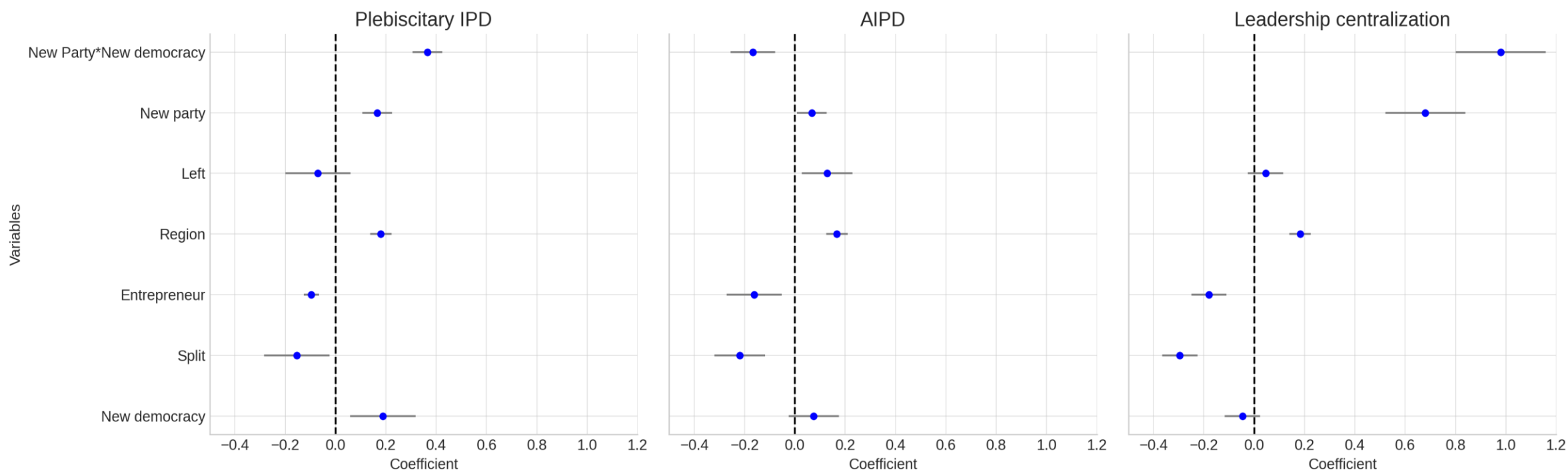
- Organizational configurations measured through the Intra-Party Democracy (IPD) indexes of the Political Party Data Base
- Plebiscitary Intra-party democracy (AIPD): 3 dimensions
 - Decision-making (programme-drafting)
 - personnel selection (leadership and candidate selection)
 - organizational structure
- Plebiscitary Intra-party democracy (PIPD): 2 dimensions
 - Decision-making (programme and issues)
 - Personnel selection (leadership and candidate selection)
- Leadership centralization (9 items)

Overall comparison



Findings

Regression Coefficients and Standard Errors



Comparing old vs new parties

In your opinion, what is one strength and one weakness of new parties compared to traditional parties?



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 Mentimeter

In your opinion, what is one strength and one weakness of new parties compared to traditional parties?

Not being linked to an ideology, the economical dependency by groups of interests

Mainly, they have a very strong and prominent leadership, whose reputation absorbs the party. So when they leave, it's very difficult for the new party to continue.

Strength: They really know which are people "real" problems Weakness: They were meant to be different from traditional parties but not too much.

Weakness: they less known to be popular among less educated people
Strenght: new themes for politics agenda

Strength: dynamic form of communicating with the citizens
Weakness: they elevate polarization and weaken an profound discourse

strength: they have not been in power, inhibiting them from being considered incompetent weakness: they have a hard time gaining credibility in the mainstream party system

Strength: having the possibility to use digital media more easily, they are bornning in an digital era. Weakness - the political context/social movements dont expect them to have a clear ideology.

New parties can be nearer to the newest generation and society's problems; the weakness of new parties can be the lack of experience and

How to measure new parties' success?

Success Measurement:

- Electoral success (vote share, seats won)
- Policy influence (agenda-setting, coalition participation)
- Organizational persistence (institutionalization, survival beyond founding leadership)

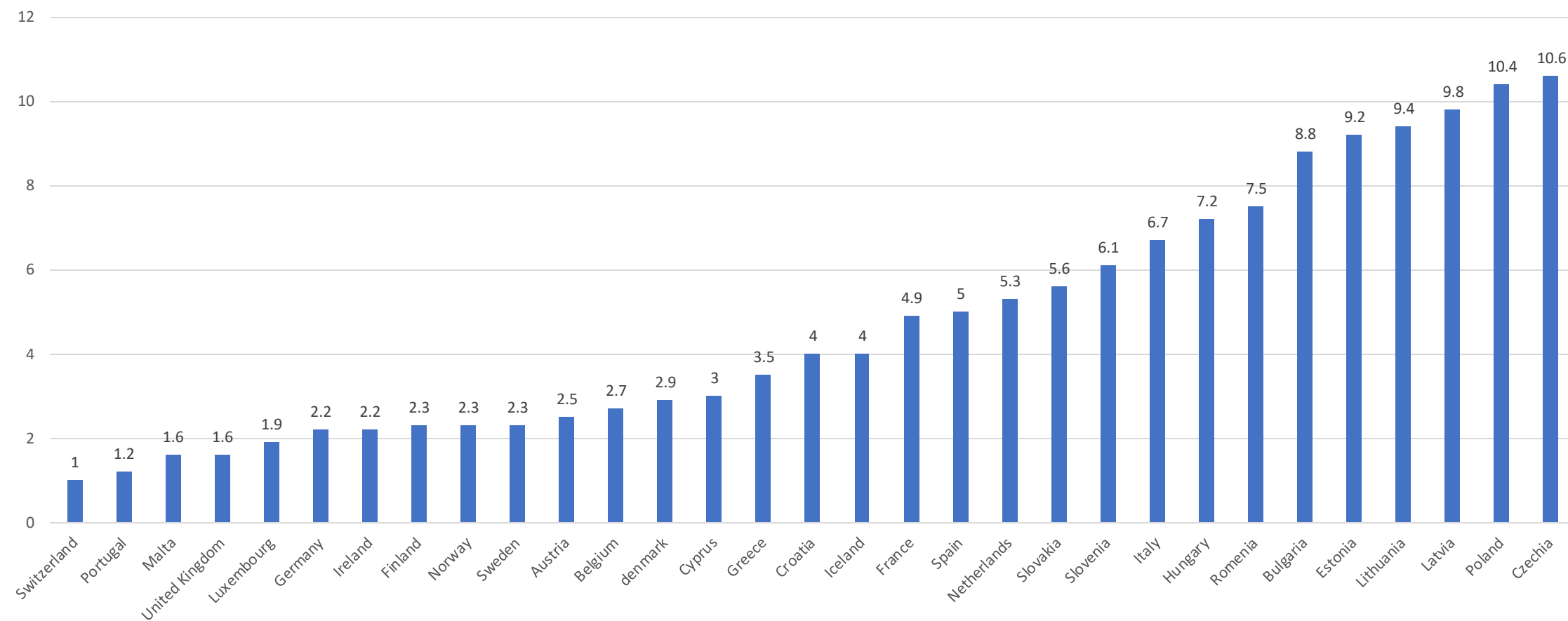
The increasing (electoral) relevance of new parties

% votes for new parties

	1960	1970	1980	1990
Austria	1.7	0.1	4.1	11.5
Belgium	2.8	11.4	12.9	23.7
Denmark	8.7	26.9	30.7	24.9
Finland	1.6	8.2	13.7	22.3
France	16.3	29.1	27.1	41.7
Germany	4.3	0.5	7.5	13.9
Iceland	2.4	4.7	19.3	21.6
Ireland	0.3	1.4	7.9	10.0
Italy	9.5	3.3	7.1	66.8
Luxembourg	3.1	12.0	11.5	22.4
Malta	13.1	0	0.1	1.5
Netherlands	2.3	26.6	44.5	45.9
Norway	3.9	13.6	15.1	19.7
Sweden	1.1	1.6	4.5	14.5
Switzerland	0.4	5.3	12.2	14.9
United Kingdom	0	0.8	11.6	2.3
Average (N=16)	4.4	9.1	14.4	22.4

Source: Gallagher et al. (2006: 261)

New parties' electoral performance by country



Electoral performance by party family

Party family	Eastern Europe	Western Europe	Total
Extreme-right	8.4	7.9	16.4
Conservatives	8.9	5.6	14.5
Agrarian	2.8	0.5	3.3
Christian-Democrats	0.9	0.5	1.4
Liberals	14.0	9.3	23.4
Social-democrats	5.6	2.8	8.4
Communists/socialists	1.4	7.0	8.4
Green/Ecologist	2.8	7.5	10.3
Single issue	4.7	6.1	10.7

Factors of new parties' electoral success

1. Internal Factors

- Leadership : Charismatic, media-savvy leaders (Macron, Salvini, Iglesias)
- Organization: 1) strength; 2) Innovation (Efficient use of digital tools and social media)
- Politicization of new issues: coherent narrative addressing voter concerns
- Resource Mobilization: Successful fundraising and volunteer recruitment
- Strong cohesion (avoid internal divergences and party splits)

2. External Factors

- Electoral System: Low thresholds and proportional representation
- Media Attention: Coverage of new parties and their issues
- Mainstream Party Failures: Policy failures; strategic failures (between radicalization and moderation); corruption scandals
- Party system: cartelization hypothesis

Challenges and future prospects

- **Institutionalization Challenges**

1. **Organizational Development:** Transition from movements to stable party organizations
2. **Leadership Succession:** Surviving beyond charismatic founders
3. **Internal Democracy:** Balancing participation with efficiency
4. **Policy Coherence:** Developing comprehensive policy platforms

- **System-Level Concerns**

1. **Governability:** Increased fragmentation complicating coalition formation
2. **Polarization:** Some new parties contributing to political polarization
3. **Democratic Quality:** Impact on representation, accountability, and legitimacy

- **Future Trajectories:** Continued party system transformation likely, with success depending on new parties' ability to institutionalize while maintaining their innovative and responsive character.

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