

# 1 The New Party Phenomenon

## *Introduction*

In 1986, a murmur went through the German federal state of Bavaria. After the foundation of the Republicans by former CSU ministers in Munich in 1983, the new party achieved an unexpectedly high result in the federal elections, with 3 percent of the vote (Schultze, 1987). Although the unrivaled rule of the CSU was confirmed once again and the Republicans ultimately failed to reach the 5 percent threshold, Franz-Josef Strauß, the long-time chairman of the CSU, expressed a powerful sentence in response to this election result, in which he declared that there can be no democratically legitimate party to the right of the CDU/CSU. Here, Strauß formulated a strategy aimed at the inclusion of social milieus, especially at the margins of the political spectrum, to ensure that no new party becomes a threat to the CDU/CSU. Strauß argued to cultivate the core clientèle, while at the same time, he believed tapping into new voter strata would be a mistake. Thus, he formulated the fundamental dilemma of established parties in dealing with new challenges: How much policy movement towards the new contender is needed to convince new voters, how much is possible without losing old voters?

One could dismiss this anecdote as a regional debate if it would not be regularly quoted to the present day whenever there were political disputes over direction between the sister parties CDU and CSU on how to deal with new challenges and challengers like the AfD (cf. Haupt, 2016). Thereby the Strauß sentence draws attention to a research question that is interesting both from a real-world and a scientific point of view: *Can established parties influence the electoral success of new competitors with their election programs?*

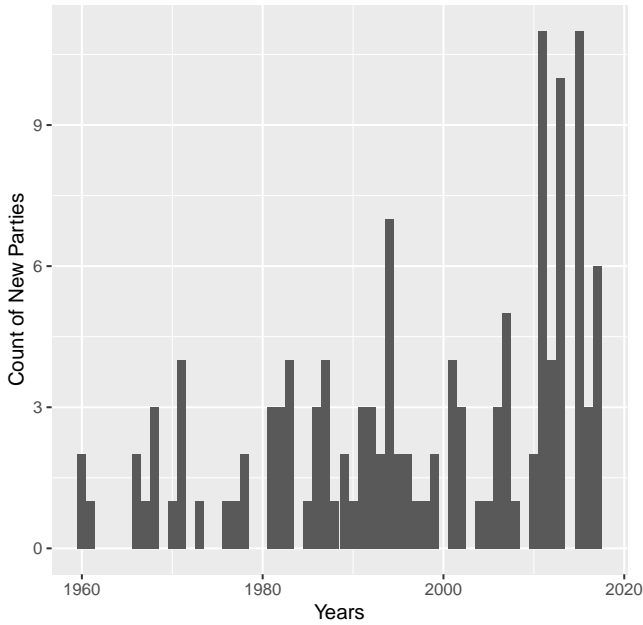
Despite its long history, the research on the emergence and success of new parties has not yet answered this question. Instead, attention to the study of new parties has often been driven by the emergence or success of individual (new) party families such as the Greens (Kitschelt, 1989, 1993; Müller-Rommel, 1985, 1992), or right-wing parties (Kitschelt, 1997). Today it is the "populist zeitgeist" (Bayerlein, 2021; Mudde, 2004), which draws attention to the phenomenon of the emergence and success of new parties. In addition to these event-driven attention cycles, there also have been efforts

to better understand the phenomenon through macro-comparative analyses (Bolleyer and Bytzek, 2017; Harmel and Robertson, 1985; Tavits, 2008) of the general population of new parties. Although these earlier works focus on sociological and institutional variables, the influence of ideology has only recently been addressed (Zons, 2015). Most of this research seeks to quantify the impact of new parties on their mainstream contenders (Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020). A contrary perspective is only taken by Meguid (2005), who emphasizes the importance of the strategies of mainstream parties for the success of niche parties. I generalize her theory in this project from niche parties and apply it to the broader category of new parties.

So far, the influence of established parties' strategies on the success of new parties has not been examined. However, the importance of new parties for political competition has long been emphasized. Downs (1957) has already pointed out the blackmail potential of new contenders. More importantly, new parties alter party systems and policies by their sheer existence (Hug, 2001). Some new parties even manage to gain office (Deschouwer, 2008). As wide-ranging as the study of new parties is, the definitions used are equally varied. I use a criterion of organizational novelty, according to which parties are considered new if they have won a seat in parliament for the first time and did not belong to the original party system.

If we look at the number of new parties based on this definition, we have every reason to get to the bottom of this phenomenon (cf. Figure 1.1). The number of new parties in parliament has increased dramatically in the past 50 years: Overall, there has been an increased number of new parties since the 1960s, with slight wave-like declines in the 1970s and early 1980s. It is striking that the number of new parties reached an unprecedented high after the financial crisis of 2008/2009, which underlines the timeliness of the new party phenomenon.

Based on this data, it is safe to say that the established parties face an increasing number of new parties with potentially significant influence. I assume that the established parties are primarily trying to maximize their vote share. To achieve this primary goal, it is also in their interest to keep competitors as small as possible. This is especially true for new parties, as their entry into parliament shakes up the previously existing power structure. What needs to be clarified is whether this is possible for them by changing their position or issue salience.



*Figure 1.1: Number of New Parties in Parliament in 18 Highly Developed Countries*

In order to answer this question, I analyze 168 new parties in 18 highly developed democracies<sup>1</sup> using election data (Jahn et al., 2018a) and party manifestos (Krause et al., 2018; Volkens et al., 2020).

I will show in this book that established parties are not out of options but can influence the vote share of the new contenders by changing their selective issue emphasis. My results show that the effect of a shift in the issue profile of an established party depends strongly on the concurrent competitive situation: Both ideological proximity and the expected election outcome play an essential role. Established parties successfully fight new parties with an engagement strategy if they act from a position of strength, i.e., if their vote gains are in prospect. Furthermore, the ideological proximity of the new party should be taken into account when choosing the strategy: within the same

<sup>1</sup> The countries in the sample are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom.

ideological bloc, an engagement strategy can be pretty successful; outside the bloc, this is instead not the case. While these results are based on measures of the text similarity of election manifestos, policy moves of established parties measured on the left-right dimension do not affect the vote share of new parties.

To come to this conclusion, I developed a novel measure based on the automated content analysis of election programmes and compared it with a more established measure of left-right position based on the RILE index. The salience measure I propose is based on text similarity and captures party policy convergence or ideological distance. The measure has the advantage of dispensing with assumptions about important issues or ideological dimensions that might be inappropriate for new parties.

I will go into the details of the measurements and the analysis in the following chapters. In the next section I clarify what exactly is meant by the term "new party" and what is meant by "established party". Then I present the main argument in greater detail and explain the structure of the book.

### *1.1 Concepts and Definitions of New Parties*

When dealing with new parties, it quickly becomes apparent that there is some conceptual confusion in this field: The term new parties is confused with neighbouring concepts such as small parties (with a low ideological offer and a small vote share) (Spoon, 2011, p. 5), new challenger parties (which are participating in an election for the first time with particular new issues) (Hino, 2012, p. 8) or with niche parties (that are solely defined by special issues put forward) (Bischof, 2017; Meguid, 2008; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Wagner, 2012).

Even when explicitly referring to new parties, there are considerable differences in understanding. For example, Hug (2001) defines a new party as a "genuinely new organization that appoints, for the first time, candidates at a general election to the system's representative assembly" (Hug, 2001, p. 14), while Barnea and Rahat (2011) describe a new party "as a party that has a new label and that no more than half of its top candidates (top candidates list or safe districts) originate from a single former party" (Barnea and Rahat, 2011, p. 312).

Such different definitions significantly impact the cases investigated, data availability, and appropriate explanatory factors. Therefore it is essential to establish a clear definition for further work on this phenomenon. To this

end, I will first briefly describe which definitions have been advocated in the literature so far. Afterward, I discuss the definition of the new party used here and its counterpart, the established party.

### Towards a systematic view on new party concepts

To bring a systematic structure to the definitions of new parties, I refer to Pedersen's party theory.<sup>2</sup> According to this theory, four stages or thresholds in party life can be distinguished: the thresholds of declaration, authorization, representation, and relevance (Pedersen, 1982, p. 6). The first step to becoming a party for a group of people is to declare an intention to compete in elections. Next, some legal regulations have to be dealt with to become authorized to participate in elections. Third, parties need to get elected to parliament to overcome the threshold of representation. The final step is to become relevant, whereby there is no concrete norm when this is the case. Certainly, governing parties meet the criteria, but also parties with blackmail potential can be considered relevant.

Three groups of definitions can be identified based on these thresholds or phases in a party's life span. In addition, I discuss a fourth type of definition, which introduces party characteristics as a further typological feature.

The first broad definition is related to the thresholds for declaration and authorization. Definitions of this type include all new parties that declare their intention to participate in elections and meet the registration requirements. Examples for the application of this definition are the studies of Harmel and Robertson (1985), Hug (2001), and more recently Obert and Müller (2017). The second definition is more strict than the first one: it puts the "threshold of representation" at the center of attention. Here parties are defined as new when they have entered parliament for the first time. Examples are the studies presented by Bolin (2014) and Bolleyer and Bytzek (2017). The third type of definition is based on the "threshold of relevance". An example can be found in the book by Deschouwer (2008), whose qualifier is the first entry of a party into government.

In addition to these three types of definitions, there are also attempts to describe new parties concerning features such as party name, party leader,

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2 For an early discussion on the divergent concepts of new parties compare Harmel (1985).

and program (Litton, 2015). Another discussed criterion is the number of new candidates (Barnea and Rahat, 2011; Sikk and Köker, 2019).

Looking at the first three definition types, it can be noted that with each type, another criterion is added to the definition so that the number of parties classified as "new" decreases. At the same time, the importance of the identified new parties for political competition increases and with it the availability of data.

The first type includes a vast number of new parties. This can quickly add up to thousands of parties in a time-series cross-section analysis. In addition, it is challenging for such a large set of often short-lived political organizations to collect (ideological) data, especially when looking at more extended time series.

The number is considerably smaller if the second type of definition is used. Focusing on parties with a minimum of strength in terms of vote or seat shares is a frequently used approach (Janda, 1980; Volkens et al., 2018), which assures a more manageable number of observational units as well as improved availability of data.

In the third type of definition, the number of new parties may vary, especially if a strict criterion such as incumbency is used in the definition. The number of new parties may be insufficient for statistical analysis so that case studies may be more appropriate.

Furthermore, these different definitions influence the theoretical assumptions about the importance of individual explanatory factors. For example, while registration restrictions and "costs of entry" (Tavits, 2006) are of great importance for parties in their early stages as a political group, other factors should play a more prominent role after successful participation in elections or even after entry into government.

With regard to definitions that include ideology or the party program itself, I see two problems: First, boundaries to neighboring concepts such as new challenger parties (de Vries and Hobolt, 2021; Hino, 2012) or niche parties (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Wagner, 2012) are blurring. These conceptual overlaps potentially compromise the clarity and stringency of the research. So, for instance, while it is true that niche parties are usually also new parties, not all new parties are niche parties.<sup>3</sup> This difference should be kept in mind in explanations to deal with all cases as appropriately as possible. Therefore both concepts should not be used interchangeably.

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3 More detailed information on this argument can be found in subsection 5.4.3.

Second, the inclusion of ideology as a defining criterion presupposes characteristics of the parties that could themselves be part of the research. So, the extent to which new parties bring new issues into parliament can be clarified in empirical research and be part of the model itself. This is impossible if the novelty of issues is part of the definition and thus the case selection. I will discuss this later in more detail.

Since the focus here is on competition between new and established parties on an ideological level, reference to definitions based on the "threshold of relevance" seems most appropriate. The number of cases is high enough for statistical analysis, and at the same time, there is good data availability, especially for ideological data. The following section presents the definition I adopted and justifies its criteria.

### Parliamentary Participation after Consolidation

I define as a new party all parties that have won at least one seat in elections to national parliaments and do not belong to the original party system consolidated after the first elections. I consider the party systems consolidated after 1960.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, all parties that won at least one seat in parliament for the first time before 1960 (or 1980) are considered established.

So, the decisive criterion of my definition is parliamentary participation after consolidation. The definition focuses on organizational rather than ideological novelty. In doing so, I directly follow the work of Bolin (2014) and Bolleyer and Bytzeck (2017). There are several reasons for choosing the criterion of parliamentary participation when analyzing the influence of the established parties on new contenders. Looking at the literature, the use of this selection rule can be justified both methodologically and in terms of content.

Entering parliament for the first time is a particularly important event for a party: Parliamentary entry distinguishes it from the multitude of newly founded parties that receive little attention. The new party's importance and chances of success increase in many ways: Media coverage is increasing, and the available resources are growing; the new party can thus represent and publicize its positioning and emphasis of issues much better than before.

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4 In Greece, Portugal, and Spain, democratization took place later, which is why I have set the threshold for these countries at 1980. This ensures that at least one election has taken place before parties entering parliament for the first time can be considered new.

Voters who previously avoided voting for the insignificant new competitor now see that their vote is not wasted. Thus, new parties that have entered parliament are far more likely to influence politics.

Therefore, the new party poses a severe challenge to the established forces. Scarce resources are redistributed after a new party enters parliament, which shocks established competitors. The former equilibrium in the political establishment is disturbed, new coalitions may become possible, issues previously thought to be safe may be discussed anew, or even wholly new issues may be integrated into the discussion. This makes it likely that an established party reacts to this kind of new contender by shifting the position and/or emphasis on issues.

Methodologically, this definition is helpful because the focus on parties with a minimum of strength and relevance limits the cases "to a more manageable level of hundreds, rather than thousands [...] for which information is more likely to be available" (Janda, 1980, p. 7).

Last but not least, by excluding the ideological profile of a party from the definition, I can include parties in the data analysis that would otherwise not be part of the sample. The variance at the ideological level allows me to include it as an independent variable in my model.

So, all in all, this definition seems to be the most appropriate approach considering the analysis' focus on the vote share of new parties in parliament.

## *1.2 The New Party Challenge*

I argue that a new party's first entry to parliament has far-reaching consequences. The new party gains access to new sources of finance, media attention increases, and the personnel resources improve considerably. From the perspective of the established parties, this situation is a challenge. After the entrance of a new party, a new competitive structure has to be taken into account. The limited amount of public attention and the scarce seats in parliament have to be shared now. A previously existing balance between parties has been shaken. This new situation requires adaptation, not least in terms of ideological orientation.

This is the starting point of the study at hand. I assume that the established parties adopt a strategic positioning vis-à-vis the new challengers to compete with them. The theory developed here suggests that established parties may respond to this challenge by changing positions and selectively emphasizing issues, thereby changing the assessment of voter proximity, the attribution



of issue ownership, and the public agenda, which ultimately contributes to changing vote shares of new parties.

I identify three strategies to deal with this challenge on the left-right dimension. The "maintaining strategy" is characterized by a party's unwillingness to change its own policy position; the "adopting strategy" means that the positions of the new party are taken into account and leads to a decreased position difference between both parties, and the result of the "confronting strategy" is an increase in the differences between both parties.

Concerning the new party's issues, I distinguish among three salience-based strategies. Parties can be indifferent to these issues, they can adapt their election program to them ("engagement"), or eliminate these issues ("avoidance").

So far, it is unclear what influence political opponents' positioning, and issue priorities will have on the success or failure of the new party in parliament. Let us consider the German case as an example. Since the 1960s, only two new parties have entered the political stage. The Greens came into parliament as a result of the 1983 elections. The PDS managed to win seats in the German Bundestag seven years later. While the two parties gained votes for very different reasons, a similar situation occurred from the point of view of the established parties: a new competitor to the left arose. This presented a challenge to them.

If we look at the examples from this perspective, we find the following strategies: In preparing for the 1987 election, the CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP avoided issues addressed in the Green's manifesto. Subsequently, an increased vote share (from 5.6% to 8.3%) of the Greens in the 1987 election was observed. The PDS experienced a similar but slightly more complex situation in the 1994 election. While the CDU/CSU and FDP manifestos had a lower similarity with the PDS manifesto than before, the SPD's program became more similar to the PDS. Nevertheless, in 1994 the PDS gained more votes than in 1990 (an increase from 2.4% to 4.4%). This example suggests that the avoidance strategy is associated with the new party's vote gain.

Of course, some cases present the opposite picture. The Irish Progressive Democrats can be cited here as an example. After their electoral success in 1987, the Workers' Party, Labour, and Fine Gael avoided their issues in 1989, while Fianna Fáil published a more similar manifesto. Subsequently, the Progressive Democrats lost half of their electorate (11.8% to 5.5%).<sup>5</sup>

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5 Despite their declining vote share in the next elections, the Progressive Democrats were involved in several governments as junior partners until they finally dissolved in 2009.

The Green Alternative in Austria is another apt example: in the 1995 election, the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Liberal Forum (LF) as well as the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) avoided the issues of the Green Party. As a result, the Green Alternative lost 2.5 percent of its votes in this election.

These few examples show that the success of new parties is a phenomenon that is difficult to grasp, as the "dramatic disintegration of newcomers that entered parliaments with extensive vote shares, and the resilience of those new parties that never won more than a few vote percentages" (Bolleyer and Bytzek, 2013, p. 775) illustrate.

In this book, I will approach this problem. For this purpose, I have developed measures, gathered data, and analyzed it based on my research design. In order to present my work as clearly as possible, I will lay down the plan of the project in the next section.

### *1.3 Projekt Framework*

In this book, I adopt a macro-comparative perspective. One of the advantages of this approach is that my findings are based on data from as many cases as possible and over a long period. At the same time, this approach also has disadvantages that should not be ignored here: The high level of abstraction goes hand in hand with a low depth of focus, i.e., in favor of statements that are as generally valid as possible, the individual cases cannot be appreciated in their uniqueness. Furthermore, the correlations identified by frequency statistics are not direct evidence of a causal relationship. Thus, while the observed changes in the similarity of election programs are a fact, this work ultimately cannot prove that the increase or decrease in the similarity of election programs was a strategic decision of party elites. It would be desirable to learn more about how election manifestos are produced and the strategic considerations of the authors. However, this is beyond the work presented here.

Furthermore, I apply a text-as-data approach. That means I conduct quantitative computer-assisted content analyses of political parties' election programs. Computer-assisted content analyses are fast and inexpensive, but more importantly, all coding decisions are intersubjectively comprehensible and can be reviewed and changed at any time. The independence from individual coders makes computer-assisted content analysis very replicable. Moreover,

the method allows thorough validation, as the influence of changes in the coding rules can be checked at any time by repeating the analysis.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, I am aware that this technique is regularly met with resistance: It is questionable to what extent computer-assisted content analysis equals or surpasses manual procedures. I will discuss this problem in greater detail later in this work. Although the suitability of manual content analysis has been proven in countless works, the disadvantages should not be forgotten: human coding is error prone, tedious, and expensive. Repetition in large corpora is therefore virtually impossible so that retrospective changes to the analysis are no longer possible. However, I see the text-as-data approach as a promising method that can only develop further if it is also used in content-related work. At the same time, I also use data generated by manual content analyses to base my analysis on a foundation as broad and sustainable as possible.

In summary, I argue that cosine similarity is well suited to capture salience changes between election programs. However, to also allow for a positional determination of the parties, I resort to the RILE. Together, both methods allow us to estimate the impact of salience and position changes on the electoral success of new parties.

In this work, I try to advance the research in terms of content and methodology: On the substantive or content level, I follow an x-centered research design (Ganghof, 2005) that attempts to explain the influence of the strategy of established parties on the electoral success of new parties. In doing so, I also take a look at the role of moderators of this relationship: The fundamental ideological proximity of both parties to each other and the specific ideological offer of the new party with regard to all other parties I see as critical intervening variables whose influence must be taken into account.

On the methodological level, I develop new measurements to capture the strategy of established parties and the ideological specificity of new parties. In this way, my work follows other text-as-data approaches (Laver et al., 2003; Slapin and Proksch, 2008). I have structured the work as described below to achieve these two goals.

In chapter two, I look at classical theory as well as empirical research from the perspective of interest in new parties and their vulnerability to rivals in the party system. I start with spatial and saliency theory as the foundations of many contemporary approaches and see what they say about my research

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6 A complete report on the validation process and the results for the data used here can be found in the validation report (Düpont and Rachuj, 2020).

questions. I then discuss two important empirical research strands: policy move and new party research, which inform my theory development and analysis. In doing so, I show that previous research provides many approaches to my research question but has not taken into account the influence of positional competition and issue competition in equal measure.

In chapter three, I use the insights gained in this way to clarify my argument, the underlying assumptions and justify the causal relationships. In essence, I draw on Meguid's "Position, Salience and Ownership Theory" (or PSO Theory for short), which describes the strategy of mainstream parties vis-à-vis niche parties, and extend its scope to new parties. To this end, I review the basic assumptions of Meguid for their viability and rearrange some elements of the theory. Finally, based on this extended theory, I develop hypotheses on the connection between possible strategies of established parties and the electoral outcome of new parties.

Chapter four is the transition to the empirical part of the project. This chapter deals with the content of election programs and the advantages and disadvantages of previous measurement methods. I focus on the RILE as a prominent representative of a left-right index based on manual content analysis and contrast it with the cosine similarity scores, a measurement of text similarity based on the bag-of-words approach. Through a simulation experiment, I can show how both measures behave when election programs become artificially more similar by adopting individual sentences. The resulting synthetic election programs thus also give an impression of the influence of individual sentences on the RILE or the cosine similarity scores. Thus, this chapter can also be read as a validation of the text-analytical measurement of issue competition between new and established parties presented in chapter five since this measurement is based on the cosine similarity scores. At the same time, the experiment helps to understand the empirical results in chapter six better.

In chapter five, I first present the data and justify the selection of the cases and time period under study. I then explain the dyadic approach chosen here and operationalize the dependent and independent variables. Here I present in detail the newly developed measurements for the issue competition strategy of the established parties as well as the measurement of new parties' nicheness. I also discuss the validation of these measurements. Moreover, I present descriptive statistics, which already give a first impression of the expected results. Finally, I justify using multilevel regression models as a method of analysis.

In chapter six, I present the results of the empirical analysis. In doing so, I draw on the hypotheses presented in chapter three. Then, based on the regression models, I endeavor to falsify them. Finally, I also show what influence the strategies of the established parties have on their new challengers, discuss my findings and present conclusions for future work.

In chapter seven, I summarize my work. For this purpose, I recapitulate my work and the most important research results and discuss them critically. I also identify desiderata as an outlook for possible further research.

