

7 Conclusion

In this final chapter, I summarize the key findings of this project by referring to the research question and the hypotheses developed. I then outline the implications for the theory developed here and the avenues I believe will emerge for future work.

The answer to the research question and thus the main result of this study turns out to be that established parties can indeed influence the electoral success of new competitors by making strategic changes in their election programs. Interestingly, however, there are significant differences in the effectiveness of changes to the election programs: While adopting or confronting the new party's positions has no impact on electoral success, it does when addressing or avoiding the new party's issues.

The direction and strength of this effect depend 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 ideological bloc, an engagement strategy can be pretty successful; outside the bloc, this is rather not the case.

This result also calls for revising the theory developed here. Underlying this work is the idea that new parties pose a problem to their established contenders. The former equilibrium, the status quo of party competition, is challenged by their entry into parliament. Resources are redistributed, alliances are reconsidered, and issues that may not have mattered before are discussed.

I assume that the established parties adopt a strategic positioning vis-à-vis the new challengers for such a situation. On a theoretical level, I distinguish two ways in which established parties can influence the electoral success of new parties:

Based on spatial theory, positional competition is assumed to be the first path. Potentially, established parties influence voters' electoral decision by changing the ideological proximity assessment of voters. In short, an adoption of positions should reduce the electoral success of new parties because

voters now get alternative offers. However, my work clearly shows that this assumption cannot be proven for positions located on the left-right dimension.

The second path is based on the salience theory. I assume that a differentiated emphasis on individual issues changes public opinion and voters' perceptions of issue ownership. In principle, an engagement strategy by the established party should pose a problem for the new party. By taking up issues of the new party, the established party attracts the new party's voters. As a result, the new party loses appeal.

My results conditionally support the theoretically assumed influence of the issue competition strategy: With the ideological proximity of the two parties as well as the competitiveness of the established party, two influential moderating variables should be considered.

An established party with good prospects for the next election can take the risk of taking up issues of the new party to convince its voters. Furthermore, the ideological proximity to the new party should be taken into account: An avoidance strategy toward the new party's issues will harm the new party if both parties belong to the same ideological bloc. However, if the two parties are in different blocs, which is likely to be the case most of the time, the engagement strategy should be chosen to reduce the electoral success of the new party. Surprisingly, the nicheness of the new party has no moderating influence.

With these results, this book contributes to the new party literature, the policy move research, and general spatial modeling approaches. First, I showed that Meguid's theory of party competition is a valuable tool for analyzing niche parties and new parties. Second, my conclusion that positional competition plays a secondary role for new parties sheds light on the importance of the left-right dimension in party competition: The left-right dimension is not as crucial for new parties as it is for established parties; instead, issue competition plays a more central role now (Green-Pedersen, 2007). Third, my analyses also confirm the results of Adams et al. (2011) and others, which showed that voters seem to ignore parties' policy moves.

Adams (2012) rightly asks whether voters read party programs at all. Following the idea of party cohesion research (Jahn and Oberst, 2012), I also think party programs really can be understood as "coagulated party discussions", giving an adequate picture of positions and issue emphasis as well as divisions within the party. As such, party programs are the basis for the political messages of party elites, interview statements, and legislative initiatives. If voters may not pay the perhaps desirable attention to manifestos, it can be assumed that at least some of these sources of information reach them.

Therefore, I assume that it would be helpful to include these data sources even more in the research. This leads me to some of the methodological advances in my work.

Based on a discussion of existing measures of ideological position and salience of parties, I developed a novel measure based on a text-as-data approach that applies information retrieval techniques to political science. For validation, I conducted simulation experiments. The resulting multidimensional measurement of issue salience has proven its usefulness in this work. Furthermore, the simulation experiment shows the advantages over classical measurements such as the RILE. Based on cosine similarity, I have also developed and validated a new calculation of the nicheness of a new party. Both measurements allow conclusions based on the content of party programs even without data from manual content analyses.

Of course, the present work could by no means solve all the problems: The effects found are, not unusually in party research, relatively small. So, for a significant change in the electoral success of new parties, quite large changes in the election program of the established party are necessary. Another problem I faced is that the measure requires at least two elections to consider the established parties' strategies. Due to this problem, many dyads have fallen out of the analysis, which negatively affects the statistical certainty of the results and their substantive scope. One way to circumvent this problem in the future would be to collect additional election manifestos that are not yet available in the manifesto corpus.

The analysis of additional data sources, as mentioned above, is then also one of the future possibilities to analyze the question examined here in more depth: Interview statements by politicians, speeches in parliaments and at election campaign rallies, flyers, and television appearances are data sources that are still underused. In my opinion, it is these sources that voters primarily consume. Therefore, they would allow an even better understanding of the election campaign's dynamics and the changes in the issues emphasized. Moreover, media coverage, for example, also occurs between election dates, which would further improve the analyses.

I assume that the somewhat desperate "Is anybody listening?" (Adams et al., 2011) can be answered with a resounding "Yes!" if new data sources are opened up for political science through the transcription of TV debates, speeches, and much more. With the text-analytical methods applied here, these are within reach of scholarly access, even though significant challenges to data collection and processing remain.

The rapid development of machine learning in recent years has already shown which tools will be in the hands of scientists in the future. For example, the tedious transcription of audio sources can now be accomplished in seconds. I made use of this to retrieve the quote from Franz Josef Strauß in the introduction. The translation of the document-feature matrix for this work was also only made possible at low cost by machine learning. I am convinced that technological development and the creativity of researchers will not stop here: With the further development of language models such as Open AI's GPT-3, the door to artificially generated texts is wide open. This would take the simulation of election programs to the next level and allow political scientists to test the impact of specially crafted political messages with experiments. In addition, advanced word embedding techniques that go beyond the bag-of-words approach, as well as classifiers and supervised machine learning algorithms, are becoming more accessible to political scientists. This development will help extract information from political texts and make it useful for research.

On a more conventional basis, I see potential in the calibrated cosine measures I have developed here as a benchmark in the experiment: Comparing documents by means of an anchor document makes it possible to trace the development of particular issues or ideas through texts from different parties or at different points in time. This is an exciting approach to diffusion research because it allows us to analyze the interdependent relationship between party competition's local, regional, federal, and supranational levels.

The theoretical foundations of this work can be applied to the analysis of party competition on all these levels and among all parties in (or between) a party system. The organizational novelty of a party could then be one of many interesting party characteristics studied in a dyadic approach. Therefore, future work should focus on party characteristics beyond nicheness, organizational novelty, or competitiveness: These may involve past party mergers, leadership replacements, or the internal party organization.

As for the outlined possibilities for future research, I think that text-as-data approaches in general, and text similarity analysis in particular, will contribute much to a better understanding of party relations. In this sense, the new party research conducted here is a beginning rather than an end.