

Party Competition in Western Europe

Challenger Parties

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04 June 2025

Last week

We talked about another way parties can use to appeal to voters:
group identities

- we introduced social identity and self-categorization theory
- we discussed two empirical readings:
 1. *group appeals* which can be analysed in the *social group yield* framework
 2. *group cues* that help to understand strategic nominations of political parties

Plan for today

- this week, we'll discuss party interactions
- what's the strategic advantage of challenger parties?
- how do established parties react to them?

Survey on the readings



A new era of challenger parties?

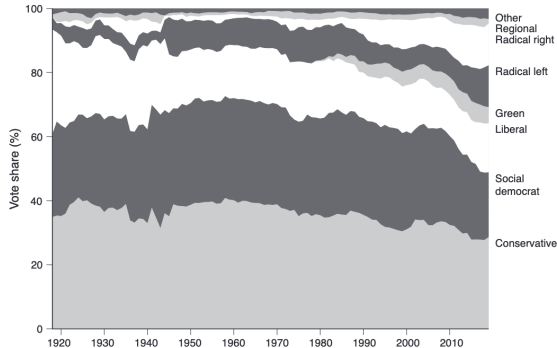


FIGURE 1.1 Vote share by party family

Note: Party vote shares 1918–2019 from Benedetto, Hix, and Mastrococco, Dataset of Parties and Elections

Figure: Unsettling the establishment?

On defining challenger parties...

Vries and Hobolt (2020) describe three ways on how to classify challenger parties. Please form three groups, describe the definition, find examples of parties that would be classified as challenger according to the definition and evaluate potential strengths and weaknesses.

- Group A: Party Family
- Group B: Programmatic Appeals
- Group C: Populism

On defining challenger parties...

1. by party family:
 - based on cleavage theories: mainstream parties speak to the 'old' cleavages, new parties relate to new cleavages
2. by programmatic appeals (cf. Meguid (2005))
 - niche/challenger parties mainly focus on non-economic issues that have been disregarded by established parties
3. by their populist character
 - challenger parties are anti-establishment

On defining challenger parties...

Vries and Hobolt (2020) suggest a fourth conceptualization of *challenger parties*:

- relational perspective: parties that are not dominant in a certain party system
- empirical translation: parties which have (never) been in government, i.e. lack of *government experience*

What are the strengths, what are the weaknesses of this approach?
(@ Julia?)

On the life cycle of challenger parties

Vries and Hobolt (2020) describe three waves of challenger parties

- the social democratic wave (1890-1920)
- the new-libertarian left wave (1970-1990)
- the populist radical right wave (1980-2010)

Each of these party families are still part of European party systems. Is there a natural cycle of party evolution from challenger to mainstream party?

On the life cycle of challenger parties

The iron law of oligarchy

- according to Michels (1915), parties' development follows an 'iron law of oligarchy', initially founded by policy hardliners (*zealots*), parties develop a bureaucracy and attract careerists
- Harmel and Svåsand (1993) distinguish between three phases:
 1. establishment of party
 2. broadening the appeal to new voters
 3. stabilization phase

How can we make sense of the evolution of the German Greens under this framework? Any counter-examples?

On the life cycle of challenger parties

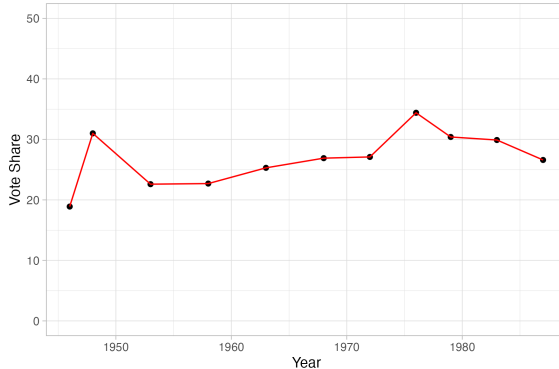


Figure: Vote Share of Partito Comunista Italiano over Time, own Visualization

The strategies of challenger parties...

“innovation creates new companies, while simultaneously destroying old ones that fail to adapt.” (Vries and Hobolt 2020, p. 41)

How do challenger parties innovate?

The strategies of challenger parties...

Challenger parties are successful when combining:

- *policy innovation*: putting new issues on the political agenda that rank high on appropriability
- *rhetorical innovation*: anti-establishment rhetoric

...when can we expect them to be most successful?

The strategies of challenger parties...

- dominant parties are in a strong position to secure their dominance; they benefit from party loyalty, decide over electoral rules, control the party system agenda and enjoy advantages on competency
- however: they may fail to recognize demand or supply-side threats
- shocks in demand-side preferences (e.g. due to generational shifts or long-lasting transformations) create opportunities for challengers

Radical Right's Success and Mainstream Parties' Policy Positions

Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) provide an empirical test of Vries and Hobolt (2020) argument. What do they do?

Radical Right's Success and Mainstream Parties' Policy Positions



Figure: A change in rhetoric by the German SPD

Argument

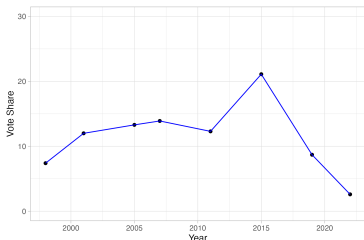
As we discussed before, there are structural transformations on the demand side, having implications for party competition:

- anti-immigrant sentiments become more vocal
- mainstream parties could directly target the new challenger and try to 'steal' their votes
- if that works out, dominance is restored

Argument

Denmark's centre-left set to win election with anti-immigration shift

Social Democrats expected to return to power this week after backing once far-right policies



(a) Danish People's Party Vote Share



The Social Democrat leader, Mette Frederiksen, has defended her party's more hardline stance. Photograph: Henning Bagger/AFP/Getty Images

(b) [Guardian Coverage](#) on the Danish Elections 2019

Figure: Side-by-side comparison of DPP vote share and Guardian coverage

Argument

Is the strategy of the Danish Social Democrats a response to the electoral success of the Danish People's Party?

Data and Methods

Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) argue: we cannot know whether policy shifts are *caused* or just *correlated* with the emergence of the far-right.

- focus on parliamentary representation of the far-right
- use of data by Manifesto Project on parties' policy shifts on multiculturalism
- regression-discontinuity design (RDD) with the electoral threshold as a natural cut-off point

What's the underlying logic behind the RDD?

Data and Methods

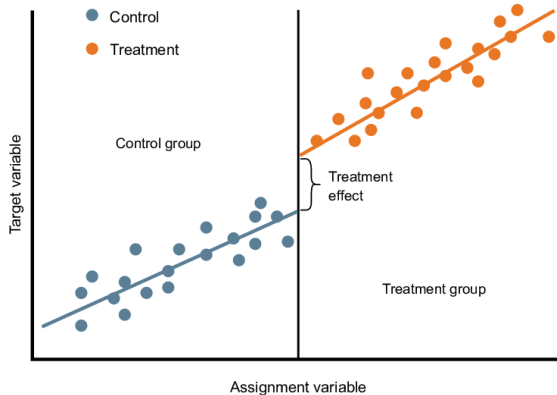
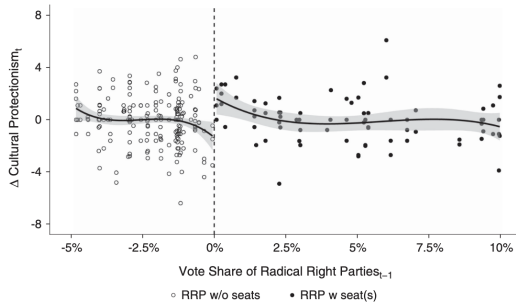


Figure: The idea of regression-discontinuity designs ([source](#))

Data and Methods



@Max: what seems to happen just below the threshold?

Findings

TABLE 2 *Mainstream Party Position Change on Cultural Protectionism*

LATE	St. Err.	Bandwidth	Polynomial	Approach	$N < c$	$N \geq c$
3.072***	0.643	3.315	1	Non-Parametric	214	32
4.388***	1.184	3.315	2	Non-Parametric	214	32
3.777***	0.820	global	3	Parametric	272	119
4.853***	1.003	global	4	Parametric	272	119

Note: Country-fixed effects and two-way clustered standard errors used. Bandwidth estimation according to Imbens and Kalyanaraman (2009). * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

What do the different cells tell us? What's the bottom line of Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020) analysis?

Follow-up research

Question by **Tanguy** and **Max**: Does the article distinguish between the impact of a first parliamentary success (“breakthrough”) and the impact of an established parliamentary presence, and what avenues might be considered for future historical research in light of their findings?

Follow-up research

Question by **Christian**: Does a party's tougher manifesto stance on cultural issues merely serve an electoral or does it translate into concrete and lasting policy change?

Follow-up research

Question by **Christian**: Does a party's tougher manifesto stance on cultural issues merely serve an electoral purpose, or does it translate into concrete and lasting policy change?

- Lutz (2019) and Römer, Leonce, and and Zobel (2023): no effect of electoral success, but government participation of RRP plays a role for restrictive migration policies
- but might be too early to call Römer, Leonce, and and Zobel (2023)

Follow-up research

- if mainstream parties respond, are they successful? (essay task)
- we talked about social identity appeals last week, should we also expect mainstream parties to align with challengers on their group appeals?
- what happens if mainstream parties lose dominance? are there any transitions from mainstream parties back to challengers?
- is this a story about the far-right? or does it travel to left-libertarian parties, too?

To conclude...

- **Research Question:** Do mainstream parties adopt the positions of far-right parties once they become successful?
- **Main Argument:** Two sided coin: mainstream parties adjust, but this may be due to a general change in public opinion on immigration
- **Data and Method:** Cross-sectional study with a RDD: threshold as cut-off point
- **Results:** Success of far-right causes right-wing shift on migration of both mainstream left and right
- **Implications:** Parties are responsive to challenger parties and try to absorb their issues

To prepare for the week after next one...

- Next week, there's Whitsun Holidays → no session; in two weeks: roundtable session on the supply side
- please submit your essays by Monday, 16 June, 23:59
- for commentators: please check your mails on Tuesday and comment on the essay assigned

Thank you for your attention!
Any further questions?

Literature

-  **Abou-Chadi T and Krause W (2020)** The Causal Effect of Radical Right Success on Mainstream Parties' Policy Positions: A Regression Discontinuity Approach. *British Journal of Political Science* **50** (3), 829–847.
-  **Harmel R and Svåsand L (1993)** Party Leadership and Party Institutionalisation: Three Phases of Development. *West European Politics* **16** (2), 67–88.
-  **Lutz P (2019)** Variation in Policy Success: Radical Right Populism and Migration Policy. *West European Politics* **42** (3), 517–544.
-  **Meguid BM (2005)** Competition between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy in Niche Party Success. *American Political Science Review* **99** (03), 347–359.

Literature

-  **Michels R (1915)** *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. Hearst's International Library Company, 1915.
-  **Römer F, Leonce Röth, and and Zobel M (2023)** Policymaking on Immigrant Welfare Rights: The Populist and the Mainstream Right. *Journal of European Public Policy* **30** (8), 1537–1564.
-  **Vries CE and Hobolt SB (2020)** *Political Entrepreneurs: The Rise of Challenger Parties in Europe*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020.