



Editorial: Party Entry and Exit in Times of Crisis

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Keywords: party entry, party survival, party system change, crisis, new parties

Editorial on the Research Topic

Party Entry and Exit in Times of Crisis

The mobilization and representation of societal demands and grievances is a central function of political parties and party systems in democratic regimes (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Sudden crises can disrupt it and act as a catalyst for party system change, leading to the entry of new parties in elections and parliaments (e.g., Hobolt and Tilley, 2016; Vidal, 2018; Casal Bértoa and Weber, 2019). This special issue is interested in the link between democracies' crisis exposure and patterns of party entry and survival as well as the latter's short- and long-term consequences for democracy. We are interested in two main questions: How have newcomers (successfully) exploited major crises? Did new entries stay around and introduce significant change in party systems or did they vanish after a short period of turmoil leaving traditional patterns of inter-party competition intact?

The first contribution by Lago focusses on the (consolidation) of electoral support of the radical right party *Vox* (established in 2013), which became electorally successful after the 2017 Catalan independence referendum that provoked a major institutional crisis. Specifically, Lago focusses on the effect of district magnitude on the electoral support for the party in the two Spanish general elections in 2019. Lago attributes the inconsistent findings on the impact of the electoral system to the fact that many scholars focus on the median or mean district magnitude (at the aggregate level) rather than using the electoral district as the unit of analysis. Furthermore, district magnitude is likely correlated with socio-political variables (e.g., demographic characteristics of the inhabitants of the district) affecting the likelihood of voting for new political parties. To disentangle the effect of district magnitude, Lago proposes a quasi-experimental design: focussing on changes in support for *Vox* within electoral districts with only 196 days separating the two elections, implies that the socio-political determinants of success for new parties are likely to stay constant, helping to isolate the effect of district magnitude. Both for aggregate district-level electoral support and individual-level party switching from the *Partido Popular* (PP) to *Vox*, Lago finds that the electoral viability of *Vox* in the April election increased its support in the November elections. So, Spanish voters strategically voted or refrained from voting for *Vox*.

The second contribution by Schulte-Cloos on the radical-right *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) (founded in 2013) also focusses on a lower level of aggregation, namely the evolution of the party's electoral support within municipalities. While Lago highlights the role of the electoral system, Schulte-Cloos uncovers the local "breeding ground" for new parties. Particularly, she argues that it is crucial to consider variation across municipalities in deeply seated nativist attitudes already present before the 2015 refugee crisis and the emergence of the AfD itself. So, to understand the initial electoral support for the AfD and its growth, we must consider differences across municipalities in the dormant electoral potential for the party. To empirically test this hypothesis, Schulte-Cloos relies on a rich panel dataset. It consists of 10,694 municipalities for which she reports the AfD's electoral support in four consecutive elections (two federal and two EU). She

OPEN ACCESS

Edited and reviewed by:

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Specialty section:

This article was submitted to
Elections and Representation,
a section of the journal
Frontiers in Political Science

Received: 01 February 2022

Accepted: 07 February 2022

Published: 05 April 2022

Citation:

van de Wardt M, Bolleyer N and
Sikk A (2022) Editorial: Party Entry and
Exit in Times of Crisis.
Front. Polit. Sci. 4:867640.
doi: 10.3389/fpos.2022.867640

focuses on two dependent variables: the AfD's level of electoral support and changes in this support across two elections. The electoral support for the radical right before the emergence of the AfD (for parties such as *Die Republikaner*) is the main independent variable and a proxy for deeply seated nativist attitudes. Based on advanced spatial econometric analyses, she demonstrates that such attitudes increased both the level and change in the AfD's electoral support.

Finally, Rama et al. analyze three new political parties in Spain: the radical left *Podemos* (founded in 2014), the unionist and liberal *Ciudadanos* (founded 2016) and the radical right *Vox* (founded in 2013). The authors provide a rich comparative analysis, uncovering the interplay between proportional electoral institutions, crises, and the voter demand side. The authors first pinpoint that all three parties first participated in EU elections with more proportional electoral rules before entering the national elections. However, the authors argue that crises and voter demands play a more decisive role than proportional electoral rules. As for the nature of the crises, *Podemos* successfully tapped into discontent with the austerity policies resulting from the European debt crisis, but other types of crises acted as catalysts for *Ciudadanos* and *Vox*—namely the Catalan independence referendum. *Ciudadanos* also benefited from a corruption scandal within the PP. The authors show *how* the three parties exploited the respective crises that led to their rise. *Podemos*, for instance, successfully mined a niche of voters combining high political interest with low trust in established political parties. Lastly, the authors reveal how the voters for each of the three parties differ from those voting for the closest located established party (PP in case of *Vox* and *Ciudadanos*, and *PSOE* in case of *Podemos*). While *Podemos* and *Vox* voters are clearly distinct from their mainstream counterparts, *Ciudadanos* voters are not that different from those of the PP. Therefore, it may be more difficult for *Ciudadanos*

to consolidate its support, which could explain its recent electoral losses.

Together these articles produce several important insights. First, to understand the (ongoing) electoral success of newcomers, we should look beyond the national level and explore regional and local factors. Second, different types of crises (not solely economic) play a major role in the electoral breakthrough of the new parties; yet, the causality may be complex. Rather than changing attitudes, crises may activate latent attitudes like the deeply seated nativist attitudes. Third, we must study how crises interact with the openness of the electoral system and electoral niches. Finally, the question of whether new parties fostered party system change depends upon one's definition of the concept (also see Borbáth, 2021). At least in the contexts studied, they have all fostered electoral losses among established parties. Yet, Rama et al. are skeptical about whether these parties changed the Spanish cleavage structure. Furthermore, assessing the impact of new parties requires looking at multiple levels (local, regional, EU) rather than only the national level.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

MW wrote the first draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

FUNDING

MW research on party entry and exit was supported by two completed postdoctoral research grants from the Research Foundation Flanders FWO (Grant No. FWO16/PDO/198) and the Fund for Scientific Research Wallonia FNRS (Grant No. 28091302).

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