

**A GROWING IMPACT OF NEW PARTIES: MYTH OR REALITY?
PARTY SYSTEM INNOVATION IN WESTERN EUROPE AFTER
1945**

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A Growing Impact of New Parties: Myth Or Reality?

Party System Innovation in Western Europe after 1945

Abstract

Despite the large body of literature on the emergence and success of new political parties in Western Europe, few, if any, attention has been paid to investigate new parties from a systemic perspective, therefore exploring their potential effects on party systems. This article focuses on Party System Innovation (PSInn), defined as the aggregate level of 'newness' recorded in a party system at a given election. After having reviewed the extant literature on the topic, the article discusses what a new party is and provides a new index to measure PSInn. The article analyses the evolution of PSInn across 324 elections held in 19 West European countries from 1945 to 2015 and its cumulative effects over time. Although in most countries the party landscape today is still very similar to the one appearing after WWII, data offer clear evidence of a sharp increase of innovation in the last few years.

Keywords

New parties; Party System Innovation; Non-founder parties; Western Europe; 1945-2015

Introduction

In the past two decades, the instability of West European party systems has significantly increased, as witnessed by growing levels of electoral volatility (Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2015). West European party systems have been changing not only because of the vote shifts among existing parties but also because of the growing support for new parties, such as the Five Star Movement in Italy, *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* in Spain, Alternative for Germany or Golden Dawn in Greece. The emergence of new parties, especially those with a large electoral strength, has the potential to make the interparty competition increasingly unstable and unpredictable (Casal Bértoa, 2014). This outcome, in turn, if occurring consistently over time, can lead to party system de-institutionalization (Chiaromonte and Emanuele, 2015), a situation which – as we have learned from the Eastern European (Birch, 2003; Powell and Tucker, 2014; Sikk, 2005) and Latin American (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995) experience – may affect the democratic process, both in terms of its legitimacy and its effectiveness. Indeed, recent studies have pointed out that new party entry causes the reduction in voter turnout levels (Robbins and Hunter, 2011) and increases uncertainty both in the voting decision-making (Ezrow, Homola and Tavits, 2014; Marinova, 2016) and in the process of government formation (Grotz and Weber, 2015), thus weakening accountability.

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In the context of Western Europe, new parties have been studied so far mainly from the traditional party-level perspective, by focusing on their ideologies, political platforms, organisations (Hug, 2001; Kitschelt, 1988; 1995; Lucardie, 2000; Willey, 1998). Yet, we still do not know much about the extent to which they have been successful over time and have been contributing to the reshaping of West European party systems. In other words, we need to address the issue of new parties from the less traditional systemic-level perspective¹, especially by considering how relevant it has potentially become for the increasing instability of party systems in this area. This is what we aim to do in this article, which analyses *Party System Innovation*, defined here as the aggregate level of ‘newness’ recorded in a party system at a given election². Our contribution is therefore primarily empirical and consists of a comprehensive picture of party system innovation across 19 West European countries and for the period going from the end of World War II (WWII) to 2015, thus taking into consideration the whole universe of parliamentary elections in the lower house.

More specifically, our first research question deals with the assessment of the evolution of party system innovation. Given the long-term emphasis put by scholars on the process of de-freezing of political alignments taking place since the 1970s (Dalton et al., 1984; Franklin et al., 1992), and the growing body of literature focusing on new parties (Bolleyer, 2013; Mudde, 2014; Sikk, 2005), we expect that party system innovation has increased through time. We also expect this to have occurred especially in the last few years, characterised by the impact of the harshest economic crisis since 1929, which has

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9 contributed to bring fresh opportunities for new parties to emerge (Hernández and Kriesi,
10 2015).

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13 Closely related to the first one, the second research question we address in the article
14 concerns the assessment of how the different waves of innovation recurring over the last
15 70 years have reshaped the party system with respect to the one of the early post-WWII
16 years. In other words, we want to understand whether and to what extent the current party
17 systems resemble those established just after 1945. Based on the above-mentioned
18 literature, we expect that, in Western Europe, the party landscape has progressively become
19 quite different than that emerged after WWII and, again, that this process of differentiation
20 has been particularly noticeable in the recent past.
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30 The article is organised as follows. The next section synthetically reviews the different
31 conceptualizations of 'new' political party, discusses our choice and, consequently,
32 introduces our measures of party system innovation. In the following three sections, we
33 analyse data on party system innovation in Western Europe since 1945. We first analyse the
34 systemic impact of new parties in the single election; then we focus on the cumulative
35 effects of innovation by analysing how much today's West European party systems are
36 different with respect to those emerged 70 years ago; finally, we propose a typology of
37 party systems related to the specific pattern they have followed as regards party system
38 innovation. A concluding section follows.
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New Parties and Party System Innovation: From Theory to Measurement

As already seen in the introductory section, party system innovation is here defined simply as the aggregate level of ‘newness’ of parties in a given election, measured as the total share of votes obtained by all new political parties. Defining a ‘new’ political party, however, is not as simple as that. Thus, we need to address the preliminary question of what is to be meant by ‘new’. There is a considerable body of literature on this topic and various scholars have given different answers to the question. However, considering that we are interested in new parties to the extent to which they influence the party system as a whole, here we will take into account only those definitions that: 1) clearly identify a set of indicators to be used to empirically detect whether a party is new or not, thus allowing for both cross-country and cross-time comparisons, and 2) associate the newness of a party, to ‘structural changes in parties that are consequential on electoral competition’ (Marinova 2015: 269)³. On the contrary, in order to establish a threshold between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’, we do not take into account the shift in the party ideological or programmatic dimensions since all parties experience frequent changes, though often to a very limited extent, in their ideological positions and platforms, but this does not make them necessarily new even to their habitual voters⁴.

According to the above-mentioned criteria, one of the first definitions found in the literature is due to Harmel, who considers new parties ‘all those that have been added to a

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9 country's original party system' (1985: 405); these parties are new exactly because they
10 didn't play any initial role within the system and their birth has been affected 'by the
11 decisions and actions of parties that have come before' (*ibidem*, 406). Based on this
12 definition, Harmel and Robertson (1985) find 233 new party alternatives in 19 Anglo-
13 American and West European countries between 1960 and 1980, including both those
14 which have roots in other party formations – therefore resulting from mergers, splits or re-
15 organizations – and those which are formed 'naturally' as completely new actors in party
16 politics⁵.

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26 Following a more restrictive perspective, Birch (2003) considers parties resulting from
27 mergers and splits as new only if they have a new name different from that of their
28 predecessors. Powell and Tucker (2014) claim that a new party is a result of a merger only
29 when the merging parties have a relevant size, i.e. when at least two of them had obtained
30 more than 5% of votes in the previous election, otherwise the party is considered to be a
31 'continuation under another name' of the larger of the pre-existing parties. As for party
32 splits, they do not regard as new a splinter party that is a clear successor (for example, if
33 retains the same name or organization). Mainwaring et al. (2015) adopt the largest
34 successor/predecessor method in cases of splits and mergers, by considering the party
35 resulting from a merge to be in continuity with only the largest of the predecessor parties,
36 while all the successor parties except the largest one as qualified as new in case of a split.
37 Quite similarly, parties resulting from splits and mergers are considered as new by Bolleyer
38 (2013) only insofar as they originate from minor splits of established parties or still need to
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9 build a viable infrastructure at the time of the merger. In the same vein, Hug identifies as
10 new the party with 'a genuinely new organization that appoints, for the first time,
11 candidates at a general election to the system's representative assembly' (2001, 14), but in
12 this case his definition, while including genuinely new parties and splits, excludes all kinds
13 of electoral alliances and parties resulting from mergers. The same definition of party
14 newness is adopted by Tavits (2006) and Zons (2015).
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22 Based on an even more restrictive approach, Barnea and Rahat defines as new 'a party
23 that has a new label and that no more than half of its top candidates (top of candidate list
24 or safe districts) originate from a single former party' (2011: 311). Similarly, for Bartolini
25 and Mair (1990) as well as for Sikk (2005) the change of the party name or the formation of
26 parties as result of mergers and splits do not make these parties as truly new units.
27 According to Bartolini and Mair (1990, 311-312) a party is considered as new only when it
28 does not derive from the structure of an existing party (as in the case of mergers and splits),
29 or, in other words, when it is a startup organisation. Sikk goes even further by adding the
30 discontinuity in the political personnel and leadership as a necessary condition for political
31 parties to be qualified as 'genuinely new'. According to this approach, also shared by
32 Marinova (2015), new parties are only those parties 'that are not successors to any previous
33 parliamentary parties, have a novel name and structure, and do not have any important
34 figures from past democratic politics among their major members' (2005: 399).
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50 Table 1 visualizes and summarizes the various indicators stemming from the different
51 operationalisations of the concept of 'new' party we have discussed so far. As we can see,
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9 party newness has been regarded as the result of a wide array of phenomena, ranging from
10 the simple denominational revision to the birth of a completely new political subject with
11 no ties to existing parties and a new political staff.
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17 Table 1 about here
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22 In this article, we rely on Bartolini and Mair's criteria as regards what can be defined as a
23 new party. These criteria have been followed by other scholars who have dealt with the
24 analysis of party system change from a comparative perspective (Ersson, 2012;
25 Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2015; Chioramonte and Emanuele, 2015). This approach is
26 rather conservative in the sense that it excludes mergers and splits from the definition of
27 new party, but does not go as far as to consider as still old those parties formed by existing
28 politicians who have previously left their former parties as done by Sikk (2005)⁶.
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36 Following this conceptualization, we operationalize *Party System Innovation* through a
37 measure that simply aggregates, for each election, the overall vote share of new parties as
38 defined above. The resulting measure, PSInn, relies on electoral results by taking into
39 account the relative size in terms of votes obtained by all the new parties jointly considered.
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45 We have also set a threshold at 1% at a given election in order to exclude marginal
46 parties and we have collected data starting from the third post-World War II or democratic
47 election of each country, for a total of 200 parties (see the Appendix for the list) in 324
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9 elections. The underlying assumption is that the party system innovation we are interested
10 in is that occurring after the initial institutionalization of the party system⁷.

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13 PSInn is calculated at time t with respect to time $t-1$ (namely, PSInn is calculated with
14 respect to the status quo established at the previous election) and therefore each
15 observation in each country is completely independent from the previous ones. In other
16 words, according to PSInn, a party is considered 'new' only in the first election when it
17 enters the party system by receiving at least 1% of the national share. Then, in the
18 subsequent elections, it becomes 'old'. Yet, after the entry of that party, the resulting party
19 system is different, to a certain extent, with respect to the original one, and this change will
20 last as long as that party will be part of the system. Therefore, PSInn cannot tell us how
21 innovation cumulates within a party system over time. To detect it we need a second,
22 cumulative measure of party system innovation, based on the distinction between *founder*
23 and *non-founder* parties in a party system. A party is considered as a *founder* if it has received
24 at least 1% of the national vote share in at least one of the first two post-WWII elections
25 (or, in the case of Greece, Portugal and Spain, the first two democratic elections).
26 Otherwise, the party is counted as a *non-founder*. The rationale behind this choice follows the
27 logic of the previous measure of PSInn: we look at the first two post-WWII or post-
28 authoritarian elections and make a dichotomous distinction between relevant parties that
29 formed the system (those who received more than 1% of the votes) and parties that
30 emerged later or were only marginal actors (those below 1%) at that time.
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Following this simple rule, it is easy to calculate the *Cumulative Party System Innovation* (CPSInn), which is nothing but the sum of the vote share received by non-founder parties in each election⁸.

Party System Innovation in Western Europe

What has been the evolution of PSInn in Western Europe since 1945? Are West European party systems increasingly populated by new parties? In order to answer these questions and verify the expectation formulated in the introductory section, we start by looking at the overall picture of the patterns of PSInn across the 324 general elections held in 19 West European countries from 1946 to 2015.

Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 shows that, overall, party system innovation has been the exception rather than the rule across the Western Europe's post-WWII history. Elections clearly tend to cluster around low levels of the index, as confirmed by the positive skewness of the distribution. As many as 184 elections (56.8% of the sample) have no innovation at all (PSInn equals zero), which means that there has not been any new party reaching 1% in that election. The elections with a considerable level of PSInn – say, higher than five – are quite infrequent (33 out of 324, 10.2%) and only five elections reach impressive levels of innovation (PSInn

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9 higher than 20). In a nutshell, empirical evidence seems to reveal that the '*fundamental bias*
10 *towards stability*' detected about 25 years ago by Bartolini and Mair (1990: 68) appears
11 confirmed in the aggregate for the 1946-2015 period as regards PSInn⁹. Yet, by adopting a
12 longitudinal perspective in order to verify our expectation about the increase of PSInn over
13 time, we note that, interestingly, these elections with high innovation are not randomly
14 distributed across time, but occur more frequently in the last decades, with a specific
15 concentration in the last few years. Table 2 disaggregates the sample across decades and
16 lists the elections having a level of PSInn higher than five. Data show a clear trend towards
17 increasing party system innovation over time. The overall correlation between PSInn and
18 time, albeit far from deterministic, is positive and significant ($r = 0.213$; $p < 0.001$).
19 Moreover, the increase in the levels of PSInn remains limited across the decades (from 0.82
20 during the 1950s to 2.16 during the 1990s, with a small reversal in the 2000s), up to the last
21 few years, when it jumps to the unprecedented mean level of 5.36. This means that, since
22 2010, on average, the aggregate party system innovation in a given election has been higher
23 than 5%. In other words, on average, a new party receiving 5% of the national share has
24 been created at each election since 2010 (or, alternatively, five new parties receiving 1%
25 each)¹⁰.
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In absolute terms this level of innovation can certainly be considered not impressive, but if compared with the previous decades the difference is indeed impressive: in the 2010s, the average PSInn is almost three times that of the previous decade and that of the whole period (1946-2015), while it is about six times and a half the average of the 1950s. The number of elections with no innovation at all has consistently declined through time, from about 79% in the 1950s to 39% in the 2010s. Conversely, the share of elections with a considerable level of innovation (PSInn higher than five) has markedly increased, moving from 5% during the 1960s to almost 23% in the 2010s. Furthermore, as Table 2 shows, in the last few years, there has been not only an increase in the number of elections with a considerable level of innovation, but also in the level of innovation themselves. Just consider that in the whole sample, only five elections have experienced a PSInn higher than 20, and four of them fall in the last decade, being the Greek election of May 2012, the Icelandic and the Italian elections of 2013 and the Spanish election of 2015. All these latter occurred in a context of economic hardship and, as anticipated in the introductory section, different scholars have linked the advent of the 2008 'Great Recession' to party system change (Hernández and Kriesi, 2015), showing a significant relationship between poor economic performance and party system de-institutionalization in the last years (Chiaromonte and Emanuele, 2016).

The longitudinal analysis reveals that, Western Europe, moving from a long period of impressive electoral stability with always the same party alternatives contesting elections time after time, has experienced increasing levels of innovation during the last decades,

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9 with a particular emphasis in the last few years, where elections characterised by the
10 emergence of new parties have increased, both in terms of raw numbers and in terms of
11 aggregate levels of innovation. Yet, we still need to clarify whether this trend is common to
12 all countries or whether different trajectories can be detected by looking at the national
13 variations of PSInn. Table 2 provided some insights on this point, revealing the presence of
14 countries with multiple innovative elections (i.e., with PSInn higher than five), such as
15 France (five), Italy and Iceland (four), the Netherlands and Luxembourg (three), and others
16 that did not experience any of them across the whole post-WWII period, as Finland, Malta,
17 Norway and the United Kingdom. Figure 2 offers a comprehensive overview of the
18 national variation of PSInn. The individual trajectories of each country show great variation
19 that allow us to point out with good accuracy the main turning points (if any) of each party
20 system.
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Figure 2 about here

We note that the above-detected overall pattern of increasing innovation is mainly due to the overwhelming wave of innovation occurred in the last years in a few countries, such as Greece, Iceland, Italy and Spain, four countries severely hit by the economic crisis and where the party system has been massively reshaped by the entry of new powerful political parties. In Greece, the dramatic election of May 2012, characterised by the highest level of electoral volatility in West European post-WWII history (Emanuele 2015) has led to the

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9 emergence of new parties in both sides of the ideological spectrum (like Golden Dawn and
10 the Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left) and has been followed by a period of
11 governmental and electoral instability up to the elections of January 2015 (when other new
12 parties successfully emerged, among which The River). In Italy, the prolonged phase of
13 extreme party system stability was broken at the beginning of the 1990s by the turbulent
14 transition from the so-called 'First' to the 'Second' Republic and the almost complete
15 replacement of the post-WWII parties. The figure for Italy shows a first notable peak in
16 1994 and, after a subsequent stabilization, a new terrific upsurge in 2013, when PSInn, due
17 to the rise of new parties among which the Five Star Movement, reaches its highest level
18 ever in Western Europe (35%). Similar earthquakes occurred in the last elections both in
19 Iceland (with the emergence of six new parties in 2013) and in Spain, where the success of
20 *Podemos* and *Ciudadanos* has smashed to the long-term consolidated two-party competition
21 between the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the Popular Party (PP).
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37 Conversely, some other countries show steady patterns with almost no innovation at all
38 (Finland, Malta, and UK) or very limited change concentrated in the last period (Austria,
39 Germany). Contrary to what expected, in about half of the countries the peak of
40 innovation is not recorded during the last years. Among them, we can mention Denmark,
41 whose turning point is certainly represented by the 1973 election, characterised by the rise
42 of the Progress Party, later followed by more than 40 years without significant innovation;
43 Portugal, where in 1985 the Democratic Renewal Party received 18% of the votes in its
44 electoral debut; and finally France, whose graph in Figure 2 displays notable ups and downs
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9 during the whole period, with particularly high innovation during the 20 years elapsing
10 between the transition from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic (1958) and the re-structuring
11 of the party system under the new format of the so-called '*quadrille bipolaire*' (1978)¹¹.
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15 From these pieces of evidence, we can conclude that our expectation about the overall
16 increase of PSInn over time, and especially in the last few years, is confirmed. Yet, most of
17 the detected increase in PSInn is due to a handful of countries that are experiencing a
18 massive process of party system change. On the contrary, stability with only occasional
19 waves of innovation has been the standard for a long time in Western Europe. Whether
20 this rule is going to be dramatically broken in an increasing number of countries or whether
21 Greece, Iceland, Italy and Spain are just temporarily deviating from it remains an open
22 question.
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35 **The Cumulative Effect of Innovation**

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37 As stated in the introductory section, our second research question concerns the
38 assessment of how the different waves of innovation recurring over the last 70 years have
39 reshaped the party system with respect to the one of the early post-WWII years¹². We are
40 wondering to what extent current West European party systems approximate the original
41 ones and, more specifically, what has been the resilience of old parties to subsequent
42 changes occurred in the electoral arena. Following the emphasis put by scholars on the
43 process of party system change since the 1970s and the large body of literature on new
44 parties developed in the most recent years, we expect that, in Western Europe, the party
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9 landscape has progressively diverged from that emerging after WWII and this is especially
10 true for recent years, characterised by the advent of 2008 Great Recession.

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12 To compare current party systems with those emerged after WWII, Figure 3 reports the
13 *Cumulative Party System Innovation* (CPSInn), calculated as the sum of the vote shares of non-
14 founder parties in the last election held in each country, while Figure 4 highlights the
15 variation in this vote share occurred after 2009. Figure 3 reveals that nowadays, on average,
16 30.3% of the votes is cast in favour of non-founder parties. This means that, despite the
17 emphasis many scholars put on the issue of party system change, party system stability has
18 remained the rule so far, with about 70% of the votes on average gained in the last election
19 by parties that were already part of the system 70 years ago. As one can easily note, there is
20 a huge variability in the vote share held by non-founder parties: in Malta the parties'
21 landscape is virtually unchanged with respect to the first post-WWII elections (1.8%); on
22 the contrary, in Italy almost three votes out of four go to non-founder parties (72.8%). The
23 rest of West European countries lie between the two extreme cases of Malta and Italy, with
24 more than half of the cases ranging between 22% and 32% of CPSInn.
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50 Figure 4 focuses on the change occurred since the beginning of the Great Recession¹³ in
51 the party systems of Western Europe. Overall, in the last few years founder parties have
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9 lost ground: since 2010 non-founder parties have gained about a quarter of their mean vote
10 share (7.5% out of 30.3%). While a handful of countries show negative – albeit very low –
11 values (i.e., founder parties increased their strength to the detriment of non-founders), in
12 some others the change occurred in the last few years is by far larger than that occurred
13 between 1945 and 2009. Spain emerges as the most striking case: until the 2008 election,
14 the country was, after Malta, the one with the strongest hold of the founder parties
15 (CPSInn was only 7.5%); then, especially through the ‘seismic’ election of 2015, the party
16 landscape has radically changed, with 40.7% of the votes held by non-founder parties. In a
17 similar vein, other countries have experienced a deep transformation in the last few years:
18 in Greece, after the dramatic electoral cycle 2012-2015, the support for non-founder parties
19 has more than doubled (10.5% to 22.2%); the same dramatic rise has occurred in the UK
20 and in Iceland, where non-founders have shifted from about 10% to 25% since 2010.
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35 From the analysis of the cumulative party system innovation some important
36 conclusions can be drawn. Our assumption according to which current West European
37 party systems are quite different to those emerged after WWII has been partially disproved.
38 Contrary to what expected, the West European landscape is still largely dominated,
39 although with the notable exceptions of France and, above all, Italy, by the same actors (or
40 their successors) that were already standing for elections at the end of the 1940s. Yet, as
41 expected, during the last few years, there has been a sharp increase of the vote share
42 received by non-founder parties and in certain countries the change occurred since 2010 is
43 larger than that cumulated between the end of WWII and 2009. Moreover, most cases
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8 showing the largest increase of CPSInn since 2010, both in absolute and in relative (i.e.,
9 compared to the situation until 2009) terms, are the countries hit hardest by the Great
10 Recession (Spain, Iceland, Italy, Greece and Portugal).
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17 **The Effects of Innovation on Party Systems after 70 years: A Typology**

18 Beyond the static comparison between current party systems and those emerged after
19 WWII, the analysis of temporal variations can reveal the specific trajectories followed by
20 each country as regards the rise and success of non-founder parties and the resilience of
21 founder parties. Figure 5 reports the values of CPSInn over the whole timespan for the 19
22 countries included in our sample. Not surprisingly, there is a clear increasing trend through
23 time: the closer to the present years we come, the lesser the party landscape of each
24 country looks like the original one¹⁴.
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42 Figure 5 about here

43 On average, the mean share of votes held by non-founder parties has increased from
44 3.3% during the 1950s to 27.9 during the 2010s¹⁵. Interestingly, the increase of the vote
45 share held by non-founder parties has occurred either steadily over time (as in Austria,
46 Finland and UK) or abruptly, with a sudden and sharp increase following a long period of
47 stability (e.g., Italy since 1992; Spain in 2015; Sweden in 1991). Moreover, in most cases
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9 these changes endure over time, while in some countries the alteration of the original
10 landscape is only temporary: after a sudden shock, founder parties are able to regain the
11 lost ground and previous changes are mainly absorbed (e.g., Portugal after 1985).
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15 This evidence suggests that the waves of innovation that have impacted Western
16 Europe since 1945 have produced different patterns of change, resulting in the peculiar
17 party landscapes that we see today. To detect these patterns of change and understand how
18 innovation has reshaped the original party system, we need to combine, for each country,
19 the average PSInn detected during the whole timespan and the CPSInn in the last election.
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21 From the resulting typology, four possible empirical ‘types’¹⁶ of party systems emerge:
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28 1) *Frozen party system*, where both PSInn and CPSInn in the last election are lower than
29 the average. Party systems falling into this ‘type’ are virtually unchanged today with respect
30 to 70 years ago;
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34 2) *Absorbent party system*, where PSInn is higher than the average but CPSInn in the last
35 election is still lower than the average: in this context, there have been relevant changes in
36 the party system but they have been mainly reabsorbed;
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40 3) *Overlaid party system*, where PSInn is lower than the average but CPSInn in the last
41 election is higher than the average: this means that there have been only small changes in
42 the system, but these latter have layered, enduring over time;
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46 4) *Transformed party system*, where both variables are higher than the average: deep
47 changes have occurred and the resulting transformations have endured through time, being
48 clearly visible still today.
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9 The scattergram depicted in Figure 6 plots the 19 countries of our sample according to
10 their mean level of PSInn during the period 1946-2015 and to the values of CPSInn in the
11 last general election.
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17 Figure 6 about here
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22 Some interesting insights can be drawn. The two measures are, as expected, highly
23 correlated ($r = 0.70$), which means that the higher the average party system innovation is in
24 each country, the more different the party system is today with respect to 70 years ago.
25 Moreover, most countries fit properly, by falling very close to the regression line. Yet, there
26 is enough variation in the position of each country within the scatterplot to detect the
27 presence of all the four 'types' specified before.
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34 First, the lower left part of the Figure clearly groups the frozen party systems. About
35 half of the countries belong to this subset, most of them falling very close to the regression
36 line, with the exception of Malta that can be configured as an outlier due to its remarkable
37 stability. It is interesting to note that this group of cases where new parties have been the
38 exception so far includes countries with very different size (Germany vs. Malta), 'patterns
39 of democracy' (Lijphart, 1999) (from the 'consensual' Austria and Switzerland to the
40 'majoritarian' UK), party system format (traditionally limited in Austria, Ireland or UK and
41 very fragmented in Norway or in Switzerland) and usual types of government arrangements
42 (single party majority as in Malta and UK, single party minority or coalition minority as in
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9 Norway and Sweden, 'grand coalition' as in Austria and Germany, up to the oversized
10 government in Switzerland). This is to say that there is not a 'magic formula' to grant party
11 system stability and avoid the emergence of new parties, but this outcome can result from
12 very different political contexts.
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17 On the opposite side of the scatterplot Spain, France and, above all, Italy fall close to
18 the right end of the regression line: in these contexts, there has been a massive PSInn with
19 a consolidation of these changes over time. As a result, the political landscape in these
20 countries is very different and has been transformed with respect to the one that structured
21 shortly after 1945. Not by chance, at least in Italy and France, the discontinuity in the
22 original party landscape has been paralleled by relevant institutional changes and by the
23 formal (France) or informal (Italy) shift to a 'new' Republic (respectively, to the Fifth and
24 the Second one). Moreover, even the Netherlands falls into this quadrant, albeit being in an
25 intermediate position, not far from the intersection of the axes and very close to the
26 regression line.
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39 Notwithstanding the overall high correlation between the two measures, two subsets of
40 countries seem to deviate from the main pattern, falling quite distant (respectively, below
41 or above) from the regression line. On one side, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg and
42 Portugal are located below the regression line, which means that their average PSInn is
43 higher than what expected based on the cumulative party system innovation they show in
44 the last election. Here, party systems have undergone important changes and new parties
45 have emerged, especially during the 1980s¹⁷. Yet, these changes have been mainly absorbed
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9 by the party system and founder parties still hold the lion's share. On the other side,
10 Denmark, Finland and Belgium fall above the regression line, thus showing a party
11 landscape that is more different with respect to the original one than what expected based
12 on their average level of PSInn. These countries have experienced a limited amount of
13 party system innovation during the 70 years under scrutiny, but these changes have been
14 resilient over time, contributing to depict a partially different party landscape today with
15 respect to the first post-WWII elections.
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28 **Conclusion**

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31 In this article we have focused on party system innovation, defined as the aggregate level
32 of 'newness' recorded in the party system at a given election, with specific reference to
33 Western Europe after 1945. In doing so, we have provided some original contributions in
34 terms of both the conceptual framework and, above all, the empirical analysis.
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40 First, unlike the most recent research focusing on a party-level approach, we have
41 adopted a systemic-level perspective to achieve a comprehensive assessment of how the
42 emergence and success of new parties has affected the party system as a whole.
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44 Consistently, we have not simply analysed new parties *per se*, but we have measured the
45 amount of innovation, that is, the overall vote share received by new parties, both in
46 absolute terms (PSInn) and in cumulative terms (CPSInn). This has allowed us to weigh
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9 differently minor changes from changes that are instead relevant for the party system as
10 such, and to assess whether and how these changes have cumulated over time.
11 Consequently, we have built an original database of these measures for 19 West European
12 countries between 1945 and 2015. This has made possible to conduct what, to our
13 knowledge, is the first comprehensive analysis of party system innovation in Western
14 Europe.
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22 Second, we have provided an overall assessment of the levels of party system innovation
23 in Western Europe since 1945. The analysis of cross-country and cross-time variation has
24 shown that, despite the persisting overall bias towards stability, in the last few years some
25 West European countries have experienced a notable increase of party system innovation,
26 especially those hit hardest by the 2008 Great Recession. The most remarkable cases
27 concern Italy and Spain, where new parties have received about 35% of the votes in the last
28 general election, and, to a lesser extent, Greece and Iceland, with, respectively, about 25%
29 and 22% of the votes obtained by new parties.
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39 Finally, the third original contribution of this article refers to the assessment of whether
40 and how the different waves of party system innovation since 1945 have reshaped the West
41 European party systems with respect to the ones emerged after WWII. The analysis shows
42 different trajectories followed by the 19 West European party systems. While about half of
43 the countries still have a 'frozen' party system (i.e., their party landscape is very similar to
44 that of 70 years ago), some others have undergone a process of either layering (small
45 changes cumulating over time) or absorption (large changes that did not cumulate over
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9 time) and eventually in few others (like Spain, France and Italy) the party system is deeply
10 transformed compared to the one emerged after WWII.

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12 This evidence suggests that, as regards party system innovation, the picture of Western
13 Europe is far from uniform, being instead quite diversified. While in some countries the
14 party landscape is still the same as it used to be 70 years ago and, therefore, relevant new
15 parties have never appeared, in some other countries various and sometimes intense waves
16 of innovation have taken place. Of course, the birth and success of new parties *per se* is not
17 a problem for the functioning and the quality of the democratic process. It can even be
18 beneficial to democracy insofar as it reflects the emergence of a new cleavage or new issues
19 – as it was the case in the 1980s with the green parties – or the need for a major change in
20 the political class – for instance in Italy during the first half of the 1990s. Yet, as we have
21 learned from the experience of countries in other areas of the world, it can become a
22 problem for democracy when the success of new parties occurs consistently and repeatedly
23 over time, leaving no room for the institutionalisation of the party system. So far, and for
24 the past 25 years, this situation has been confined to Eastern Europe and Latin America.
25 Yet, following what we have detected in our analysis, it is likely that even some West
26 European countries will not continue to remain immune from the risk of a prolonged
27 phase of party system de-institutionalization.
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Notes

¹ The systemic-level approach is not entirely original, since it was adopted by Mair (1993) and Mainwaring and Scully (1995), although their analyses date back to the first half of the 1990s and focus not exactly on the strength of new parties but rather on the resilience of old parties.

² Note that our concept of ‘party system innovation’ roughly corresponds to that of ‘party replacement’ developed by Birch (2003). Both refer to the overall electoral strength of new parties in a given election. Nevertheless, we have preferred to use a different term because – as it will be clear in the article – our conception and operationalization of what a new party is greatly differ from those of Birch. Moreover, unlike in Mair (1997), our conception of party system innovation does not refer to the governmental arena but to the electoral arena.

³ These structural changes (startups, mergers, splits, electoral alliances) correspond to what Litton (2015) calls the ‘thin’ conception of party novelty.

⁴ This requirement leads us to discard definitions where parties are seen as new only in that they represent new political issues (Willey, 1998), new or ‘purified’ ideologies (Lucardie, 2000), or transform themselves, by revising their programme and/or appealing to new groups of voters (Krouwel and Lucardie, 2008), if these changes do not have a structural nature.

⁵ Among the latter we find, though not exclusively, both the Left-libertarian parties (Kitschelt, 1988) emerging from the post-materialist revolution of the 1970s, and the Radical Right parties that are a reaction of the opposite sign to same process (Kitschelt, 1995).

⁶ See Emanuele (2015) for further methodological insights on these criteria.

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⁷ The empirical observation carried out by Morlino in Southern Europe (1998) confirms that party systems tend to stabilize over a period of three elections after the (re-)establishment of the democratic regime.

⁸ For further details on the two measures and the data sources see the Appendix.

⁹ This picture of overall stability resulting from our measure of party system innovation (PSInn) would have been probably quite different if one had employed less conservative operationalisations, for instance including mergers and splits in the definition of new parties, as some scholars do (see Table 1).

¹⁰ Furthermore, note that since 2010 38 new parties have emerged (on average 6.3 each year in Western Europe and 2 per country) against 162 during the period 1946-2009 (on average, 2.5 each year). The complete list of new parties included in the calculation of PSInn is provided in the Appendix.

¹¹ An accurate analysis of the determinants of party system innovation goes beyond the scope of this article. Yet, the electoral system change may have played a role in this story. Indeed, both in France (from 1958 onwards) and in Italy (from 1994 to 2001) the shift from PR to single-member constituencies is associated with a notable increase in the number of new parties and in the overall level of innovation. In particular, during the three elections with the mixed, quasi-majoritarian electoral system introduced in 1993, Italy experienced the rise of six new parties (2 on average per election) with an average PSInn per election of 11.3, against 10 new parties in the remaining 13 elections (0.8 on average per election) with an average PSInn per election of 4.2.

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¹² The idea of studying party system innovation through a comparison between the actual and the original party system of a given country was already at the core of Harmel's study on new parties (1985).

¹³ Note that the 2008 Great Recession has started to produce its effects in Europe since 2009. Therefore, our reference point for the comparison is the year 2009 and we split the sample in two temporal subsets, 1946-2009 and after 2009.

¹⁴ The overall correlation between CPSInn and time is positive ($r = 0.54$) and significant ($p < 0.001$).

¹⁵ Specifically, it has increased to 7% during the 1960s, 9.7% in the 1970s, 12.1% during the 1980s, 16.1% during the 1990s and 19.9% during the 2000s.

¹⁶ Note that this is an empirical typology built on the combination of two continuous variables (average PSInn and CPSInn in the last election) and on the use of the mean values of these variables as cut-off points. As such, the position of each country within the typology depends not only on its own values but also on those of the other countries considered. As a consequence, the position of each country should be interpreted comparatively and in terms of closeness to the four types of party system we have outlined.

¹⁷ As the Democratic Renewal Party emerged in 1985 in Portugal or the Alternative Democratic Reform Party appeared in Luxembourg in 1989, just to mention the largest two ones.

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List of Tables

Table 1. Operationalization of ‘new party’ in the literature.

Authors (year)	Indicators of the ‘newness’ of parties ^a					
	Relabeling	Joint lists	Merger	Split	Startup organization	New Personnel
Harmel and Robertson (1985)	V	V	V	V	V	V
Birch (2003)			V ^b	V	V	V
Powell and Tucker (2014)			V ^c	V ^d	V	V
Bolleyer (2013)			V ^e	V ^f	V	V
Mainwaring, España and Gervasoni (2015)				V ^g	V	V
Hug (2001), Tavits (2006), Zons (2015)				V	V	V
Barnea and Rahat (2011)				V ^h	V	V
Bartolini and Mair (1990), Chiaramonte and Emanuele (2015)					V	V
Sikk (2005), Marinova (2015)						V

Notes:

^a Each indicator marked with V is considered as a sufficient condition for a party to qualify as new by the corresponding author(s).

^b Only if the party resulting from the merger has a new name.

^c Only if each of the merging parties had at least 5% of the votes in the previous election.

^d Only if the splinter party or parties are not ‘clear successor(s)’ of the original party.

^e Only if the party resulting from the merger still need to build a viable infrastructure at the time of the merger.

^f Only if it originates from a minor split of an established party.

^g Only if it is not the largest among the successor parties

^h Only if less than 50% of the top candidates of the splinter party were members of the original party.

Table 2. Party system innovation across time in Western Europe.

Decade	Mean PSInn	N	N elections with PSInn = 0	N elections with PSInn > 5	List of elections with PSInn > 5
1950s	0.82	47	37 (78.7%)	3 (6.4%)	France 1956 (12.9); Iceland 1953 (6.0); Ireland 1957 (5.3)
1960s	0.88	40	27 (67.5%)	2 (5.0%)	Denmark 1960 (6.1); Luxembourg 1964 (5.8)
1970s	1.37	51	33 (64.7%)	4 (7.8%)	Denmark 1973 (15.9); France 1973 (13.3); Switzerland 1971 (7.5); Luxembourg 1979 (6.6)
1980s	2.06	55	27 (49.1%)	6 (10.9%)	Belgium 1981 (7.5); France 1986 (11.1); Iceland 1983 (5.5); Ireland 1987 (13.7); Luxembourg 1989 (10.2); Portugal 1985 (18.4)
1990s	2.16	51	26 (51.0%)	6 (11.8%)	France 1993 (12.7); Germany 1990 (5.7); Italy 1992 (10.5), 1994 (22.2) ; Netherlands 1994 (7.4); Sweden 1991 (6.7)
2000s	1.92	49	22 (44.9%)	5 (10.2%)	France 2002 (6.5); Italy 2001 (7.3); Netherlands 2002 (18.6), 2006 (7.7); Iceland 2009 (7.2)
2010s	5.36	31	12 (38.7%)	7 (22.6%)	Austria 2013 (5.7); Germany 2013 (5.7); Greece 2012, May (25.4), 2015, January (9.6); Iceland 2013 (21.7); Italy 2013 (35.0); Spain 2015 (34.9)
Total	1.94	324	184 (56.8%)	33 (10.2%)	

Note: For the sake of simplicity, the decade of the 1950s includes the French legislative election of 1946 (the only one in the sample held before 1950); PSInn value of each election in brackets; in bold elections with PSInn higher than 20.

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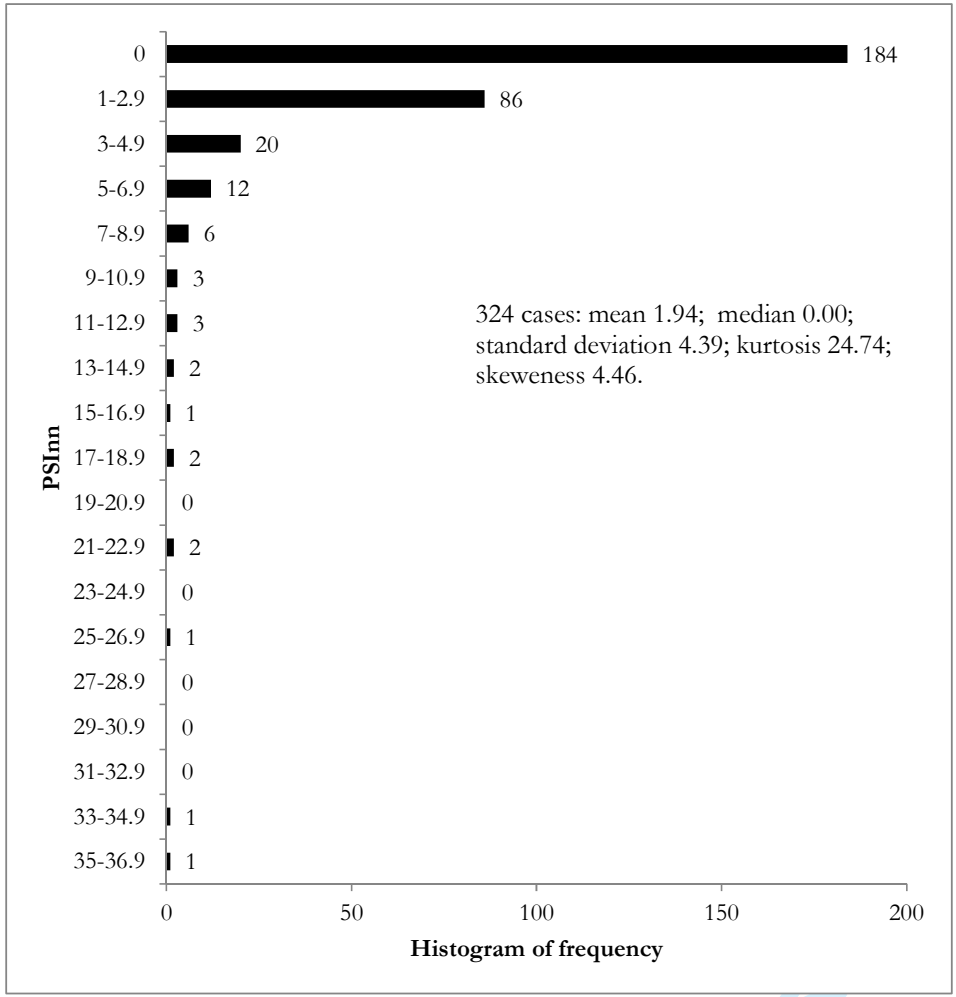


FIGURE 1. Frequency distribution of elections by interval values of PSInn.

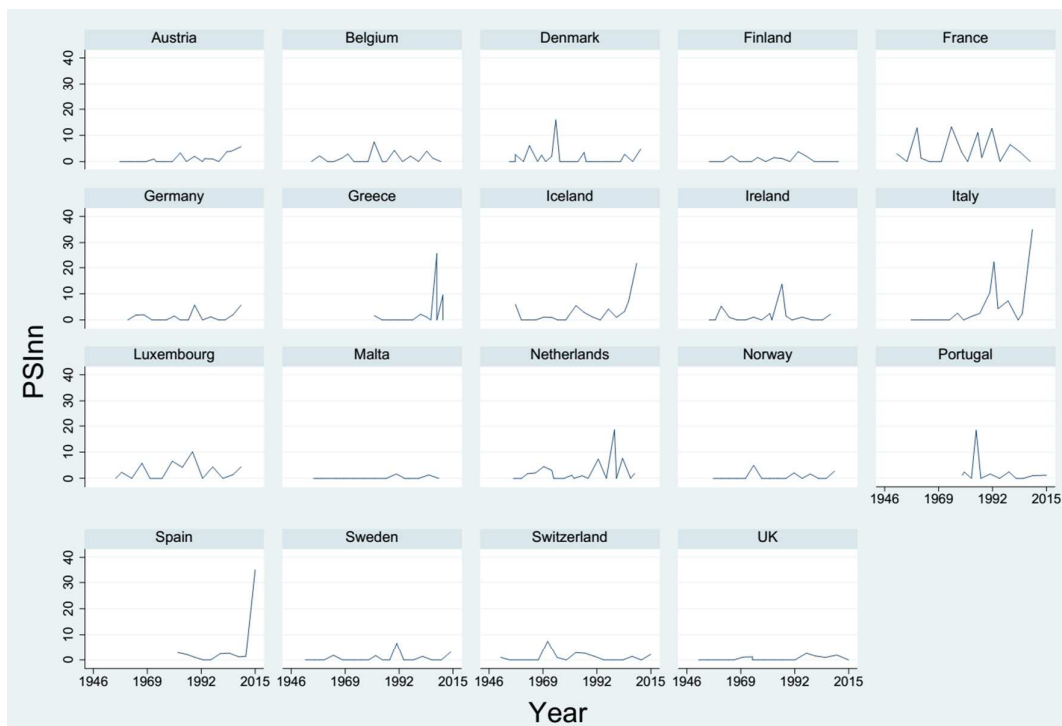


Figure 2. Party system innovation in 19 West European countries from 1946 to 2015.

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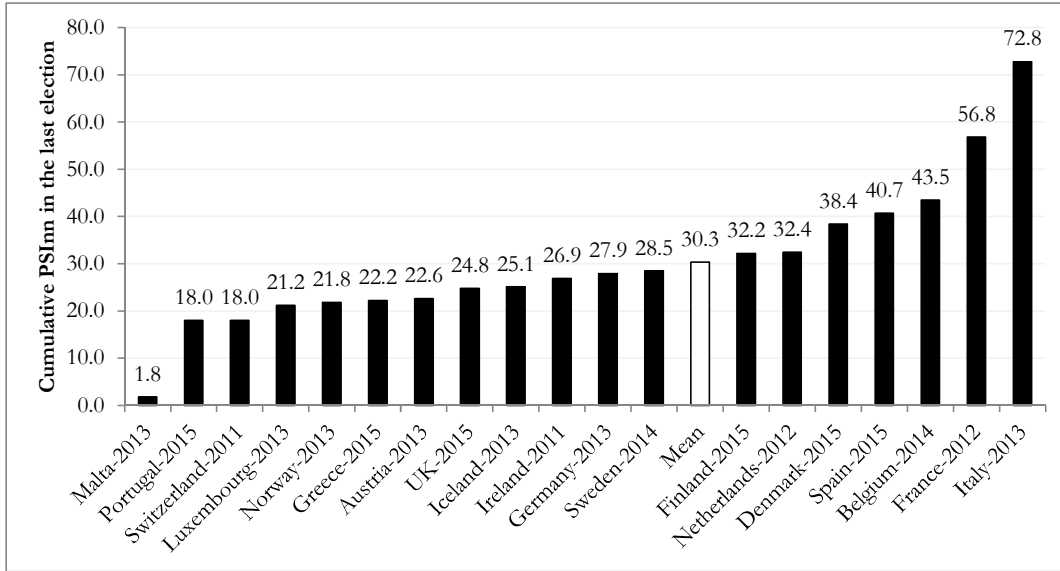


Figure 3. Cumulative party system innovation in the last election held in each country.

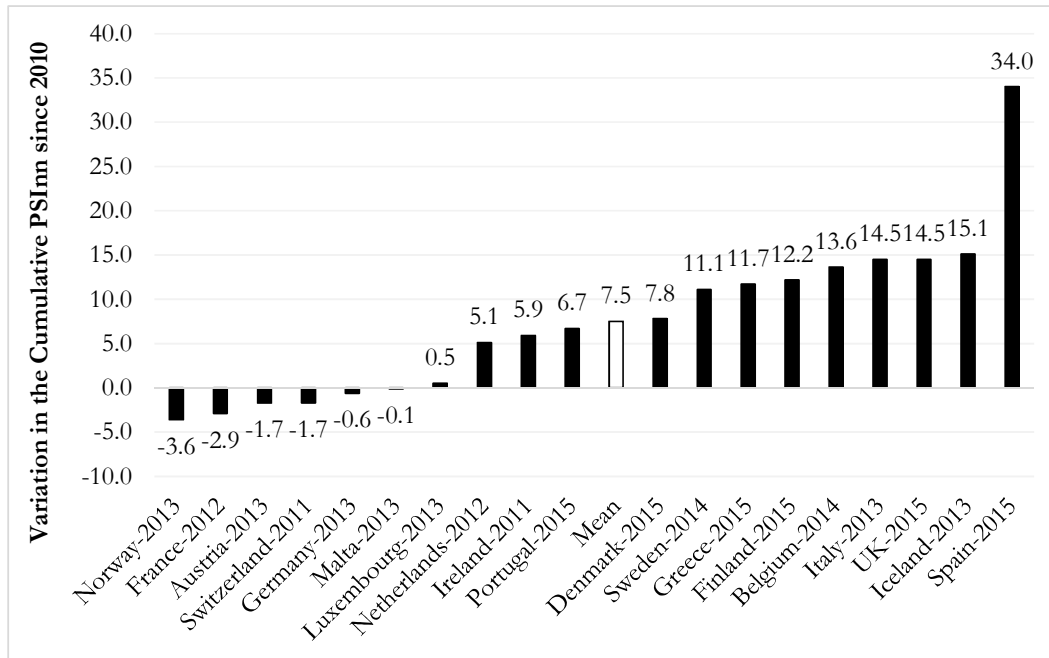


Figure 4. Variation in the cumulative party system innovation since 2010.

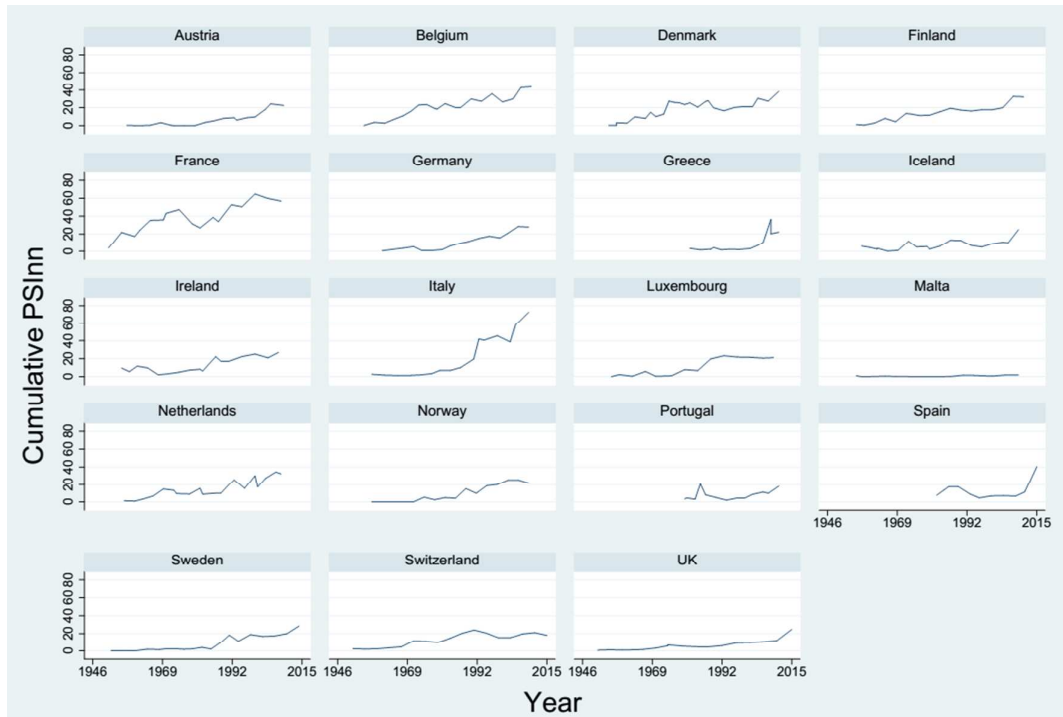


Figure 5. Cumulative party system innovation in 19 West European countries from 1946 to 2015.

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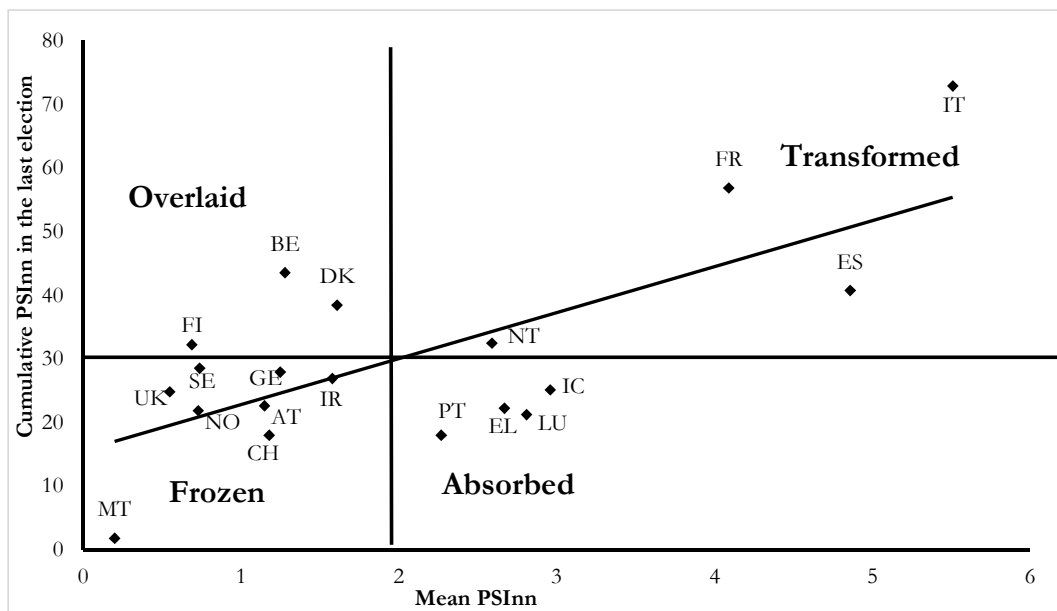


Figure 6. A typology of party systems according to their mean PSInn and their CPSInn in the last election.

Appendix

Details on the operationalisation of the two Party System Innovation's measures

PSInn simply aggregates, for each election, the overall vote share of new parties as defined above. It relies on electoral results by taking into account the relative size in terms of votes obtained by all the new parties jointly considered. This measure is in contrast with Tavits' *'Supply of parties'* (2008) and Marinova's *'Electoral Instability in Parties'* (2015), which deliberately exclude the electoral results from the calculations and simply count parties as units. Indeed, a change in the supply side becomes relevant for the system to the extent to which it receives the electoral support of the voters. This is true especially when one wants to build a systemic measure and cannot attribute the same weight to a change concerning the emergence of a major party and to another one related to the rise of a marginal party. Moreover, by considering parties' vote share in the calculation of PSInn, we rely on the electoral arena. This latter is the only arena where the interactions between parties and voters can be taken into account. The electoral results of new parties are the only measurable tools to gauge voters' reactions to parties' structural changes and, therefore, are crucial to assess whether the innovation has a sizeable impact or not. The electoral arena works as a 'thermometer' of the extent to which voters are available to exert the extreme form of electoral change, that is, voting parties that have never contested elections. The 'size' (in terms of vote share) of this availability (captured by PSInn) also becomes an implicit estimate of the retrospective negative evaluation of the existing alternatives and of the propensity to shift to political forces devoid of a valuable – and therefore criticisable – past.

We have also set a threshold at 1% at a given election in order to exclude marginal parties. Note that the threshold of 1% is set to identify the 'borders' of a given party system. A similar choice is consistent with other authors (Marinova, 2015; Powell and Tucker, 2014), although they rely on more exclusive thresholds. Any threshold could be considered arbitrary and has its own trade-offs. However, not to set any threshold would be even more distorting for calculating the extent to which a party system is undergoing an innovation. Indeed, given that we are interested in parties that are somewhat relevant for the system, a threshold is necessary to set a qualitative distinction between parties that produce a significant change within the system and parties that simply enter the election

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4 game. From this choice it follows that when a new party reaches 1% it enters in the
5 calculation of PSInn, even if it had already run in previous elections without reaching the
6 threshold (as the French National Front in 1986). Moreover, when a party that has already
7 reached one per cent in the past moves from less to more than one per cent at a given
8 election, it enters in the calculation of PSInn as well. The main source followed to collect
9 electoral data has been the work by Nohlen and Stöver (2010) for elections until 2008. For
10 the elections held since 2009, we have relied on official data provided by the pertinent
11 electoral authority for each country. Information about the formation of new parties comes
12 from Nohlen and Stöver (2010) as well as party websites and other available online sources.
13 A complete list of all new parties entering in the calculation of PSInn can be found below
14 in Table A1.
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24 **CPSInn** is the sum of the vote share received by non-founder parties in each election.
25 A party is considered as a *founder* if it has received at least 1% of the national vote share in
26 at least one of the first two post-WWII elections (or, in the case of Greece, Portugal and
27 Spain, the first two democratic elections). Otherwise, the party is counted as a *non-founder*.
28 Nevertheless, problems of classification may arise as far as time goes by and founder
29 parties undergo organizational transformations (party relabeling, joint lists, splits, mergers).
30 In order to detect under what conditions a party can be considered as a founder or as a
31 non-founder – consistently with PSInn and following again Bartolini and Mair's choices
32 about party splits and mergers (1990: 311–312) – we have used the following rules: 1) when
33 a founder party changes its name, it remains a founder party; 2) when two founder parties
34 merge, the resulting party is still consider a founder one; 3) when two parties split from a
35 founder, both are considered as founders; 4) when a founder party and a non-founder party
36 merge, the resulting party is a founder if the former was the larger one, otherwise it is a
37 non-founder.
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47 Note that other scholars have followed a somewhat similar approach: Mair (1993: 128)
48 calculates the percentage of votes won by *old parties*, 'those parties which contested both the
49 first and the most recent elections'. In another work (2002: 126), Mair investigates the
50 electoral success of new parties, defined as 'those which first began to contest elections no
51 earlier than 1960'. Mainwaring and Scully (1995) consider the number of seats held by
52 parties founded before 1950.
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Table A1. List of new parties in Western Europe (1946-2015).

Country	New parties entering in the calculation of PSInn	
	N	Names
Austria	11	Communist Party of Austria (1970; 2006); United Greens (1983; 1990); Alternative List (1983); No - Civic Action Group against the sale of Austria (1995); The Independents - Lugner's List (1999); Dr. Matin's List (2006); Liberal Forum, Citizens Forum of Austria (2008); Team Stronach (2013)
Belgium	11	Christian Flemish People's Union (1954); Democratic Front of the Francophones (1965); Walloon Rally (1968); Ecolo, Agalev, Democratic Union for the Respect of Labour (1981); Rossem, National Front (1991); Vivant (1999); List Dedecker (2007); Popular Party (2010)
Denmark	9	The Independent Party (1953); Socialist People's Party (1960); Liberal Centre (1966); Christian People's Party (1971); Progress Party (1973); Common Course, The Greens (1987); New Alliance (2007); The Alternative (2015)
Finland	8	Smallholders' Party of Finland (1962); Constitutional People's Party (1975); Green League (1983); Pensioners' Party (1987); Young Finns, Alliance for Free Finland (1995); Reform Group, True Finns (1999)
France	20	Gaullist Union (1946); Poujade List, Extreme Right (1956); Unified Socialist Party (1958); Reformist Movement, Republican Radicals (1973); Ecologists, Workers' Struggle (1978); National Front, Other Right (1986); Other Left (1988); Greens, Ecology Generation, Other Greens, Extreme Left (1993); Hunting, Fishing, Nature, Tradition, Revolutionary Communist League, Republican Pole, Other Greens, National Republican Movement (2002)
Germany	10	German Peace Union (1961); National Democratic Party of Germany (1965); The Greens (1980); Party Of Democratic Socialism, The Republicans, Alliance '90 (1990); German People's Union (1998); Pirate Party (2009); Alternative for Germany, Free Voters (2013)
Greece	12	Progressive Party (1981); Popular Orthodox Rally (2004); Ecologist Greens (2007); Independent Greeks, Golden Dawn, Democratic Alliance, Recreate Greece, Action Liberal Alliance, Front of the Greek Anticapitalist Left (2012); The River, Union of Centrists, Teleia (2015)
Iceland	18	National Preservation Party (1953); Independent Democratic Party (1967); Candidature Party (1971); Independents from the South (1979); Women's Union (1983); National Party, Humanist Party (1987); Liberals (1991); Liberal Party (1999); New Force (2003); Icelandic Movement - Living Country (2007); Citizens' Movement (2009); Bright Future, Pirate Party, Household Party, Iceland Democratic Party, Right-Green People's Party, Rainbow (2013)
Ireland	9	Sinn Féin (1957); National Democratic Party (1961); Sinn Féin (1973; 1987); Anti H-Block (1981); Green Party (1989); National Party (1997); Socialist Party, People Before Profit (2011)
Italy	16	Proletarian Democracy, Radical Party (1976); Pensioners' Party (1983) Green List (1987); Lombard League, The Network (1992);

		Forza Italia, Democratic Alliance (1994); Italian Renewal (1996); Italy of Values, European Democracy, New PSI (2001); The Right (2008);
		Five Star Movement, Civic Choice, Act to Stop the Decline (2013)
Luxembourg	12	Independent party of the Middle Class (1954); Popular Independent Movement (1964); <i>Enrôlés de Force</i> , Independent Socialist Party (1979);
		Green Alternative Party (1984); Alternative Democratic Reform Party, National Movement (1989); The Left, Green and Liberal Alliance (1999);
		Communist Party Luxembourg (2009); Pirate Party Luxembourg; Party for Full Democracy (2013)
Malta	2	Democratic Alternative (1992; 2008)
Netherlands	15	Pacifist Socialist Party (1959); Farmers' Party (1963); Democrats 1966 (1967); Reformed Political League (1971; 1986); New Middle Party (1971);
		Reformed Political Federation (1981); General Elderly Alliance, Socialist Party, Centre Democrats (1994); List Pim Fortuyn,
		Liveable Netherlands (2002); Party of Freedom, Party for the Animals (2006); 50Plus (2012)
Norway	5	Progress Party (1973); Red Electoral Alliance, Pensioners' Party (1993); Coastal Party (2001); The Green Party (2013)
Portugal	9	Christian Democratic Party (1979); Workers' Party for Socialist Unity, Revolutionary Socialist Party (1980); Democratic Renewal Party (1985);
		National Solidarity Party (1991); Left Bloc (1999); Workers' Communist Party (2009); People-Animals-Nature (2011);
		Democratic Republican Party (2015)
Spain	11	Democratic and Socialist Centre (1982); Communist Unity Board, Democratic Reformist Party (1986); Ruiz Mateos' Group (1989);
		Galician Nationalist Bloc, Canarian Coalition (2000); Republican Left of Catalonia (2004); Union for Progress and Democracy (2008);
		Amaiur (2011); Podemos, Citizens (2015)
Sweden	5	Christian Democrats (1964); The Green Party (1982); New Democracy (1991); Sweden Democrats (2002); Feminist Initiative (2014)
Switzerland	11	Evangelical People's Party (1951); Republican Movement, National Action (1971); Progressive Organizations of Switzerland (1975);
		Federation of Swiss Green Party, Feminist and Green Alternative Group (1983); Swiss Motorists' Party (1987); Ticino League (1991; 2015);
		Green Liberal Party (2007); Alternative Left (2015)
UK	6	Scottish National Party (1970); Ulster Unionist Coalition (1974); Referendum Party (1997); United Kingdom Independence Party (2001);
		Green Party (2005); British National Party (2010)
Total	200*	

* This number includes six parties that have entered twice in the calculation of PSInn given that they have first obtained 1% of the national share or more in a given election, then declined under 1% and eventually re-emerged at or above 1% (both the two years of emergence at 1% or more are indicated in brackets).