

### New political parties through the voters' eyes

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Preprint / Preprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

**Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:**

Wuttke, A. (2019). New political parties through the voters' eyes. *West European Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1603940>

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This is an uncorrected pre-print of a study that is published in West European Politics.

Please cite the original study:

Wuttke, Alexander (in Press): “*New political parties through the voters’ eyes*”,  
West European Politics, doi: 10.1080/01402382.2019.1603940.

New Political Parties through the Voters’ Eyes

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Original Study: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1603940>

Replication Material and Appendix: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/E763Q>

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## **New political parties through the voters' eyes<sup>1</sup>**

Scholars mainly studied the formation of political parties on the macro-level, but to explain the conditions of successful party establishment we need to understand the motivational underpinnings of voting for a new party on the individual level. Using cross-national voter surveys and long-term panel data from Germany (2005-2013) and the Netherlands (1998-2002), this study contrasts the implicit assumptions about voter behaviour of equilibrium- and protest-based theories on party emergence. Although proximity to a new party matters, the findings do not support the equilibrium perspective's tenet that new parties gain votes from citizens whose views were not represented in the preceding election. Moreover, political discontent was found a fertile soil for new parties to gain electoral support, but the relationship between discontent and voting is more complex than theoretically suggested. These findings on individual voter behaviour may inform further theoretical work on the successful establishment of new political parties.

Keywords: Party systems, new parties, Germany, panel data, populism, voting behaviour

In the past decades, the establishment of new political parties has reshaped the face of many European party systems (Poguntke 1993; Mudde 2010). Some scholars interpret the emergence of new parties as a sign for the vitality and responsiveness of a party system (Harmel 1985), but good arguments can also be made that new parties are signs of distress and discontent (Belanger and Nadeau 2005). Conflicting interpretations about the formation of parties reflect normative premises, but they may also reflect differences in the empirical assessment of the motives that lead citizens to cast their ballot for a new party, thereby enabling its successful establishment. Yet, what drives individual voters to turn their back on established parties and to cast a ballot for new formations has not received much scholarly attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduction material for the empirical analyses can be found online along with the supplementary files at <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/E763Q>. Tables und plots were created using Stata Ados –coefplot– and –esttab– by Ben Jann (2007); (2014), –eclplot– by Roger Newson (2003), and the graph scheme by Daniel Bischof (2017).

The literature on party emergence focuses on the macro-level, employing political parties or party systems as observational units (Selb and Pituctin 2010). Studies in this tradition assess the role of institutional factors or long-term social trends and provide insights into the specific attributes of newly emerged parties (e.g., Bolleyer 2013; Hug 2001; Lago and Martínez 2011; Tavits 2006). Because party establishment is by definition tied to electoral accomplishments (Hino 2012), macro-level studies on successful party establishment explicitly, or implicitly, presuppose assumptions about the behaviour of individual citizens whose votes are necessary for electoral success.<sup>2</sup> Electoral research on the individual level has accumulated much knowledge about the motivational underpinnings of the voting calculus, including vote choices for recently emerged party families (e.g., anti-immigrant parties, see: Bélanger and Aarts 2006; Norris 2005; Fennema *et al.* 2000). However, because those studies do not investigate new parties as such, micro-level research aiming to enhance our understanding of party formation is scarce.

This study combines macro-level explanations of party emergence with theories on voting behaviour and observes attitudinal changes on the micro-level as a reaction to the emergence of new political parties. By investigating individual determinants of voting for new parties, this study contributes to an ongoing controversy about the conditions of party emergence, namely about whether empty ideological spaces are necessary requirements for the establishment of a new party or whether it suffices for a party to channel and express diffuse dissatisfaction as a project of ‘newness’.

Using cross-national voter surveys and Dutch and German long-term panel data this study shows that there are merits to both approaches, but in many cases, the individual-level

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<sup>2</sup> Macro-level studies (e.g., Hug 2000) distinguish the emergence of new political parties from their success as distinct stages of party formation. Due to the empirical focus on voting behavior, this study necessarily includes only political parties that have successfully overcome the requirements for electoral participation. When I speak of ‘emergence’, for the sake of simplicity, it is with this restriction in mind.

assumptions of both models do not square with the observed voting behaviour. More specifically, the findings underscore the role of political discontent in the decision to vote for a new party, but they do not provide evidence for the protest-based perspective of dissatisfied voters who would float like sand drift from one new party to the next. Likewise, the data underscore the role of proximity considerations in the calculations of (some) voters to cast their ballot for a new party, but the results do not provide evidence for the equilibrium approach's depiction of new party voters as lonesome wanderers in the policy space. These results have implications for macro-level theories on the emergence of political parties that are discussed in the concluding section.

### **Macro- und micro-level explanations of party emergence**

Stability and fluidity of party systems have been subject to extensive scholarly work (e.g., Sartori 1977). For long, scholars viewed party systems as dynamic equilibria of issue preferences, in which new parties would surface to counterbalance disturbances when the congruence between voters and parties had become too loose (Laver 2005; Sartori 1977). From this perspective, political issues are the electoral market's primary goods, and party competition is explained by policy demands of the electorate on the one hand and policy offerings of political parties on the other hand. Changes in the electorate's demands are understood as external shocks that require policy adjustments on the part of political parties. If the established parties fail to adjust accordingly, opportunities for the formation of new parties will open up. Scholars in this tradition, therefore, 'know that new parties emerge primarily because old parties have failed to absorb new issues into their agenda and programmes' (Müller-Rommel 2002: 740). This classic line of reasoning has for long been influential in party research and also permeates recent scholarly debates. The burgeoning literature on niche parties, for instance, enhances and refines our understanding of the role of political issues in the emergence of new

parties (Ezrow 2008; Abou-Chadi 2016). Still, it is the common notion of these studies that niche parties owe their emergence to distinct characteristics of their programmatic offerings (Meyer and Miller 2015; Zons 2016). Hence, when explaining the emergence of new parties, scholars often view the electoral market as an equilibrium between the electorate's demands for and the parties' supply of certain issue proposals.

Nonetheless, scholars of late have contemplated the possibility that new parties might emerge without filling empty policy spaces or propagating new political topics. Empirically, several cases of new populist or anti-establishment parties were documented whose support is driven by factors seemingly different from ideology or specific issues (Barr 2009). Theoretically, scholars reasoned about alternative pathways of party emergence. Lucardie (2000) proposed that political parties might enter the political competition as purifiers of already existing ideologies. Observing political parties that achieve parliamentary presence without supplying novel programmatic ideas, Sikk (2011) suggested that new political alliances could build their electoral offer solely on a 'project of newness'. Devoid of particular policy innovations, such parties could capitalize on anti-establishment resentments among segments of the electorate, so that the sole promise of being different from seemingly failed options of the past could be the distinctive feature of a new party.

The discrepancies between these macro-level perspectives are rooted in diverging assumptions about the voter calculus. Because macro-level studies of party emergence rarely specify assumptions about voter motivation, we need to uncover the individual-level assumptions of both approaches in order to understand under which conditions political parties can succeed as new electoral contestants. Examining the establishment of new parties on the micro-level requires us to view new political parties from the voters' eyes. Even though we may or may not be able to objectively measure the macro-level contextual characteristics which influence the emergence of new parties (e.g., the distribution of party positions in the policy

spaces), for investigations on the individual level we need to employ the subjective interpretations of the reality that voters hold. These interpretations might be contradictory or arguably false but they are nonetheless the basis of individual decisions. How voters then incorporate these beliefs in their decision-making processes is conceptualized differently by the competing macro-level theories on party emergence (Table 1).

The equilibrium perspective employs a Downsian conception of voting in uni- or multidimensional policy spaces (Laver 2005). Only if citizens care about policies and base their party choice on specific issues or their ideological generalizations, it is reasonable to explain the emergence of new parties as the result of an interplay between policy demands and policy offerings.

[Table 1 near here.]

From the protest-based perspective on new party establishment, voting serves an expressive rather than an instrumental function. The potential of protest-based voting is underscored by studies which show substantial erosion of public trust in the representatives of the political system (Norris 2011). Therefore, the reservoir of anti-partyist resentment among segments of the electorate could form a fertile soil for new electoral competitors (Barr 2009; Belanger and Nadeau 2005; Niedermayer 2010) as new parties may capitalize on a wide-spread populist temperament, which contrasts ‘the pure people’ on the one hand with ‘the corrupt elite’ on the other hand (Mudde 2010). From this perspective, the electoral appeal of new political parties is their ability to credibly claim pureness for not being part of the disdained elites.

In order to better understand the rivalling conceptions of voter behaviour that we deducted from macro-level approaches to party emergence, we can borrow from a parallel discussion in electoral studies: the literature on vote switching (Schoen 2003). Because new party voters abandon their previous vote choice, voting for new parties represents one form of

vote switching. Like studies on party emergence, the literature on electoral volatility is similarly divided into camps that view vote switching either as channels to express generalized frustration or as driven by party-related performance and issue considerations.

According to the latter and more optimistic approach, vote switchers make up their minds all over again at each election (Dalton 2007). In contrast to habitual partisans, vote switchers are viewed as engaging in sophisticated party-related decision-making, considering the parties' prior performance and policy offerings in their vote choices (Dassonneville *et al.* 2015; van der Meer *et al.* 2015). The positive perspective on vote switching comprises the implicit micro-level assumptions of the equilibrium accounts on party emergence: voters care about policies, and new political parties will enter the party system by attracting citizens whose political views are not represented by the established parties. Likewise, the equilibrium approach assumes that voters of new parties consider issue stances of the parties when making voting decisions. Empirically, however, the majority of citizens do not consider proximity calculations in their voting decisions (Boatright 2008; Lenz 2012; Singh 2010). Consequently, if new political parties capitalize on segments of the electorate which engage in proximity calculations, then we would expect ideological voting to be more prevalent among new party voters than among the average voter.

*Issue-voting hypothesis:* The effect of ideological considerations on the vote choice is stronger among new party voters than among other groups of the electorate.

If we believe that voting for a new party can be understood as the reaction of issue-driven voters to the occurrence of new options on the ballot, then we can derive further testable expectation about the beliefs of new party voters and their development over time. First, if new political parties slip into unoccupied political spaces, then we would expect voters who were previously unrepresented by existing political parties to react more favourably to the emergence of a new party than voters whose views were already well represented.



*Empty space hypothesis:* Prior to the establishment of a new party, new party voters perceived the closest political party as more distant than other voters.

Second, we expect voters of new parties to improve in terms of issue representation after the establishment of the new party. To the extent that new parties gain votes by offering a unique policy platform to citizens who were previously poorly represented we would expect increasing voter-party policy congruence among new party voters compared to their previous vote choices.

*Switching benefit hypothesis:* New party voters exhibit higher policy congruence with their vote choice after switching votes to a newly established party.

In the literature on vote switching, the more sceptical approach describes floating voters as similar to sand drift (Zelle 1995; Dassonneville 2012; Belanger and Nadeau 2005). Because voting is not seen as choosing the best fit out of a menu of distinct policy options but as a vehicle to express dissatisfaction, discontent vote switchers would be swayed from one party to the next. Against the backdrop of increasing political distrust and dealignment in Western societies, scholars argue that ‘frustrated floating voters’ (Zelle 1995) emerged as an electoral subgroup. The segment of frustrated floating voters could function as the nutrient for new political parties that enter the party system based on a project of newness. Without necessarily having to fill empty policy spaces, new political parties could appeal to the frustrated floating voter not by raising issues previously left unaddressed by established parties, but by channelling the diffuse dissatisfaction with the established political parties. As organizations devoid of political history, new political parties may credibly claim pureness, which differentiates new parties from the political establishment and could appeal to frustrated voters who welcome any political change, irrespective of its direction.

*Indifference hypothesis:* The effect of party-related considerations on the vote choice is weaker among new party voters than among other groups of the electorate.

*Dissatisfaction hypothesis:* A voter's level of political dissatisfaction is associated with the inclination to vote for a political party that has not been on the ballot before.

## **Data**

I will employ two types of survey data to investigate the determinants and consequences of voting for a new party. First, for comparative analyses, we use Modules 1-4 from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (Giebler *et al.* 2016; CSES 2017). Secondly, I use long-term panel datasets from the German election study and the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study. Both types of data complement each other in their faults and merits regarding sampling and measurement. The CSES is a harmonized compilation of international post-election voter surveys. Considering all elections with one or more new political parties in countries that Freedom House (2017) rated as free leaves 39 elections<sup>3</sup> between 1996–2016 for the analysis with 33,033 respondents with non-missing-values on the relevant variables (see Appendix A1 for a list of elections and new political parties covered).<sup>4</sup> Analysing data from many countries renders the results less dependent on features of a single election, but CSES surveys respondents only at one point in time. Therefore, the data is not suited to trace the reactions of voters to dynamics on the macro level. Panel surveys enable comparing intra-individual developments of political attitudes and behaviours before and after a new party appeared in the menu of political options (cf. Bélanger and Aarts 2006; Rooduijn *et al.* 2016; Wuttke 2017). Moreover, longitudinal surveys do not rely on often erroneous self-reported recalls by respondents to gauge information on past voting behaviour (e.Waldahl and Aardal 2000). Yet, panel surveys suffer from attrition (see appendix A2), which shrinks sample sizes and may bias sample compositions. Furthermore, long-term panel surveys are scarce data sources. For the purpose

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<sup>3</sup> CSES measured party-related attitudes only for larger parties. Therefore, voting behaviour towards a new party was only analysed if party-related attitudes were gathered for that party.

<sup>4</sup> Average sample size per country: 826, minimum: 261, maximum: 2,676.

of this study, survey data is needed that meet the following requirements: 1) measures intra-individual developments at two or more elections, 2) contains questions on perceived party positions, 3) includes one party that had not competed in national elections before. Two longitudinal datasets meet these requirements.

First, long-term panel datasets collected by the German Longitudinal Election Study are used to investigate the emergence of new political parties at the 2005 and 2013 German elections. Two of these surveys were conducted face-to-face and cover the period from 2005 to 2013 (N=518, see: Rattinger *et al.* 2016a) and from 2009 to 2013 respectively (N=1,108, see: Rattinger *et al.* 2016b). A third survey was conducted online during the 2009 and 2013 election campaigns (N=1,025, see: Rattinger *et al.* 2016c).

These datasets cover the emergence of three new political parties that have successfully entered parliaments on the provincial level or above after a long period of political stability in the German party system (Saalfeld and Schoen 2015). The leftist party (Die Linke) was on the ballot for the first time in 2005. Because the party arose from a merger of a protest initiative against the government's reform program with the pre-existing socialist party, Die Linke builds on organizational predecessors and thus cannot be considered a "genuinely new party" (Sikk 2005). However, as the new party managed to assemble various protest forces against the government's course of austerity (Patton 2006), Die Linke replenished the political competition with distinct programmatic offerings in a novel organisational form. In 2013, the Pirate Party was new on the ballot. The party had won seats at provincial and European elections, with an outspoken anti-partyist stance and claimed to represent a new kind of participatory politics (Niedermayer 2010). Furthermore, the Eurosceptic and anti-immigrant party Alternative für Deutschland ran for the first time in 2013 (Arzheimer 2015). Altogether, the German case presents a mixture of new parties with different ideological positions and an emphasis on either political issues or anti-establishment orientations.

Second, I use the 1998-2002 panel from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study which was collected under the supervision of the Foundation for Electoral Research in the Netherlands. In 1998, 1,814 eligible citizens were interviewed at home. 689 of these respondents (38%) were surveyed again after the elections in 2002 (for more information, see: Bélanger and Aarts 2006: 6–8). The 2002 Dutch elections were extraordinary as they brought the highest vote share for a new political party in the country’s electoral history. Running for national office for the first time, Lijst Pim Fortuyn entered the Dutch parliament as the second-biggest party with 17% of the votes. The party was initially organised around his charismatic founder and namesake. Fortuyn created the Lijst after he was dismissed as leader of another party due to controversial statements on immigration, among them the call to stop accepting asylum seekers in the Netherlands (Lucassen and Lucassen 2015). Lijst Pim Fortuyn was described as a right-wing populist party, combining anti-elitist rhetoric with anti-immigration policies (e.g. Bruff 2003). Therefore, the Dutch case is a likely candidate for tapping into both approaches on the emergence of new political parties (cf. Bélanger and Aarts 2006).

### **Method and Operationalization**

Main dependent variable is whether a respondent has voted for a new party. We define a new political party as a political organisation that has not competed for office before on the national level with the same name. The identification of new political parties in the CSES dataset was carried out using the CSES codebook and additional publicly available information (see appendix A1).<sup>5</sup> Lijst Pim Fortuyn is the only new party in the Dutch dataset. In the analysis on Germany, voters of the Leftist Party in 2005, as well as voters of the Pirate Party and the Alternative für Deutschland in 2013, were classified as new party voters.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Voting behaviour was analysed in elections for the lower house whereas presidential elections were not considered.

<sup>6</sup> Recall questions are used to measure voting behaviour in 2005 for the two German surveys, which began in 2009.

For an empirical test of the dissatisfaction hypothesis, we employ two indicators: the perceived efficacy of voting is a more specific indicator of discontent, reflecting attitudes towards the act of voting as the perennial institution of democratic systems. Efficacy of voting was assessed on a 5-point scale on whether it makes a big difference whom people vote for.<sup>7</sup> The degree of dissatisfaction with democracy serves as a more general summary indicator of system-related attitudes. It was measured with the question: ‘On the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with democracy in [country]?’ . Because the CSES data does not provide voter perceptions of party issue positions, I rely on left-right placement as a super-issue to assess the equilibrium hypotheses. Ideological proximity reflects the absolute difference between a voter’s self-placement and the voter’s perception of the position of the party he or she voted for on an 11-point left-right scale. Finally, testing the indifference hypothesis relies on the degree to which individuals like or dislike the party they voted for (11-point scale), which represents a generalized summary evaluation of the party. In order to minimize unobserved heterogeneity, socio-demographic and attitudinal covariates are included in the model which are known to be fairly stable over time and located early in the funnel of causality.

### **Empirical Analysis**

Although the equilibrium- and the protest-based perspectives on new party emergence hold diverging premises on the differences between voters of new parties and the rest of the electorate, both approaches concur that new party voters can be characterized by distinct features, on which new political parties build electoral success. Using CSES data, the first

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<sup>7</sup> In a few elections (Germany 2005, Netherlands 2002, Poland 2005) respondents were not asked “whether it can make a big difference whom people vote for. Instead they were asked whether “who was in power makes a difference”. In these cases, the latter variable was used. In those countries, where both indicators were measured, both variables yielded similar effects.

analytic step, therefore, examines whether the proclivity to vote for a new party goes along with distinct voter characteristics.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 reports the results of a logistic regression on the proclivity to cast a vote for a party that had not previously competed in national elections.<sup>8</sup> Clustered standard errors account for similarities of individuals in the same electoral context.<sup>9</sup> To make the results easier to comprehend, I report average marginal effects using the observed value approach (Hanmer and Ozan Kalkan 2013).

The regression model contains two indicators of political dissatisfaction to investigate the prevalence of political discontent among supporters of new parties. Perceived efficacy of voting is not associated with the proclivity to vote for a new party but generalized political alienation is more prevalent among new party voters than among other voters. In line with the protest-based approach, higher levels of dissatisfaction with democracy go along with a higher propensity to vote for a new party. The average probability to vote for new parties across all elections in the sample is 18.1 per cent. Increasing generalized dissatisfaction by one standard deviation increases the probability to vote for a new party by three percentage points, indicating a substantial but small effect.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the data confirm the expected relationship between political dissatisfaction and voting for new parties even though the association is not strong. If voters seek to signal protest and to use their ballot expressively, then we expect a lower weight of party-related considerations when voters decide for a new party over the established alternatives. In contrast to the indifference hypothesis, however, vote choice evaluations do not predict whether a person cast the ballot for a new or an established political party. In other

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<sup>8</sup> Due to the high frequency of missing values in party-related indicators in some countries (see Appendix A3), the analysis was re-ran without these variables but the results do not differ substantively (see Appendix A4).

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix 5 for robustness analyses using multi-level modelling.

<sup>10</sup> Increasing political dissatisfaction from the minimum to the maximum increases the probability to vote for a new party by 12.6 percentage points (see Appendix A6 for distributions of the variable).

words, the appraisal of the party that a respondent voted for is equally important for voters of new parties as it is for other voters. Hence, the analysis does not provide evidence for the idea that new party voters are swayed to any political alternative regardless of the characteristics of that new party.

Ideological proximities are used to test whether the assumptions derived from the equilibrium approach embody a better approximation of the observed voter behaviour. Considering the importance of political spaces that the equilibrium approach attributes to the decision calculus of new party voters, this approach predicts that new party voters would be ideologically closer to their vote choices than voters who stayed with established political parties. Yet, Table 2 shows that ideological proximity is not a distinct feature of new party voters as the degree of ideological congruence makes no difference in the inclination to cast a ballot for a new party.

Altogether, the analysis of the international survey data solely lends support for the dissatisfaction hypothesis whereas the observed voting behaviour does not conform to the remaining hypotheses. However, the lack of significant results might be a methodological artefact of averaging effects across a diverse set of countries. To avoid overlooking meaningful effects in single elections, we conducted separate logistic regressions for each of the 39 electoral contests (Figure 1, covariates not plotted).

[Figure 1 about here.]

The country-wise results provide additional insights into the determinants of new party voting. Above all, Figure 1 reveals tremendous heterogeneity across countries in the relationship between political dissatisfaction and the decision to vote for a new political party. With very few exceptions, perceptions of the efficacy of electoral participation still show no substantial association with new party voting. Voters of new parties and voters of established political groups do differ in their evaluation of the quality of the democratic process, but the

country-by-country analysis shows that the pattern of associations between democratic dissatisfaction and support for new parties is much less uniform than suggested by the dissatisfaction hypothesis. In 14 of the 39 elections higher levels of dissatisfaction increase the probability of choosing a new party. But the effect's direction is reversed in nine elections, and in the remaining electoral competitions, we observed no effect. For example: the Israeli party Kadima, which was founded in 2005 by prominent politicians from the Israeli establishment and shortly thereafter emerged as strongest force in the 2006 national elections, drew support from voters who were satisfied with the democratic processes in their country. To the contrary, in the 2002 Dutch election Lijst Pim Fortuyn successfully mobilized voters who were alienated with democratic politics. That is, democratic dissatisfaction plays a role in voting for new parties, but the relationship is apparently more complex than suggested in protest-based accounts on the formation of new parties.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the remaining determinants of voting for new political groups, the country-wise results are similar to the findings from the cross-national regression analysis, even though there is a noticeable number of statistically significant associations between party evaluation and new party voting. Altogether, in several countries the cross-sectional analysis of voting behaviour provides empirical support for the tenet that new parties receive votes from dissatisfied segments of the electorate. Yet, there is no indication for stronger ideological considerations among voters of new parties as suggested by the equilibrium approach.<sup>12</sup>

Although supporters of new political parties are not ideologically closer to their vote choice in virtually any observed electoral contest, proponents of the equilibrium model could

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<sup>11</sup> Considering the great variation in effects of political dissatisfaction across elections, post-hoc exploratory analyses were conducted to investigate potential contextual moderators of dissatisfaction's influence in a country. Because the likelihood of new party emergence depends on the distribution of political dissatisfaction in a society (Tavits 2008), it was tested whether the overall level of dissatisfaction in a country moderates the relationship between new party voting and a person's level of dissatisfaction but there is no evidence for a cross-level interaction (see appendix A7).

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix A8 for regression results, separated by country.



raise at least three reasonable arguments for why this finding is not sufficient evidence to disprove the role of policy spaces in the decision calculus of new party voters. First, equal ideological congruence between both groups of voters does not prove the absence of ideological considerations among new party voters. Indeed, ideological considerations could drive the motivation of new party voters to the same extent as they matter to any other voter. However, prior research has shown that ideological congruence is only one among several factors in the voting decision (Dowding 2017) and the majority of voters do not follow proximity calculations (Boatright 2008; Singh 2010). The finding that new party voters do not emphasize spatial considerations more strongly than other voters casts doubts on whether the necessary individual-level requirements are met to uphold empty policy spaces as the dominant explanation for the establishment of a new party on the macro-level.

Still, two reasonable methodological objections remain. Even though left-right placement is often regarded as super-issue subsuming a variety of political issues (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976), one indicator can hardly represent the entire political space. This limitation is particularly critical when considering the formation of new political parties because these parties may have emerged in order to supersede traditional left-right cleavages. Finally, the observed equivalence in ideological congruence between new party voters and the residual electorate might reflect methodological artefacts resulting from the cross-sectional data structure. Even if new party voters are not ideologically closer to their vote choice than other voters, it is plausible that new party voters had been even worse off in the preceding elections and caught up in terms of ideological congruence after the emergence of a new party. In this vein, the observed equivalence in ideological congruence would be misleading because it overlooks inter-temporal dynamics.

To investigate the merits of these methodological objections, we turn to Dutch and German long-term panel surveys. These longitudinal datasets span two or more elections, thus

enable to disentangle the temporal order of system-level dynamics among the parties and individual-level changes in attitudes about the parties (see Table 3 for an overview of the distribution of new party voters in the respective datasets).

[Table 3 near here.]

I first analyse vote choices for new parties using German long-term panel sets, covering the elections with new parties on the ballot in 2005 and 2013. This data allows tracing whether voters who cast their party for a new party in 2005 again rallied around the -very different- new political parties that had emerged before the 2013 election. According to the issue-voting hypothesis, individuals who voted for the new radical-left party in 2005 should be reticent to vote for the right-wing AfD or the ideologically diffuse Pirate Party in 2013. From the perspective of protest-based party emergence, in contrast, ideological distances and other party-related considerations should not hinder migration from one new party to the next.

In contrast to the indifference hypothesis, Table 3 reveals a rather low share of voters who value newness per se and floated from one new political party to the next. A sizable segment of respondents voted for a new party in the 2005 *or* in the 2013 elections. However, only a handful of voters—between 0.6 and 2.5% of the surveyed respondents—voted for new parties both in 2005 *and* in 2013.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, we can conclude at least for the observed German case that the group of frustrated floating new party voters alone was not a sufficient support base for the successful establishment of new parties.

The longitudinal data allows to further elaborate on the intra-individual dynamics of ideological distances, which is key to the equilibrium approach on voters' decision-making

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<sup>13</sup> Voters of the new party in 2005 were not more likely to again cast their ballots for the new parties in the 2013 election (see Appendix A9).

calculus. The cross-sectional analysis could not dissolve whether the observed similarity in political representation between new party voters and the remaining electorate predated the emergence of the new electoral competitors or whether it resulted from the emergence of new parties which closed previous representational deficits among new party voters. Hence, the subsequent analyses examine the temporal claims about the voter's position in the policy space before and after the emergence of a new political party.

Figure 2 speaks to this question, showing how the ideological congruence between parties and individual voters developed between two election cycles, separated for segments of the electorate. Specifically, new party voters in 2013 are compared with voters who stayed loyal to their vote choice and with voters who switched party choices between established parties in 2009 and 2013. These estimates are reported separately for the three German election surveys (see Appendix 10 for a meta-analysis of the reported estimates).

[Figure 2 near here.]

The left-hand panel of Figure 2 depicts the degree of ideological congruence between voters and the ideological offerings of the parties in the 2009 election, separated by type of voting behaviour in 2013. Specifically, the left-hand panel depicts the minimal ideological distance between a voter and the party closest to the voter in the 2009 German elections.<sup>14</sup> Put differently, separated by the voting behaviour four years later, the left panel of Figure 2 reports whether electoral groups differ in their previous degree of political representation by the parties.

If support for new political parties was built on voters whose views were previously not represented in the party system (*empty space hypothesis*), we would expect that new party voters report a higher minimal political distance than other voters in the 2009 election, that is

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<sup>14</sup> Only major parties were included in the analysis on minimal distances: CDU/CSU, FDP, Greens, Left, SPD.

before the establishment of The Pirate Party and the AfD. Yet, Figure 2 shows that the degrees of ideological representation in 2009 differed not very strongly when we separate citizens by their voting behavior in 2013. Keeping in mind that the left-right scale runs from 0–10, the average ideological distance to the closest party is roughly half a scale point among all voter groups. This means that even among new party voters, the average citizen had at least one political party in their choice set that was ideologically close to their own position in the preceding election. However, the distance between new party voters and the closest party was about 0.2 scale points larger compared other voter groups, which is a statistically significant difference in the meta-analytic aggregation. This finding is in line with the empty space hypothesis. However, the minuteness of this effects casts doubts on the description of new party voters as previously lonesome wanderers in the policy space hoping for a new party to pick them up. Considering that 0.2 scale points is not a fundamental difference in terms of ideological representation, attributing the vote choices for a new party to the motivation to overcome empty ideological policy spaces would mean placing much weight on a small difference in ideological representation.

The plots in the centre of Figure 2 depict how the perceived congruence with a person's vote choice changed between 2009 and 2013. To calculate the representation difference over time I subtracted 1) the distance between the respondent's left–right self-placement in 2013 and the position (in 2013) of the party she voted for from 2) the distance between the voter's ideological position in 2009 and the perceived position of the party she voted for back then.<sup>15</sup> Positive values signal higher congruence with the vote choice in 2013 than in 2009. The analysis indicates no average differences between the observed voter groups. In other words, compared

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<sup>15</sup> Formally, the value equals  $|(\text{Ego}_{2009} - \text{VoteChoice}_{2009})| - |(\text{Ego}_{2013} - \text{VoteChoice}_{2013})|$ .

with their previous vote choice, adherents of new political parties did not achieve higher congruence with their parties after the reconfiguration of the party system than other voters.

Finally, the right-hand panel reports the benefit in ideological congruence that resulted from vote switching, operationalized with a measure of hypothetical congruence with the previous vote choice. Like before, I calculate the degree of ideological congruence between 1) self-placement and vote choice in 2013 but this time I subtracted this value from the distance between 2) the voter's ideological position in 2013 and the perceived position (2013) of her vote choice at *the previous elections in 2009*. Reflecting that positions of parties or voters may have changed, this measure compares the congruence with actual vote choice in 2013 on the one hand with the hypothetical scenario that the voter would have stayed with her previous vote choice on the other hand. If switching votes reflects choosing a party that better represents the voter's political views, then we should see that electors receive a benefit of vote switching in the form of higher ideological congruence (*switching benefit hypotheses*).<sup>16</sup>

Empirically, we find that new party voters have gained only very limited ideological benefits from their vote switching. The estimated switching benefit is small and statistically insignificant for new party voters. Vote switchers among established parties, in contrast, achieved some higher ideological congruence by switching their vote choice from one *established* party to another *established* party.<sup>17</sup> The absence of measurable benefits in the ideological congruence of new party votes may, in part, reflect the estimate's uncertainty that results from the small number of observations. However, switching benefits are far from gigantic even when the upper bound of the confidence interval is considered. Moreover, when

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<sup>16</sup> Formally, the value equals  $|(Ego_{2013} - PreviousVoteChoice_{2013})| - |(Ego_{2013} - VoteChoice_{2013})|$ . The value is 0 for loyal partisans because the variables on the left hand of the equation are the same as those on the right hand.

<sup>17</sup> Acknowledging that vote switchers did not achieve a better political representation in 2013 than in 2009, the switching benefit presumably indicates that switchers reacted to a deteriorated congruence with their former vote choice and switched voting decision in order to at least preserve the current quality of their political representation.

combined in the meta-analysis (Appendix 10), the estimates are precise enough to conclude that new party voters achieve lower switching benefits than ordinary vote switchers. Substantively, in terms of ideological congruence, this finding suggests that it would not have made a large difference if new party voters had stayed with their previous vote choice. In other words, contradicting the equilibrium-model, voters of new parties have abandoned established parties in favour of new parties even though they do not gain significant benefit in ideological proximity.<sup>18</sup>

Because unidimensional policy orientations might not sufficiently represent the political space, I employed different strategies to test the results' sensitivity to using left-right placements. First, an additional analysis of the German data makes use of a different indicator of perceived representation by the political parties. Individual perceptions of the parties' competence to solve the country's most important problems serves as a measure of *party-related alienation*. Specifically, this indicator queries whether a respondent reports that none of the available parties can solve the country's most or second-most pressing problem. Employing this strategy circumvents researcher assumptions about the probable weight of specific issues in the voting calculus and about the representation of these policy preferences in a generalized ideological super-issue. Moreover, it takes into account that issue importance varies between voters. Hence, we investigate voter evaluations of the parties' political supply in terms of the voters' subjective perception of the issue agenda.

According to the equilibrium account, we would expect higher levels of party-related alienation among new party voters before the emergence of the new electoral alternative and, presumably, a certain degree of reconciliation after the new party has accommodated the voters'

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<sup>18</sup> Ideological congruence might play a role in the voter's calculus in the form of a region of acceptability and by interacting with political discontent. Indeed, ideological proximity to a new party moderates how discontent translates into votes for a new party among German voters (see Appendix A11).

previously unrepresented political preferences. However, as Table 4 shows, most new party voters did not feel alienated from the political parties before the establishment of the new party. Moreover, although the estimates for new party voters are subject to considerable uncertainty, clearly only a minority of new party voters exhibit improvements in self-reported alienation with the political parties. Finally, we observe similar trajectories of party-related alienation among all groups of voters. Therefore, a measure which does not rely on narrow assumptions about the voters' belief system also does not provide much evidence for the basic tenet of the equilibrium account that political parties appeal to voters who previously felt unsatisfied with the political offerings of the established parties.

[Table 4 about here]

For another test of the equilibrium hypothesis in a different context, the analysis of voter-party congruence over time is replicated using Dutch data, which has the advantage of providing party-related survey measures on multiple policy issues. Figure 3 shows the development of congruence between voters and Dutch parties on the left-right ideological dimension and on the issues of income differences, the liberalization of euthanasia and the admission of asylum seekers (see appendix 12 for tables and tests of statistical significance).

On most policy orientations, issue congruence developed similarly among all voter groups in the electorate, except for the asylum issue where the observed patterns square nicely with the issue-voting hypothesis. Notwithstanding slight gains in policy representation among new party voters with respect to Euthanasia, overall, the observed voter groups show similar patterns of voter-party congruence on each of the policy orientations depicted in the first three rows. Hence, the analysis does not provide strong evidence that new party voters gathered

behind the new party to increase the political representation on income differences, euthanasia or the generalized left-right dimension in the 2002 Dutch election.

However, the dynamics are strikingly different with regards to the admission of asylum seekers. On this issue, we observe large switching benefits among voters who moved to Lijst Pim Fortuyn. Hence, new party voters greatly improved issue congruence compared to if they had stayed with their vote choice from the previous election. Recognizing the outspoken anti-immigrant stance of Lijst Pim Fortuyn, this finding is clearly in line with the equilibrium approach's issue-voting hypothesis.

Curiously, not all congruence measures on the asylum issue developed as predicted by the equilibrium account. First, the established parties represented voters' position on immigration quite well in the preceding 1998 elections (minimal distance measure). Second, because the parties in the 1998 elections already mirrored the electorate, Pim Fortuyn voters did not substantially improve congruence on this issue in the 2002 elections compared to the previous vote (representation difference). How can we make sense of the fact that Fortuyn voters achieved a switching benefit in 2002 even though the representation gap was so small in 1998?

Apparently, the Dutch elections provide some evidence for voter behaviour in line with the equilibrium account, but the story is more nuanced than a simple explanation of issue-based party emergence might suggest. Comparing intra-individual dynamics of issue distances from one election to the next does not suggest new party voting as a reaction to representational deficits in the preceding election. Empty policy spaces might still have played a role, but the consequential realignment of party positions and voter preferences seems to have taken place in the period between election campaigns. Presumably, the intense debate, which took place in the Netherlands about the acceptance of asylum seekers between the 1998 and the 2002 elections (Lucassen and Lucassen 2015), caused many voters and political parties to change



their positions on this issue during the inter-election period. The switching benefit for voters of Pim Fortuyn –and the losses in voter-party congruence among loyal partisans between 1998 and 2002– may reflect the realignments of party positions and voter attitudes during that period.<sup>19</sup> Hence, a close look reveals the role of issue considerations in the decision to vote for Lijst Pim Fortuyn even though there were no empty policy spaces in the preceding election.

[Figure 3 near here.]

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

New political parties can only succeed if a sufficient number of voters prefer the new party over established alternatives. Although presumptions about the decision calculus of individual voters are therefore central to macro-level theories of party emergence, they are usually implicit in scholarly theories and rarely tested empirically. Using cross-national data sources and long-term panel data from Germany and the Netherlands, this study put competing assumptions about the motivation of new party voters to an empirical test.

These analyses show that none of the rivalling macro-level approaches to party emergence suffices as a one-fits-all model, but each approach has merits in explaining voter behaviour in some electoral contests. As suggested by the protest-based account, political dissatisfaction among voters was clearly a fertile soil for the emergence of new political formations in several countries but the relationship between discontent and voting for new parties proved more complex than theoretically suggested and sometimes even occurred in

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<sup>19</sup> Using slightly modified versions of the switching-benefit measure (Version 1:  $|(\text{Ego}_{2013} - \text{PreviousVoteChoice}_{2009})| - |(\text{Ego}_{2013} - \text{VoteChoice}_{2013})|$ , Version 2:  $|(\text{Ego}_{2009} - \text{PreviousVoteChoice}_{2013})| - |(\text{Ego}_{2013} - \text{VoteChoice}_{2013})|$ ) suggests that a large portion of the switching benefit achieved by voters of Lijst Pim Fortuyn is due to intra-individual changes in the position of these voters on asylum between 1998 and 2002; for similar results, also see: Bélanger and Aarts, 2006: 15.

reversed direction. Moreover, the German data provided no evidence for dissatisfied new party voters moving like sand drift from one new party to the next. The rivalling equilibrium approach conceptualizes the emergence of new parties as a response to unoccupied positions in the policy space and assumes citizens to use their ballot for maximizing policy congruence with the parties. Indeed, ideologies and stances on political issues play a role in the calculus to vote for new parties but empty policy spaces were not proven a natural or even necessary condition to cast a vote for new formations. New party voters are not lonesome wanderers in the policy space; in fact, compared to the previous elections German and Dutch new party voters did not increase congruence with their vote choices on any of the observed policy orientations. Still, proximity to new parties matters and the success of Lijst Pim Fortuyn presents a case in which a new electoral competitor may have attracted voters by offering a unique policy platform. Altogether, however, these findings caution us not to expect these models to represent voter behaviour in every electoral contest adequately, but they emphasize the variety of reasons and considerations that stipulate vote choices for a new party, depending on party characteristics and other contextual factors.

This study argued for the relevance of linking macro-level explanations of party formation to empirical examinations of individual-level processes. However, studying individual vote choices requires survey data that come with certain analytical limitations, which also apply to this study. First, the analyses are confined to the measures in each survey. Party-related evaluations are usually only queried for major parties. Hence, then analytical leverage of survey data does not cover the entire universe of new parties and is restricted to the more successful challengers. In addition, most election surveys such as the CSES only measure perceptions of party positions on the left-right scale. In interpreting these analyses, therefore, we should keep in mind that this generalized super-issue does not represent the entire policy space, which is why several efforts were made to diversify the analyses in the longitudinal

analyses on Germany and the Netherlands. Second, the generalizability is confined to time and countries for which survey data is available. For instance, much literature on new political parties considers the formation of green parties, supposedly as a response to growing demands from the electorate along the new politics dimension. Since many Green parties were founded before the first CSES survey wave (1996), this study cannot speak to the development before that point in time. Moreover, the data on long-term voting histories is confined to five recent electoral contests in two countries. Even though the new parties in these elections propagates different issues (digital freedom, euro-scepticism, anti-immigration) and differed in how they tapped into political frustration among voters, none of these parties were, for example, spin-offs from existing parties by prominent politicians, which might employ more issue-based appeals instead of anti-establishment rhetoric.

While the findings of this study provide insights into the motivation of new party voters, it can only be a stepping-stone for further empirical and theoretical work. Voters of new political parties were investigated without further differentiation between different types of voters or different types of new parties. Future studies may differentiate party families and could investigate moderating influences of macro-level features on vote choices for new parties, trying to explain the tremendous heterogeneity between countries in the individual-level motivators of new party voting. Future examinations of new party voting on the individual level may also profit from new concepts developed in the burgeoning literature on challenger parties (e.g., Hernández 2018). Finally, this study has not considered abstention and its presumably complex relationship with macro-level reconfigurations in the party systems which also deserves further attention.

In addition to studies on new parties from the voters' perspective, more theoretical work on party emergence is called for, which incorporates evidence on voter behaviour into macro-level explanations. For example, Zons (2016) showed that programmatic distinctiveness is more

important for the success of niche parties at the beginning of the life cycle, but the importance fades over time. Zons employed an equilibrium perspective, but the findings could be reinterpreted as indicating that programmatic distinction not (only) matters for instrumental reasons (to maximize congruence) but also for expressive reasons (as a signal of newness). In this vein, understanding the motives of new party voters on the individual level may contribute to the theoretical integration of equilibrium- and protest-based approaches to party emergence. For instance, among the findings of the present study was that political discontent and attitudes towards the acceptance of asylum seekers both played a role in vote choices for Lijst Pim Fortuyn in the Dutch 2002 elections. As individuals may well be driven by different motivations simultaneously (Bélanger and Aarts 2006), the equilibrium- and the protest-based approach are neither exhaustive nor necessarily mutually exclusive which might be elaborated in future studies.

## **Acknowledgement**

I thank Joop van Holsteyn for sharing the 1998-2002 Dutch panel data, Lukas Bischoff and Benedikt Schroth for help with the manuscript, the Participants of the ECPR 2016 Graduate Student Conference and Sonja Krauss for valuable comments. Also, I want to thank very supportive reviewers who helped with fair and constructive criticism.

## **Funding Details**

This work was supported by the German Research Foundation project ‘GLES German Longitudinal Election Study, 2009–2017’.

## **Disclosure Statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## **Data availability statement**

Reproduction material for the empirical analyses can be found online along with the supplementary files at <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/E763Q>.

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## Tables & Figures

Table 1. Characteristics of Equilibrium- and Protest-based Party Establishment.

|  | <b>Equilibrium-based<br/>Party Emergence</b> | <b>Protest-based<br/>Party Emergence</b> |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Requirements on<br/>The Macro Level</b> | Empty policy<br>space                        | Widespread<br>dissatisfaction            |
| <b>Assumed Voter<br/>Calculus</b>          | Issue-driven                                 | Expressive                               |

Table 2. Logistic regression on voting for a new party in 39 electoral contests.

|                                      | <b>Vote for a<br/>new party</b> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Dissatisfaction<br>w/ democracy      | 0.10*<br>(0.04)                 |
| Efficacy of Voting<br>(reversed)     | -0.04<br>(0.02)                 |
| Vote Choice:<br>Party Evaluation     | -0.00<br>(0.07)                 |
| Vote Choice:<br>Ideological distance | 0.04<br>(0.02)                  |
| Secondary Education                  | -0.00<br>(0.02)                 |
| Post-Secondary Education             | 0.01<br>(0.03)                  |
| Occupation (retired)                 | -0.01<br>(0.02)                 |
| Occupation (employed)                | -0.02<br>(0.01)                 |
| Gender (female)                      | -0.01<br>(0.01)                 |
| Party ID                             | -0.04*<br>(0.02)                |
| Age                                  | -0.02***<br>(0.01)              |
| Log likelihood                       | -14914.5                        |
| Wald chi2(13)                        | 77.12                           |
| Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>                | 0.02                            |
| Observations                         | 32,251                          |

Notes: Reported are average marginal effects with standard errors in parenthesis from a logistic regression using robust standard errors (clustered by electoral contests). \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001.

Table 3. Distribution of new party voters in German and Dutch election surveys.

|   | <b>Face to Face Panel<br/>2005–2013</b> | <b>Face to Face Panel<br/>2009–2013</b> | <b>Web Panel<br/>2009–2013</b> | <b>Dutch Panel<br/>1998–2002</b> |
|---|---|---|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Voters of<br/>new parties,<br/>1998</b>            | -                                       | -                                       | -                              | 13.8                             |
| <b>Voters of<br/>new parties,<br/>2005</b>            | 15.3                                    | 10.1                                    | 6.3                            | -                                |
| <b>Voters of<br/>new parties,<br/>2013</b>            | 8.4                                     | 5.7                                     | 8.0                            | -                                |
| <b>Voters of<br/>new parties,<br/>2005 &amp; 2013</b> | 2.5                                     | 0.6                                     | 1.0                            | -                                |
| <b>Total N</b>  | 518                                     | 1108                                    | 496                            | 628                              |

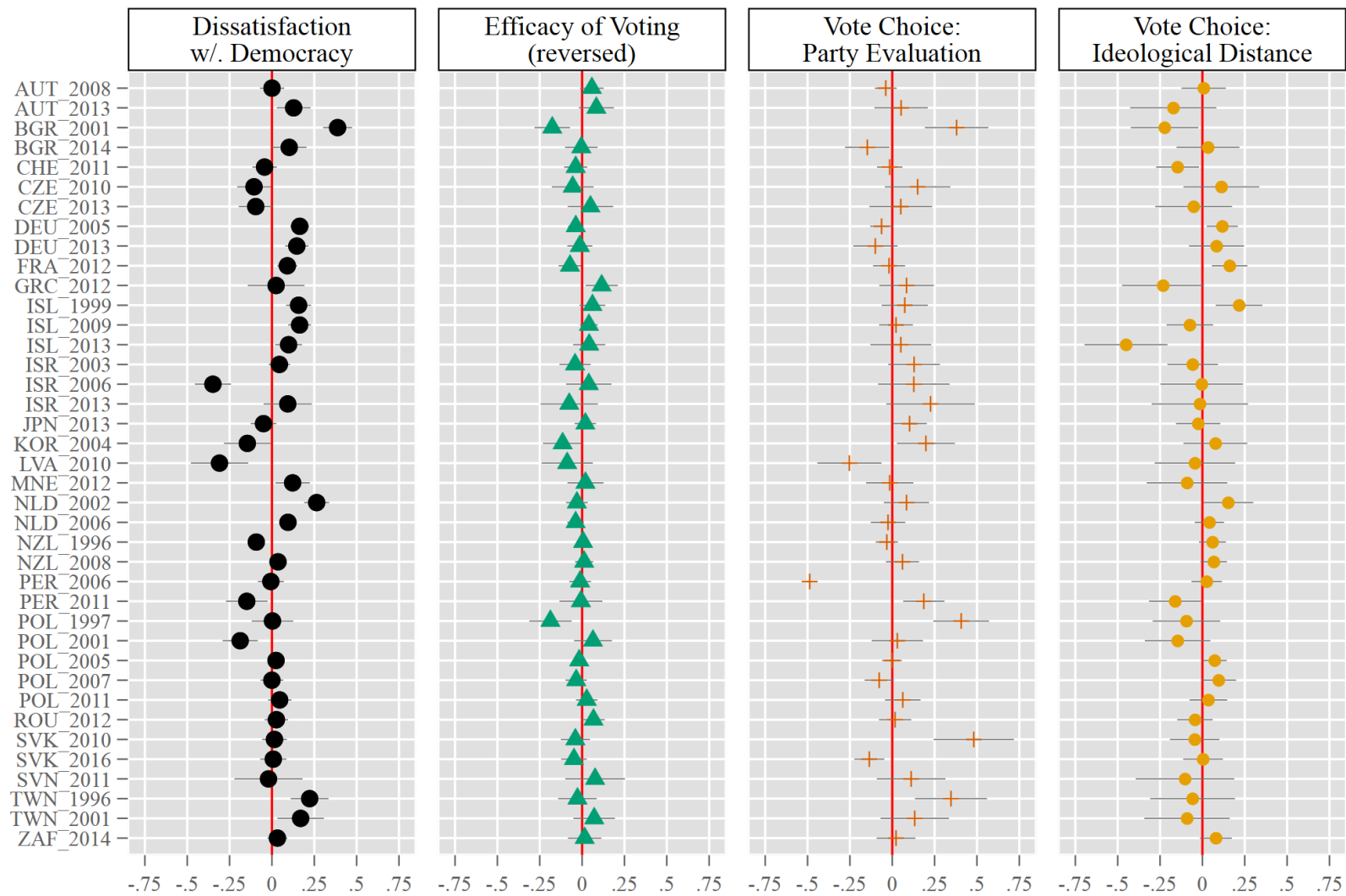
Note: in Percent. Socio-demographic survey weights applied. Total N refers to respondents with valid responses on voting behaviour in 2005 and 2013 (Germany) or in 1998 and 2002 (Netherlands) in the entire dataset.

Table 4. Dynamics in self-reported alienation with political parties between 2009 and 2013.

| in %                             | <b>Partisans</b>    | <b>New Party</b>    | <b>Switchers</b>    |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Stable: Alienation</b>        | 10.0<br>[8.3,12.6]  | 15.4<br>[10.5,22.1] | 10.5<br>[9.2,12.2]  |
| <b>Improved</b>                  | 14.7<br>[12.4,17.4] | 12.8<br>[8.1,19.5]  | 11.2<br>[8.7,14.4]  |
| <b>Deteriorated</b>              | 10.9<br>[8.8,13.4]  | 18.7<br>[12.3,27.4] | 11.6<br>[9.1,14.7]  |
| <b>Stable:<br/>No Alienation</b> | 64.4<br>[61.1,67.5] | 53.1<br>[44.3,61.7] | 66.7<br>[62.6,70.8] |
| <b>N</b>                         | 1432                | 181                 | 604                 |

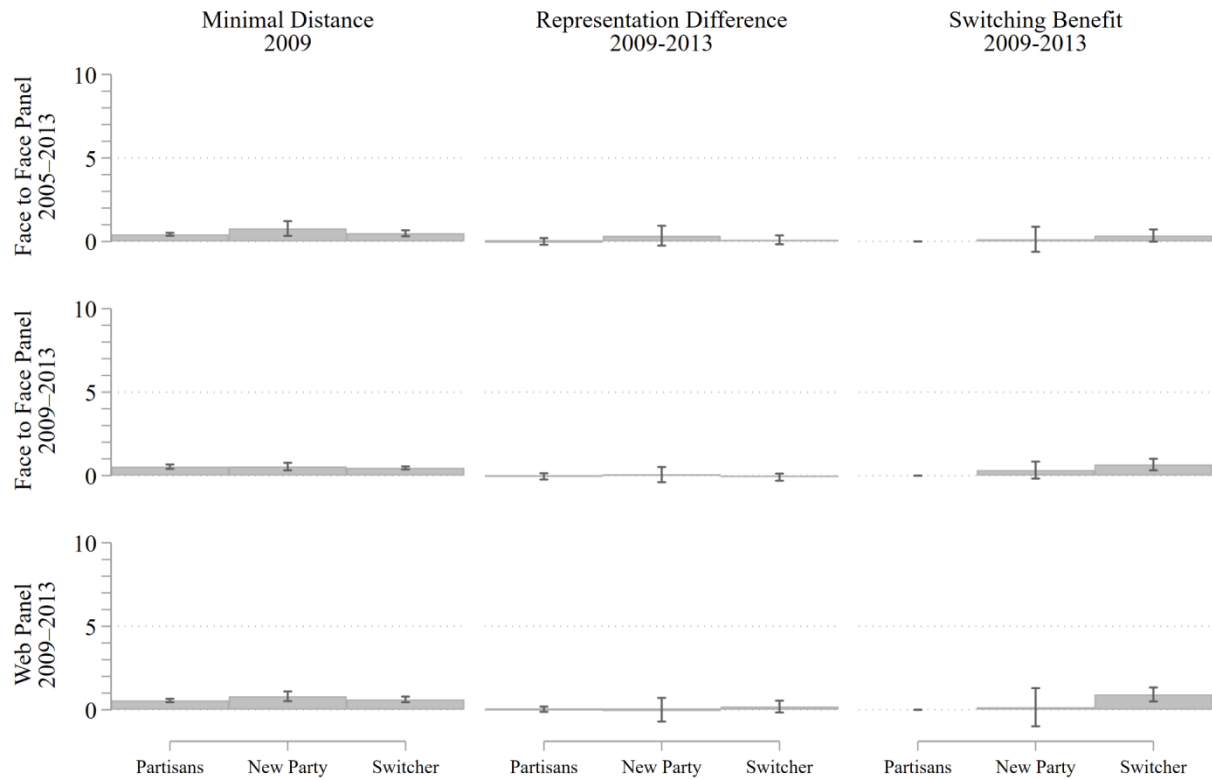
Notes: Missing values to 100 due to rounding. Combined data from Face to Face Panels 2005–2013 and 2009–2013 and the Web Panel 2009–2013. Alienation is a dichotomous indicator, reflecting whether a respondent answered “no party” when asked which party was able to solve the countries’ most or second-most important problem.

Figure 1. Determinants of New Party Voting in 39 Countries.



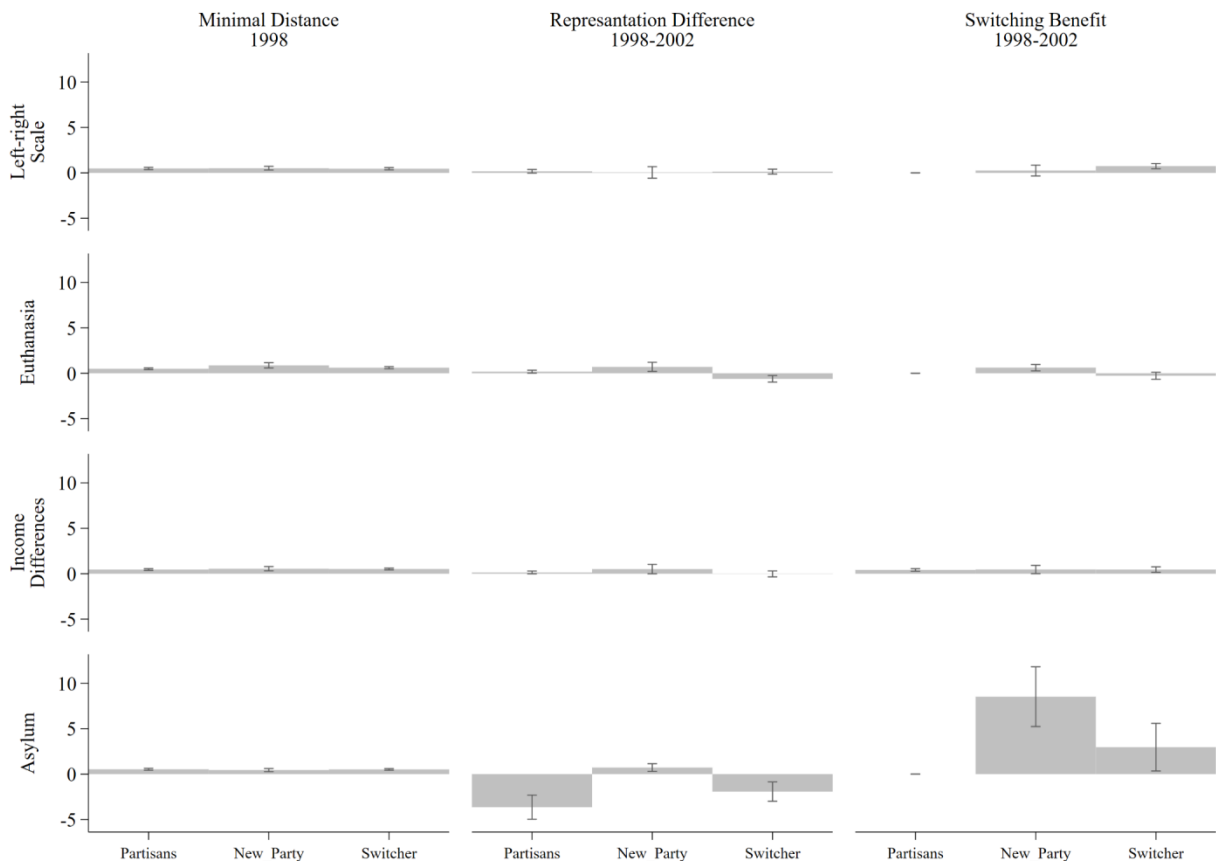
Notes: Reported are average marginal effects and 95% confidence intervals from 39 separate logistic regressions. Covariates not plotted. Full regression results in Appendix A8.

Figure 2. Voter-Party Congruence on the Left-Right Scale at the 2009 and 2013 German Federal Elections.



Notes: Reported are means of ideological distances and 95% confidence intervals, separated by voting behaviour in the 2013 federal election (partisans did not change voting behaviour, switchers changed between established parties). Ideological self-placement and perceived party positions measured on a 0-10 scale.

Figure 3. Voter-Party Congruence at the 1998 and 2002 Dutch Elections.



Notes: Reported are mean distances and 95% confidence intervals, separated by voting behaviour in the 2002 Dutch election (partisans did not change voting behaviour, switchers changed between established parties). Issue positions were measured on a 0-7 scale. Ideological positions were measured on a 10-point scale.