Perspectives on Political Party Death

Theorizing and Testing Downsian and Sociological Rationales

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Theorizing and Testing Downsian and Sociological Rationales

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Abstract:

Which of the new political parties that emerged in advanced democracies faded away and which ones managed to survive and why? Considering a party as dead once it ceases to nominate candidates in any elections, we develop two sets of hypotheses to account for party death derived from two conceptions of political parties. One conceptualizes parties as vehicles formed by career-oriented politicians eager to maximize individual rewards. Failure to deliver seats or government access is therefore expected to predict an earlier death. The other conceptualizes parties as societal organizations that serve representational functions valued in themselves by elites and members alike. This conception stresses the importance of roots in society or ideological novelty. Using survival analysis, we test our hypotheses in 17 advanced democracies based on a new dataset covering 144 new parties from birth until their (potential) death. Arguments derived from both conceptions have significant support stressing the complexity of the drivers underpinning parties' very existence.

Introduction

Cross-national research on advanced democracies has produced excellent work on new party formation and entry, their electoral and parliamentary performance as well as government participation[1]. However, more fundamental questions about the survival of new parties are surprisingly rarely dealt with (but see Collignon 2018; Lowery et al 2013; Rose and Mackie 1988; on new democracies Bakke and Sitter 2015; Casal Bértoa and Spirova 2017; Cyr 2016; Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2015). Drivers of party death and survival shed light on the fundamental question of how we should *theorize* what political parties *are.* Indeed, core party actors are likely to dissolve their party only when they perceive the *raison d'être* of their organization's existence to be fundamentally undermined. What defines this *raison d'être* - the core motivations that underpin a party's very existence - depends on the conception of parties we start out with (Mudge and Chen 2014: 310-2).

This is why in this paper we develop two sets of hypotheses on party death building on two contrasting conceptions of political parties co-existing in the literature for many decades, one originating in Downs' economic theory of democracy (1957), the other in Lipset and Rokkan's seminal work on party systems (1967). Are parties best understood as a "team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office" (Downs 1957: 25), as careerist vehicles composed of ambitious politicians driven by the pursuit of individual rewards? Or do they bear stronger resemblance to "alliances in conflicts over policies and value commitments" (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 5) sustained by followers committed to build support for a collectively shared ideology or group interest?

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[1] See, for instance, Akkerman and de Lange 2012; Biezen and Rashkova 2013; Bolin 2007; Deschouwer 2008; Heinisch 2003; Hug 2001; McDonnell and Newell 2011; Meguid 2007; Spoon 2011; Tavits 2006.

Especially, comparative party research is strongly shaped by the Downsian conception. As Bawn et al put it, "[c]ontemporary scholarship views a party as a team of politicians whose paramount goal is to win electoral office" (2012: 571; see also Aldrich 1995: 4; Müller and Strøm 1999). This rationalist, office-driven conception of parties formed and sustained by self-interested individuals underpins – implicitly or explicitly - many large-N studies on new party performance (e.g. Tavits 2006; Hug 2001; Harmel and Robertson 1985). This also includes recent studies that stress the need to overcome the treatment of parties as unitary actors (often associated with this rationalist conception) and show how intra-organizational factors shape parties' strategic choices and their long-term evolution, for instance, in terms of the programmatic profile they adopt (Schumacher et al 2015; Spoon 2011; Tavits 2013). As detailed below, this Downsian conception of parties provides a rationalist, office-driven rationale allowing us to derive hypotheses on party death.

This account contrasts with works following sociological traditions, which approach political parties as societal organizations driven by group goals rather than individual interest-maximization (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 5; Monroe 2001: 20-1; Mudge and Chen 2014: 310; Bawn et al 2012: 571; see also Kitschelt 1989; Panebianco 1988). Works taking this perspective are predominantly qualitative and small-N. In contrast, the interest group literature has applied this conception more broadly to account for mortality or organizations' anxiety thereof, distinguishing central resource dimensions crucial to an organization's viability such as a distinctive area of competence (comparable to a party's ideological niche) (Gray and Lowery 1997: 28). We make this sociological conception useful by developing hypotheses on party death centring around a party's (in)ability to fulfil its representation function in order to test them alongside hypotheses following a Downsian rationale.

To derive hypotheses from both rationales is important as the assumptions about the core motivations that underpin a political party's very existence, as associated with the *Downsian* and the *sociological conceptions*, are usually not tested by themselves. Unlike the study of parties constitutive for fully institutionalized party systems that have lasted many decades and rarely die (hence do not allow to examine party death), the study of the evolution of 144 new parties – irrespective of their origins, durability or ideological profile – over the course of more than four decades in 17 established party systems opens a window of opportunity: it allows us to examine the drivers of party death in an encompassing fashion. It allows us to go beyond the study of parties' relative success – the dominant focus of existing research - to explore what fundamentally sustains them, by covering *these parties' whole life cycle from their birth to their (potential) 'death'* (Pedersen 1982).

This is important not only theoretically but also empirically. Only new parties that contest more than a few elections can broaden the offer of the party system and may have a direct or indirect impact on policy-making, by entering government or by triggering shifts in the offer of mainstream parties (e.g. Meguid 2007; Mudde 2007). Only once knowing which types of new parties tend to die and survive and why, can we truly evaluate the implications of the rise of new parties for representative democracy, in which support for mainstream parties has been suffering over the last decades, (e.g. Dalton and Wattenberg 2002). More particularly, whether Downsian or sociological drivers of party death finds more support has important empirical implications for which type of change new parties are likely to introduce in established party systems and the way they contribute to representative democracy undergoing significant societal change. Essentially, it reveals whether new parties predominantly exploit on-going processes of dealignment and the decline of mainstream parties (if the Downsian arguments find more support) or whether new parties (echoing the

sociological rationale) contribute to the formation of new, lasting linkages to societal groups and thereby enhance the representational capacity of established party systems.

In the next section, we develop two sets of hypotheses derived from two distinct conceptions of political party co-existing in the literature. After that, we present the indicators, the data-set and methods used to test these hypotheses. Then, we examine – using survival analysis, the patterns of death and survival of 144 organizationally new parties formed in or after 1968 in 17 democracies. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and of avenues of future research.

Theory: Two Conceptions of Political Party and Drivers of Party Death

Defining Party Death

Participating in elections by nominating candidates for public office is a key characteristic of political parties, which sets them apart from organizations such as interest groups (Sartori, 1976). A party survives as long as it takes part in elections, irrespective of the governmental tier – national, regional or local (Rose and Mackie 1988: 539; Spoon 2011: 16-17; Cyr 2016: 129; Collignon 2018). Consequently, we define a party as dead when it *permanently* ceases to nominate candidates for *any* electoral contest as a *separate, autonomous* organization.[2]

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[2] Importantly, this definition is – beyond a party's ability to assure *any* form of electoral participation (which is a precondition but not a predictor of its success) - not based on performance indicators related to electoral success, parliamentary representation or the ability to sustain a presence on the national level as other specifications of 'death' or 'disappearance' used in earlier work (e.g. Lowery et al 2013: 388; Beyens et al 2016: 259; van de Wardt et al 2017: 246). This makes this definition particularly suitable to test Downsian against sociological drivers of party death, as a performance-based specification would bias the results towards the Downsian model. Furthermore, when operationalising party death, we often uncovered information indicating that the reason for the party ceasing to present candidates was its organisational dissolution.

Downsian and Sociological Rationales of Party Death

To develop a series of systematic hypotheses on drivers of party death, we start from the *core motivations* of those actors instrumental to forming and sustaining a party (Mudge and Chen 2014: 310-2; Krouwel and Lucardie 2008). These *motivations – or ends* - constitute the *raison d'etre* of a party and allow us to identify conditions *most central to a party's continued* survival and conditions whose absence are, in turn, likely to lead to a party's death. To identify those conditions we use the Downsian conception of parties as careerist vehicles and the sociological conception of parties as "alliances in conflicts over policies and value commitments" directed towards fulfilling important mobilisation and representative functions (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: 5; Enyedi 2005: 699) as analytical devices.[3] Instead of representing rivalling accounts, the two conceptions (each of which is inevitably a simplification of 'reality') serve as heuristic tools to generate systematic expectations regarding which particular factors are likely to be immediately important – in light of the respective conception - to account for whether core actors within a party maintain their organization through assuring ongoing electoral participation or not. This perspective starting out from parties' core motivations stresses the importance of party agency when theorizing the decision to continue investing the resources necessary to build and maintain an active party organization or to cease to do so (Enyedi 2005; de Lange and Art 2011; Bolleyer 2013).[4]

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[3] The latter perspective aligns with the 'group coalition view' of political parties developed in the US context conceiving of parties as intense policy demanders underpinned by activists and aligned groups (Cohen et al 2008; Bawn et al 2012).

[4] The challenge of sustaining a party is likely to decrease with a party's increasing age and on-going institutionalization, i.e. the longer a party survives, the more likely its persistence becomes, also because core actors have invested considerable resources in the past and there is a tendency to continue doing so. This makes organizational or programmatic changes more likely responses to crises, with the decision to dissolve representing only a 'last resort'. However, if a party's fundamental inability to achieve its core goals becomes

More specifically, each conception allows us to distinguish factors or conditions that are merely desirable for core party actors (and might be important for explaining party strategy, for instance) from those that are likely to motivate core party actors to dissolve their party as they see the latter's *raison d'être* as fundamentally undermined. This distinction is important as, for instance, parliamentary seats are desirable and helpful to any party to realize its goals, including those parties predominantly aspiring to represent group interests in line with the sociological conception. However, seats are only one means and parliament only one arena among several towards the end of engaging in representative activities (Saward 2009)[5]. Thus, starting out from a sociological conception, we would expect access to seats to be less decisive for party actors' determination to sustain their organization than, for example, a party's societal roots and its ideological identity. If, however, we consider parties as career instruments to self-interested politicians in line with the Downsian conception of parties instead, we would expect the inability to win seats (or access government) to motivate wide-spread defection likely to trigger party death (as the aspiration of winning office is considered constitutive for creating a party in the first place).

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apparent, dissolution can be expected to become an option. Echoing this, some parties indeed die late in their life cycle (see Figure 1).

[5] This line of argument makes clear that our distinction between Downsian and sociological conceptions of political party resembles but is not equivalent to an "office-oriented" vs. "policy-oriented" conception of parties. Group representation as associated with the sociological conception of party transcends the formulation and implementation of "policy" and also contains agenda setting through the highlighting of issues, i.e. which does not presuppose institutional access.

Table 1: Drivers of Party Death

	Downsian Account of Party Death	*Sociological Account of Party Death*
Central End/ *raison d'être* of Conception of Political Party	Maximization of individual rewards	Joint representation of group interests/ collectively shared values
Formation Variables Aligned with Central End	*Insider formation* (involving parliamentarian(s)) → death more likely	*Rooted formation* (promoted by pre-existing societal groups)→ death less likely *Ideologically novel formation* → death less likely
Variables Capturing/ Constitutive for Central End	*Seats* → death less likely *Government access* → death less likely	*Distinctive ideological profile* → death less likely

In the following we theorize the two sets of factors respectively. Each set is derived from one conception of political party, as distinguished by the dominant (not necessarily only) end that actors running a party are assumed to strive for predominantly.[6] The factors forming part of each account of party death can be divided in two groups respectively, one time-invariant, the other time-variant. First, each conception (characterized by a specific motivational underpinning) is closely associated with the way an organization is formed, as the latter captures who is involved in a formation for what reasons (e.g. Duverger 1959; Lucardie 2000; Krouwel and Lucardie and Ghillebaert 2008). Formative characteristics defining what a party is for should be immediately relevant for any evaluation of if and when a party has failed to meet its constitutive purpose. Second, by specifying one central end, each

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[6] While echoing the distinction between parties as electoral vehicle and societal organizations by Bolleyer (2013), her 'electoral notion' was not systematically derived from Downs, neither was the societal conception based on Lipset and Rokkan, which is why we start out from Mudge and Chen (2014). Given a different conceptual foundation, the variables included in her analysis of party death are not identical. Moreover, her analysis does not include time-variant predictors (Bolleyer 2013: 78-85).

conception allows us to theorize those factors that are direct realizations of, or constitutive for, such ends. Table 1 summarizes the two accounts of party death. All factors associated with the Downsian conception and the sociological account, and how they are expected to shape party death, are detailed below.

The Downsian Rationale of Party Death - Hypotheses

Theorizing formative conditions closely aligned with the Downsian notion of parties, Duverger has famously argued that parties formed by parliamentarians distinguish themselves in terms of their organization, finances and evolution from parties formed without such 'insider' support (1959: 290-1). Developing this argument further, Krouwel and Lucardie (2008: 283) argued that this is the case as in parties formed by parliamentarians, their 'strategic' or 'personal ambitions' – both short-term orientations - are likely to be dominant. This, in turn, makes long-term investments in a lasting party infrastructure which is then able to outlive the founding elites less likely (should the latter decide to leave). Indeed, parliamentarians forming their own party often do so after defecting from another party because they could not exercise the level of influence they envisioned (Ceron 2015). While parliamentarians might have ties to societal groups or not, the core of the argument is that the motivational structure underpinning insider formations created with the central involvement of professional politicians is defined by career aspirations central to our Downsian conception of a political party, making long-term structural investments less likely. The lack of such investments increases the risk of party death.

H1.1 (*Insider Formation Hypothesis*): Parties formed by parliamentarians are more likely to die than those that are not.

Individual rewards in the form of office are the central end for party actors driven by the maximization of such rewards. Consequently, while electoral support signals to party elites that institutional access might be within reach, whether the votes bring tangible rewards from party elites' point of view depends on their translation into seats that can be allocated to central figures in the party (usually the first national seat a new formation wins is taken over by the party leader). Thus, what matters to elites is the party's institutional access – both in terms of seats and government - rather than its mere electoral performance (Mayhew 1974; Obert and Müller 2017). While winning many seats too early on can be destabilizing for new parties (Bolleyer 2013), the Downsian rationale suggests that MPs can be expected to make stronger efforts to keep their party going and assure its success, efforts that are directed towards assuring their own reelection, than elites who remained outside public office. Consequently, the more party actors benefit from parliamentary seats (incentivized to sustain their organization), the more the party is likely to profit, thereby reducing the risk of its death.

The same rationale applies to government access as the ultimate locus of power and prestige. For ambitious politicians, seats in parliament might be little more than a stepping stone on the way to the ultimate reward, the take-over of ministerial posts. The literature is divided regarding the merits and perils of government participation for new political parties as organizations: for some parties the access to government had destabilizing or disintegrating effects, on others, strengthening effects (e.g. Deschouwer 2008; Bale and Dunphy 2011; de Lange and Art 2011; Bolleyer et al 2012). Yet starting out from a Downsian conception, what matters is how members of the party elite respond to government access because such access constitutes a major reward (Müller and Strøm 1999). Once occupying ministries in national governments or powerful regional governments, office-

holders can be assumed to be highly motivated to sustain their party's core activities to assure re-entry into government, efforts which should make party death less likely.[7]

This leads us to two further hypotheses on the risk of party death derived from the Downsian perspective:

H1.2 (*Seat Share Hypothesis*): Parties with a higher seat share are less likely to die than parties with lower seat shares.

H1.3 (*Government Access Hypothesis*)*:* Parties with government access are less likely to die than parties without.

The Sociological Rationale of Party Death - Hypotheses

If parties are formed as societal organizations to represent and give voice to issues or groups within society as well as the institutional arena, two characteristics in a party's origin can be expected to be relevant for the risk of party death. First, it is important whether the new formation is supported by a promoter organization already established in civil society in pursuit of a collective goal which the newly formed party carries into the electoral arena. The second formative feature of relevance is whether a party has an ideologically novel profile. Both these formative characteristics are likely to decrease the risk of death as the motivations of their founders are more likely to be 'ideological' or 'altruistic societal' (Krouwel and Lucardie 2008: 283; Spoon 2011: 27-28), motivations that suggest a commitment to long-term policy goals as opposed to an orientation towards short-term rewards.

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[7] While office-holders face the strongest and most immediate incentives towards sustaining their party following a Downsian perspective, ambitious office-aspirants can also be expected to invest more time and effort in building their career in a party that is able to win significant seats shares and to enter government than in a party that performs well on neither dimension.

Regardless of whether their cause is fascist, religious or environmental, promoter organizations provide access to a pool of committed activists able to fill positions in the new party (e.g. Rose and Mackie 1988; Poguntke 2002; Art 2011). They decrease a party's dependence on a particular leader or core elite, while party elites affiliated to promoter organizations (which tend to represent broader collective interests that require political representation in the longer run) are less likely to build an organization for the sole purpose of advancing their careers. Both aspects make it more likely for the organization to outlive the same elites. Simultaneously, followers are less likely to defect if their individual interests clash with organizational demands, as affiliations to already established promoter groups function as a first 'natural pre-selection mechanism' for an organization that initially has very little capacity to identify and weed out opportunists (Art 2011).

A novel ideological profile is another beneficial 'formative feature' we expect to decrease the risk of death. Ideological novelty (being a party introducing a new set of issues or a new ideology formerly unrepresented by other parties) helps new parties not only to mobilize initial support but also to cultivate lasting (non-instrumental) loyalties among their followers (e.g. Lucardie 2000; Abedi 2004; Meguid 2007; Spoon 2011; Lowery et al 2013). Adams et al. (2007: 514-15; 525) have more specifically shown that niche parties – usually characterized by novelty - respond less to shifts in public opinion. This should help them to maintain the ownership of core issues by making it more difficult for competitors to highjack their issues, which, in turn, makes it more likely for novel new parties to occupy a separate niche in their party system in the longer term (Meguid 2007; Spoon 2011).

This leads us to two hypotheses on *formative* party characteristics closely aligned with the sociological conception of parties expected to shape the likelihood of party death in the long run:

H2.1 (*Societal Roots Hypothesis*)*:* Parties formed with the support of pre-existing societal organizations are less likely to die than parties without.

H2.2 (*Novel Formation Hypothesis*): Parties formed with a novel ideological profile are less likely to die than parties without.

Irrespective of whether new parties are novel *formations*, whether a party (old or new) can engage in representative activity meaningful to its members and supporters in the long term is likely to depend on whether it is confronted with the emergence of a credible competitor from the same party family (Ladrech 2012: 17-18). If a party's main purpose is indeed to represent societal constituencies that need representation according to the sociological conception, the fact that the demands of this constituency are represented by another party should increase the risk of party death (rather than incentivizing the strategic adaptation of the party's representative profile suggested by the Downsian rationale).[8] While novel formations, by definition, do not have a credible competitor *at the time of their formation*, such a competitor (e.g. a second anti-immigrant party) might emerge within a few election cycles and thereby *weaken* its 'novelty advantage'. Vice versa, a new liberal party does not possess a novelty advantage as it represents an old ideology, but it still can profit from a 'distinctiveness advantage' in periods in which no viable liberal party exists in its party system.

H2.3 *(Distinctiveness Advantage Hypothesis)*: Parties that do not face a competitor party belonging to the same party family, hence, are ideologically distinct, are less likely to die than parties that are not.

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[8] This rationale is very different from Downsian spatial theory in which policy is a means to the end of maximizing votes and parties are expected to adapt their policy position when facing competitors to differentiate themselves. Starting from the sociological conception, this leeway to change a party's 'policy offer' is much more restricted assuming a party's accountability to a societal constituency whose interests it represents than in the Downsian conception.

Definition of New Parties and Empirical Scope of the Analysis

We define new parties by referring to their *organizational age*. Organizationally new parties still need to build a viable, self-sufficient infrastructure consolidated by a (relatively) stable support base, which makes these parties more vulnerable than, and thus distinct from, the group of established or 'organizationally mature' parties (e.g. Mair 1990). Parties are newly created if they are built from scratch ('newly born'), i.e. formed without the help of members of existing parties (Hug 2001: 13), through mergers in which newly born parties participate and splits from old parties[9], i.e. parties that faced or still face the challenge to build a viable infrastructure. Mergers between old parties and successor parties– being able to rely on more extensive infrastructures and resources – are excluded.[10]

Following Bolleyer and Bytzek (2013), we identified new formations meeting these criteria from 1968 onwards as party systems in long-lived democracies were considered "frozen", hence 'stable', up to the 1960s. However, citizens' party affiliations underpinning these party systems started to de-align in the latter period of that decade (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Consequently, all parties covered faced a growing challenge to stabilize support in an era of mass media communications as well as high levels of citizen disengagement from traditional forms of political participation.

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[9] Building on earlier work, a split (or a fission) is operationalized as parties formed with the help of actors who defected from existing parties (Mair 1990: 132; Hug 2001: 13; Ibenskas 2018). These defectors can form part of the party elite or the rank-and-file. Importantly, as compared to the 'mother party', they take only the minority of the overall resources inside and outside public office with them.

[10] See for a discussion of the full spectrum of newness from 'newly born' to successor party (Beyens et al 2017).

Meanwhile, to assure unit homogeneity, we deliberately focus on organizationally new parties that - *from their organizational birth until their (potential) death - operated in already fully consolidated party systems* (a situation that is substantially different if the majority of rivalling parties are organizationally new as well) (Meguid 2007). Simultaneously, the countries included are all established democracies with long electoral histories that allowed us to assess full party life cycles some of which lasted several decades before their eventual death. Following this rationale, we cover parties in 17 countries in Western Europe, North America and Australasia[11], all of which were fully consolidated by 1968, the earliest possible 'year of birth' in our party sample.

The dataset includes all new parties that won a seat in national parliament in these 17 countries between 1968-2011 at least once in their lifetime irrespective of vote share and ideological profile, whose vote shares varied between 0 and 37.7%. As parliamentary thresholds differ across countries, we complemented these by all new parties that did not win a seat but a minimum of 2% of the national vote at least once in their 'life', increasing inclusiveness in high threshold countries such as Germany or France. This strategy provided us with a highly inclusive sample of 144 parties essential to test factors influencing the risk of party death.[12]

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[11] These are the Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

[12] The average vote share across all national elections parties participated in was 3.6%. The Appendix, Section 2, provides information on the number of parties per country and the distribution of vote share across parties for each country in the sample.

Operationalization of Variables

Measurement of Dependent Variable

The dependent variable measures the length of the party's life in years from its organizational foundation until its year of death or, if it is still active, up to 2011[13] drawing on a wide range of primary sources and secondary sources. In essence, death occurs when a party permanently stops nominating candidates for any elections (irrespective of tier) as a separate, autonomous organization.[14] In operational terms, such 'death' can occur through different processes. Predominantly it is linked to the formal dissolution of the party (through a membership meeting or a formal declaration of the leadership). Alternatively, parties can cease to run elections by withdrawing from the electoral arena to exclusively focus on societal activities or merging into other organizations.[15] Using these criteria, we find that 64 parties or 44 percent of the parties in our sample died during the period under consideration.[16] Figure 1 shows the timing of death for these parties.

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[13] In alternative analyses, we also measure the party's life from the year of the first parliamentary election in which it participates until its death. This does not affect the results reported below (see Appendix, Section 5).

[14] Thus, while for many parties the ceasing of national electoral participation and death coincide, this is not necessarily the case as parties that withdraw from national politics sometimes continue to run local or regional elections.

[15] Also note that temporary electoral alliances (e.g. Ibenskas 2016) do not qualify as death under our definition.

[16] Our sample shows the relevance of the conceptual distinction between organizational death and the lack of legislative representation: we record 23 parties that, after losing legislative representation, survived more than 5 years (i.e. a full legislative term). 11 of these parties were still functional in 2011. Additionally, there were 17 parties that never received seats in their lifespans but survived more than 5 years. 12 of these parties were alive in 2011.

Figure 1: The Distribution of Party Survival Times

About here

The distribution is quite diverse: some parties did not survive even a single year, one died after more than 39 years of continuous existence. The average lifespan is 13.0 years while the standard deviation is 8.4 years. In comparison, looking at the whole sample, we find that the average number of years that a party stays in the sample is 13.4, with the standard deviation of 9.9 years. The highest observed age is 42 years.

Measurement of Independent Variables

Starting with the variables associated with our *Downsian account of party death,* a new measure was constructed to capture the variable *insider formation* (*Insider Formation Hypothesis* 1.1). We coded each of our parties as 1 if a national parliamentarian (present or former) was involved in its formation and took on a formal role (often but not always its leadership) in the new party. To test the *Seat Share Hypothesis* (H1.2), we compiled data on the evolution of the number of national seats for the first house of parliament starting with the first national election a party nominated candidates for (earliest 1968) till the last one it participated in or, in case of still active parties, the last national election before 2011. We use the lagged *natural logarithm of party's seat share* reflecting the expectation that changes in seat share at lower values have a stronger impact on survival than those at higher values. Participation in national or regional g*overnment* (*Government Access Hypothesis* 1.3) is a dummy variable (values 0 and 1) and was coded for each year. Details on data sources for these and other explanatory variables are listed in the Appendix, Section 1.

Moving to the variables linked to our *sociological account of political party*, we distinguished between *new formations with and without societal roots* (*Societal Roots Hypothesis* 2.1) relying on the classification of 140 new parties provided by Bolleyer measuring whether a party's foundation was supported by one or several identifiable promoter organizations or groups or not (2013: 43-3, Table 2.2). Whether a party is an *ideologically novel formation* (*Novelty Hypothesis* 2.2) was measured in two steps. First, we identified which parties in our sample either belonged to the new Green or new right family, the only two genuinely new party families that – according to Mudde (2007) – established themselves across a wide range of established democracies. To capture whether these new right or Green parties brought something novel and distinct to their party systems (and thus were likely to take ownership of these issues in the longer term), we only coded those of them as *ideologically novel formations* (1) if they were the first party of that family – in terms of their year of formation - that entered their respective party system. All other parties were coded 0. This was suitable to measure ideological novelty since in numerous countries more than one new Green or new right party have emerged over the last four decades. Appendix 1 discusses the steps in the operationalization process in detail. To operationalize our *Distinctiveness Advantage Hypothesis* (Hypothesis 2.3), we examine whether any of the parties with at least 1 percent of the vote represented the same ideological family as any of the new parties in our sample in each previous national parliamentary election throughout the party's life cycle. If one or more such parties exist, we code the value of the variable indicating the presence of a competitor as 1. The absence of such a competitor is coded as 0. The variable varies in time following the emergence and/or decline of ideologically similar new competitors.

Control Variables

To assure the robustness of our findings we control for the following institutional variables earlier studies identified as relevant for new party performance. The first is the presence or absence of a powerful regional tier in the political system, giving parties another arena to operate, gain visibility and access resources on (e.g. Deschouwer 2003; Spoon 2011; Cyr 2016; Obert and Müller 2017). To measure the strength of a political system's regional tier we use the Regional Authority Index (RAI) provided by Hooghe et al (2015). The RAI captures the authority of regional governments in ten different areas on an annual basis for the period between 1950 and 2010. We include the values of this index lagged by one year to account for the time that it takes for any changes in regional authority to influence party survival and death. Second, we control for a party's access to direct state funding important to maintain basic party functions (e.g. Bakke and Sitter 2015; Casal Bértoa and Spirova 2017). We construct a time-variant variable measuring each party's access to funding in each electoral cycle that it participated in during its lifespan. The variable takes the value of 1 if the party won sufficient votes or seats to obtain state funding (organizational or electoral) made available by the party finance regime in place in the respective electoral cycle and a score of 0 otherwise. Finally, electoral system disproportionality may also affect parties' survival influencing the translation of votes into seats. We use the average district magnitude of the lower tier of the electoral system to measure electoral thresholds. Bormann and Golder (2013) is the source of this data. While alternative measures of national electoral thresholds have been proposed (Gallagher and Mitchell 2005), there is little research on their properties and suitability as measures of electoral systems. We therefore follow recent studies on new parties (e.g. Tavits 2006; Biezen and Rashkova 2013) and more general studies on the effects of electoral systems (e.g. Carey and Hix 2011) by using the average district magnitude for capturing potential effects of electoral systems.

The Appendix (Section 2) presents the descriptive statistics of all variables used in the analysis and the correlation between three time-invariant variables (societal rootedness, initial ideological novelty and insider formation).

Empirical Analysis

Model Choice

We use the proportional hazard model developed by Cox (1992) to estimate the impact of the variables discussed above on the probability of the death of parties. We choose the Cox model for the analysis as it does not assume a specific probability distribution for the time until an event occurs (Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn 2001). To control for any country specific effects, we use robust standard errors clustered by country.

A key assumption of the Cox model is that of 'proportional hazards', which implies that the ratio of hazards is constant over time. This is not to say that the risk of an event is constant, but rather that hazards are proportional over time. We tested this assumption using the Schoenfeld residuals PH test, which is a common test of the assumption of non-proportionality. Following a standard practice when using the Cox model, statistical models include the interaction between a covariate and the natural logarithm of time if the statistical test (we use the 0.05 level of significance) indicates that the effect of this covariate is not time-constant.

We explain the choice of the model and its interpretation in greater detail in the Appendix, Section 3.

Findings

Table 2 summarizes the results of the Cox regression models of party death. The first two models test the variables associated with each of our two theoretical conceptions separately. Model 3 includes variables for both perspectives. Control variables are included in all three models. Table 3 presents the substantive effects of the covariate variables. For the covariates whose significant effects are not time-constant, Table 3 shows the first differences (i.e. the percentage change in the hazard rate at the specific point in a party's life related to the change in the values of the predictor variable) when party age is one standard deviation below the mean (3.5 years), at the mean value (13.5 years) and one standard deviation above the mean value (23.5 years) (see Appendix, Section 7, for the plots of the first differences across the whole range of party age).

Our findings indicate the relevance of factors derived from both conceptions of political parties. Starting with the effects of factors forming part of the Downsian conception of party death, there is support for the notion that party formations involving parliamentarians are more likely to die, in line with our *Insider Formation Hypothesis* (1.1). Although the coefficient of this variable is negative, the interaction effect with time is statistically significant (Model 3). For very young parties (6 years or less, with 30 percent of observations falling in this range), insider status decreases the chances of party death. However, for parties that are 12 years or older (half of the observations in the sample have these values of party age), being an insider formation increases the chances of death. The effect is also substantively strong: as Table 3 shows, when the age of a party is 23.5 years (which represents the mean value plus one standard deviation), the hazard rate of death increases by more than 500 percent for insider parties compared to others. While we expected this variable to have a time-invariant effect, these findings nevertheless are in line with our theoretical

logic. As the insider parties are formed by parliamentarians to promote their office ambitions, they are unlikely to be dissolved in their early years of life whilst their founders are still active. However, once the founders retire, these parties often struggle with a leadership vacuum as the former often display little interest in recruiting and promoting candidates suitable for leadership who would be able to challenge their position.

Table 2: Cox PH Models of Party Death

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Downsian Account			
Insider Formation	-1.76**		-3.58**
	(0.67)		(0.78)
Insider Formation * ln (years)	1.16**		1.69**
	(0.29)		(0.31)
Ln (Party Seat Share)	-0.34**		-0.29*
	(0.14)		(0.17)
Government Access	-1.04		-1.13*
	(0.69)		(0.66)
Sociological Account			
Rooted Formation		-0.97**	-2.57
		(0.25)	(1.59)
Rooted Formation* ln (years)			0.69
			(0.60)
Ideologically Novel Formation		-1.00**	-0.90**
		(0.33)	(0.36)
Distinctiveness Advantage		-0.26	-0.26
		(0.34)	(0.35)
Control Variables			
Strength Regional Tier		-0.15**	-0.20*
		(0.06)	(0.08)
Strength Regional Tier * ln (years)		0.05**	0.07**
		(0.02)	(0.03)
Party Funding Access	3.21**	1.53**	2.74**
	(0.95)	(0.75)	(0.78)
Party Funding Access * ln (years)	-1.60**	-0.88**	-1.33**
	(0.38)	(0.33)	(0.37)
Ln (Electoral Threshold)	-0.60**	0.23**	-0.85**
	(0.18)	(0.07)	(0.17)
Ln (Electoral Threshold) * ln (years)	0.36**		0.45**
	(0.07)		(0.07)
AIC	524	519	499
Number of parties	144	144	144
Number of events	64	64	64
Number of observations	2638	2638	2638

Regression coefficients of the Cox PH model. Robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses.
** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

National seat share has a negative effect on the chances of death in line with our *Seat Share Hypothesis* (1.2). Parties with higher seat shares – providing a core payoff for ambitious elites - are less likely to die (although the variable is significant at the 0.1 level of statistical significance). The effect is important substantively: based on Model 3, the change in the

values of this variable (logged seat share) from one standard deviation below the mean (representing no seats) to one standard deviation above the mean (equivalent to 4.4 percent of seats) decreases the hazard rate of party death by 38 percent.

Table 3: Effects of Predictor Variables on Party Death

	Account	Non-time-dependent effects		
Ln (Party Seat Share)	(Downsian)	-38 (-66; 3)		
Government Access	(Downsian)	-62 (-91; 17)		
Ideologically Novel Formation	(Sociolog.)	-58 (-79; -19)		
	Account	**Time-dependent effects**		
		Values of party age		
		Mean – 1 SD (3.5 yr)	Mean (13.5 yr)	Mean + 1 SD (23.5 yr)
Insider Formation	(Downsian)	-75 (-91; -45)	138 (15; 333)	519 (162; 1168)
Rooted Formation	(Sociolog.)	-75 (-97; -3)	-54 (-72; -29)	-30 (-71; 40)
Strength of Regional Tier	-	-86 (-98; -34)	-34 (-74; 48)	35 (-48; 202)
Party Funding Access	-	208 (47; 517)	-49 (-73; -4)	-74 (-91; -38)
Ln (Electoral Threshold)	-	-57 (-76; -29)	152 (70; 255)	431 (199; 740)

Note: First differences in the hazard rate of party death for different values of party age, simulated using simPH (Gandrud 2015) package in the statistical environment R based on the estimates of Model 3 in Table 2. 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. The values of the continuous predictor variables are changed from one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean.

In line with our *Government Access Hypothesis* (1.3), the coefficient of the government access variable is negative and significant at the 0.1 level of statistical significance (Model 3). Parties in government at the national and/or regional level are 62 percent less likely to die than those without presence in government. Thus, despite the moderately high correlation (0.26) between the variables measuring legislative seat share and government access, our model uncovers distinct effects of both variables. It therefore suggests that the elites of new parties value executive office beyond the privileges that they receive as national MPs.

Two factors associated with the *sociological account of party death* are substantively and statistically significant in the theoretically expected direction. First, as suggested in our *Societal Roots Hypothesis* (2.1), parties formed with the support of promoter organizations have much stronger chances of survival according to Model 2. Model 3 (and the first differences plot, see Figure 3 in Appendix 7) indicate that the effect of this variable is not time-constant. Specifically, *party formations with societal roots* have a lower risk of dying when the age of a party is between 3 and 18 years (60 percent of the sample has these values of party age) (see Appendix, Section 7, for the plots of the first differences). The effect is substantively strong: when the party is 13.5 years old (the mean value of party age), the risk of death is 54 percent lower than for parties being formed without the support of pre-existing groups. This finding echoes classical work stressing the importance of party ties to mobilized societal groups representing specific interests (e.g. Duverger 1959; Panebianco 1988; Rose and Mackie 1988). That societal roots are particularly advantageous in earlier phases of new parties' life cycles makes sense as the formation of an organization and the building of loyalties are resource-intense and time-consuming. In earlier phases, rooted parties have advantages to achieve this as compared to organizations formed without external support. Over time, the latter formations have the chance to 'catch up' building a resilient organization through accessing other resources, which means that the difference between rooted formation and those without societal backup loses relevance for their risk of death in later stages of new party evolution.

Second, the *Ideological Novelty Hypothesis* (2.2) is also supported. Specifically, based on Model 3, the risk of death for such parties is 58 percent lower than that for the other parties. This finding is in line with a wide range of earlier empirical studies stressing the importance of ideology for new parties to carve out their own, separate niche to survive as organizations (Spoon 2011; Lowery et al 2013). However, unlike these previous studies, we suggest that

ideological novelty helps parties to survive by mobilising their members and core supporters rather than assuring them with electoral support. Indeed, the ideological novelty hypothesis is supported in Model 3 while controlling for the variables capturing a party's parliamentary seat share and access to government. Although the latter variable affects the chances of a party's survival, among the parties with few or no legislative seats, ideologically novel parties are more likely to survive due to the commitment of ideologically motivated activists. Interestingly, unlike the advantages enjoyed by rooted formations or the disadvantages associated with insider formations, the positive effect of novelty does not diminish over time.

In contrast, the emergence of competitor parties that represent the same party family as the new party does not increase the probability of its death. Our *Distinctiveness Advantage Hypothesis* (2.3) does not find support (this null result holds when using several alternative measures of ideological proximity, as explained in Section 6 of the Appendix). This indicates that being the only credible representative of a particular ideology does not help a party to survive.

Our controls capturing regional, party funding and electoral institutions on party death are significant, which underscore the robustness of our main findings. First, echoing earlier work (Deschouwer 2003), new parties are more likely to survive in institutional settings with a strong regional tier, but this variable is important only for the parties that are 8 years or younger. Second, the effect of the access to party funding is also time-dependent, although largely in line with what earlier work would lead us to expect. Interestingly, in comparison to the parties that received no state funding, parties entitled to state funding are more likely to die when they are young (up to 5 years) but less likely to die when they are 12 years or older. The positive effect of this variable may be a consequence of the infighting between core actors in very immature parties due to the access to state funding. The negative effect,

however, is substantively more important and stresses the importance of financial resources for parties' long-term maintenance (e.g. Casal Bértoa and Spirova 2017). Finally, a higher district magnitude (i.e. a more permissive electoral system with lower electoral thresholds) decreases the probability of the death of young parties (5 years or less) but makes the death of older parties (8 years or more) more likely. In the early years of a party's existence, more proportional electoral institutions tend to decrease the chances of death as the translation of votes into seats is more favourable. Yet once a party grows older in such permissive systems, it has to compete with a higher number of parties, making it less likely that it can stabilize its support in the long run.

Discussion

Why do some political parties that emerge in advanced democracies fade away by ceasing to nominate candidates in elections while others manage to survive? To address this question, we developed two contrasting sets of hypotheses on party death derived from two prominent conceptions of political parties, which allows us to provide an encompassing perspective on this important phenomenon. According to the Downsian conception, political parties are vehicles for career-oriented politicians who seek to maximise their legislative and executive office. The failure of the party to provide these benefits leads to its demise as the rationale of core actors in the party to sustain it disappears. The sociological conception views parties as societal organizations that serve representational functions valued in themselves by their members and supporters. The party is therefore more likely to survive if it was formed by a promoter organization or represented a distinct ideological position, both at the time of its foundation and in the later years of its existence.

We examined our hypotheses applying survival analysis to a new dataset covering 144 new parties in 17 democracies. As to be expected, some arguments derived from either conception hold, although we find somewhat stronger evidence for the Downsian perspective. Specifically, in line with this approach, our empirical analysis suggests that insider parties (i.e. parties formed by parliamentarians) are less likely, while parties with a higher share of legislative seats and access to government office are more likely to survive. The two formative characteristics of the party associated with the sociological perspective – support by a societal promoter organisation and ideological novelty – also increased the chances of party survival. Finally, controls capturing federal, party funding and electoral institutions influenced party death and survival indicating the robustness of our findings.

Through the careful theoretical and empirical analysis of party political death, we contribute to a key debate in the party politics literature: the nature of political parties. The dominant view of political parties as coalitions of office-seekers has been recently challenged or complemented by the arguments that see parties as first and foremost representatives of social groups or ideologies (Hanson 2010; Mudge and Chen 2014). The systematic examination of the drivers of the death of new parties as organisations (as opposed to their electoral performance) over more than four decades provides a unique window to address this question. Our analysis strengthens the case for a more balanced understanding of parties by showing that societal and ideological roots of parties matter for their survival even when controlling for their electoral success and access to governmental office.

Our results also emphasise an interesting dynamic regarding the effect of the variables that capture parties' characteristics related to their formation as opposed to those that capture their ability to achieve their central goals later in their life. In line with classical arguments stressing the importance of the 'genetic imprint' that formative features leave on an

organization in the long term (Panebianco 1988), we find that societal rootedness, ideological novelty and insider status all have a strong effect on party survival. Thus, the length of parties' survival can be predicted to large extent at the time of their formation. Parties that are formed by parliamentarians without the support of a promoter organisation and novel ideological profile are unlikely to survive more than several electoral terms unless they achieve consistent electoral success and access to government. In contrast, parties with strong societal and ideological roots are likely to survive for relatively long periods of time even without having access to legislative and executive office.

While for methodological reasons we tested our theoretical framework using a sample of new parties in established party systems, it is also useful for understanding the survival and death of parties not included in our empirical analysis. Both theoretical accounts developed here explain why, despite substantial electoral change in established democracies, the death of older parties (those established prior to the 1960s) embedded in established party systems has been a rare occurrence. From the Downsian perspective, the overwhelming survival of these parties can be explained by the fact that they retain substantial legislative representation, often participate in government and only in few cases were formed by parliamentarians. From the sociological perspective, these parties often started their existence as expressions of various societal interests and were also the sole representatives of their respective ideologies. Even if some of them have been reduced to minor legislative parties in the wake of recent economic crises, the sociological perspective suggests that their organizational survival is highly likely.

Finally, with some adaptations, our framework can be made useful for understanding party survival and death in countries with less stable party systems such as in Central and Eastern Europe. While the literature has made important advances in explaining the electoral

persistence of parties there (Grzymala-Busse 2006; Tavits 2013), research on the organizational survival and death of parties has been less prominent (but see Bakke and Sitter 2015; Casal Bértoa and Spirova 2017; Obert and Müller 2017). In line with our Downsian account, Obert and Müller (2017) find that legislative representation reduces the chances of party death, so does access to state funding. However, there is less theoretical and empirical research on the factors related to the sociological account, which could provide new insights into the 'fleeting parties' phenomenon observed in many younger democracies (Spirova 2007; Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2015). While many of these parties lack clear ideologies (Sikk 2011), anecdotal evidence suggests that those parties that have strong ties with societal organisations (e.g. many ethnic parties) or have presented a novel ideological profile (e.g. Green parties in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Lithuania) are less likely to die.

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