New Challenger Parties in Opposition: Isolation or Cooperation?

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The context of European parties has been through a process of significant transformation in recent years, with the fall of traditional mainstream parties and the rise of challenger parties. Despite their significant differences, mainly at the ideological level, we argue that challenger parties share some common characteristics when they first enter parliament. Namely, we expect them to employ a similar strategy as regards their relationship with the other party actors and to attempt to send the same message to their electorate: that they represent the alternative to existing parties, be it in government or in opposition, and will behave accordingly in parliament. We test our expectations by analysing and comparing the cooperation attitudes of challenger parties vis-à-vis the other opposition parties, using legislative co-sponsorship during their first term in parliament as an indicator and Social Network Analysis as a method.

Keywords: Challenger Parties, Parliament, Opposition, Cooperation, Legislative Initiative, Social Network Analysis

1. Introduction

The context of European parties has been through a process of significant transformation in recent years. The most visible changes in many European countries are the fall of traditional mainstream parties and the rise of challenger parties. The many examples of increasing support for the latter include the success of both new anti-establishment parties and older radical right parties. In fact, the category of challenger parties encompasses very different actors, ranging from new politics (or niche) parties to extreme right or ethno-regionalist parties (Hino, 2012). While some of these were already present in the European party context prior to the crisis, others only appeared later (De Giorgi and Dias, 2018).

Despite their significant differences, mainly at the ideological level, we argue that challenger parties share some common characteristics when they first enter parliament, notably in terms of the behaviour they adopt at this time. Indeed, we not only expect challenger parties to employ a very similar strategy when they make their entrance in parliament as regards their relationship with the other party actors, but also to attempt to send the same message to their respective electorate: that they represent the alternative to existing parties, be it in government or in opposition, and will behave accordingly in parliament. Following De Vries and Hobolt (2012), this study distinguishes between mainstream government parties, mainstream opposition parties and challenger parties and proposes a new dimension for the analysis and identification of the latter, more specifically, their relationship with the other opposition parties or, in other words, their level of isolation in parliament.

We test our expectations by analysing and comparing the cooperation attitudes of a number of challenger parties—some of which made their appearance before the recent Eurozone crisis, and others during or after that—vis-à-vis the other opposition parties, using the amount of legislative co-sponsorship during their first term in parliament as an indicator. Since we are interested in a relational dimension, that is, the relationship between the new challenger parties and the other opposition parties in parliament, we mainly employ social network analysis (SNA) methods.

The article is therefore divided into four sections: the first one introduces the theoretical framework and our main expectations; the second presents our selected cases; the third and fourth sections, respectively, illustrate our data and methods and analyse the obtained results.

2. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

As noted above, we distinguish between three types of political party: challenger parties, mainstream opposition parties and mainstream government parties (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012). Mainstream parties compete for power, having what we call a government vocation, and regularly alternate between government and opposition. Challenger parties, on the other hand, have not previously held political office (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012, p. 251) and thus cease to be defined as challenger parties if they enter government; moreover, they are often, but not always, found at the extremes of the political spectrum (Hobolt and Tilley, 2016). These parties have recently managed to successfully attract disaffected voters by offering them 'a clear alternative narrative to the mainstream consensus' (2016, p. 975). Academic literature has devoted much attention to these (new) actors, and has taken different perspectives. Scholars have examined their ideology, communication strategy, organisational profile and charismatic leadership and tried to

explore the reasons behind their remarkable success (Akkerman et al., 2014; Kriesi and Pappas, 2015; Hobolt and Tilley, 2016; Vidal, 2018). Nonetheless, as yet little is known about the behaviour of these parties once they get into parliament,[1] the main purpose of this article is to start filling this gap.

Challenger parties always sit on the opposition benches when they first enter parliament. However, they may follow varying paths after their first legislature: while some challenger parties remain in the opposition, various factors may result in others entering government or deciding to give external support to the executive (Minkenberg, 2013; Akkerman et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this work focuses on their first legislature in parliament on the opposition benches, and the process of adaptation to their new institutional role and socialisation in the new arena.

How do challenger parties behave once they cross the institutional threshold? Is their behaviour significantly different from that of the other opposition parties? Do they tend to remain isolated or do they start some kind of socialisation process—such as increasing collaboration with some of the other opposition forces? Can we identify any cross-country patterns related to new challenger parties?

To answer these questions, we propose a new dimension of analysis, more specifically, their relationship vis-à-vis the other opposition parties. In fact, we expect that, on entering parliament for the first time, these parties are not only aiming for a government position and to take advantage of the opposition position, but they also have one further goal: to set themselves apart from the other opposition parties. The latter, in fact, is the main reason of their electoral success and, in the end, their essential characteristic. Hence, we expect them to keep their distance from and not cooperate with either the temporary or the permanent opposition parties, notably in terms of action in parliament and its link (or not) with the action of the other parties.

We measure the challenger parties' distance from the other opposition parties and its possible evolution over time by employing the SNA techniques on the co-sponsorship of bills. Many studies, mainly focused on the USA, have shown that co-sponsorship is related to ideological proximity (Aléman et al., 2009), but it is also an opportunity for representatives to signal to other political actors (Wilson and Young, 1997). We therefore expect the MPs of new challenger parties to collaborate very rarely with the other opposition parties, thus signalling their difference. Former research has shown that in parliamentary systems with unified parties, co-sponsorship is mainly driven by specialisation: MPs introduce resolutions and amendments jointly with those who work on similar topics (Louwerse and Otjes, 2015). This can be a further reason for the isolation of the new challenger Parliamentary Party Groups (PPGs) who have no previous experience and

[1]With some exceptions, of course, such as Albertazzi and McDonnell (2005) or Pinto and Pedrazzani (2015).

are not well known by the other PPG members; their recent entry in parliament and lack of experience are precisely what makes them stand out from the mainstream parties. Of course, the other parties also matter in the possible socialisation process of the new challengers and the way mainstream (government and opposition) parties react to their presence in parliament is equally important (Van de Wardt, 2015): in fact, parties seldom collaborate with the new challengers even when there is ideological proximity.

For all these reasons, we expect that, during their first legislative term in parliament, new challenger parties remain much more isolated from the other (opposition) parties than their more experienced colleagues in opposition. We test our expectations by analysing the six new challenger parties introduced in the section below, each from a different Western or Eastern Europe country.

3. Our case selection

We focus on the following six party cases: the Italian Five Star Movement (*Movimento 5 Stelle*, M5S), the Dutch Party of Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV), the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*, SD), the Czech Dawn of Direct Democracy (*Úsvit přímé demokracie*), the Hungarian Jobbik—Movement for a Better Hungary (*Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom*) and the Slovakian Kotleba—People's Party Our Slovakia (*Kotleba—Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko*, ĽSNS), which entered parliament before, during or after the Eurozone crisis. This selection (Table 1) is not only aimed to provide a wide representation of different European countries but also to test whether the category of new challenger parties was already applicable, with the common traits we expect to find, before the political and economic crisis that hit Europe from 2008 onwards, as opposed to a product of this crisis.

Starting with the Italian case, the 2013 Italian general election saw the fall of both the centre left and the centre right mainstream parties and the emergence of a new strong challenger, namely the Five Star Movement (*Movimento Cinque*

Table 1 Our case selection

Country	Party	Term
Czech Republic	Dawn of Direct Democracy	2013–2017
Hungary	Jobbik	2010–2014
Italy	Five Star Movement	2013–2018
Netherlands	Party of Freedom	2006–2010
Slovakia	Kotleba	2016–2020
Sweden	Sweden Democrats	2010–2014

Stelle, M5S). The new tripolar competition was consolidated in 2018, but the balance of power among the three political poles changed radically, with the M5S gaining over seven percentage points vis-à-vis the previous election and becoming the biggest party in parliament (Chiaramonte et al., 2018). After a long phase of negotiations, M5S and the right wing League (*Lega*) appointed the first cabinet in Western Europe that did not include any mainstream party family (Paparo, 2018).

Immediately after their entry into the parliamentary arena, in 2013, the M5S MPs were quick to reveal their non-involvement in the old party dynamics, refusing to consider any post-electoral alliance to overcome the political paralysis that had hit parliament (and the country) following the electoral results. The M5S wanted to clearly show the electorate the image of a bottom-up movement that was close to the citizens and far from the traditional party logics. The new MPs therefore appeared in the parliamentary arena as a 'new opposition': an opposition that is alternative to all political forces—whether from the left or the right, from the majority or the opposition—, with a strong will to conquer the majority of seats and the government in the near future (De Giorgi, 2016).

Although other Italian parties had made recourse to anti-establishment rhetoric in the past, the M5S took the critique of corrupted party elites to a whole new level. The Movement and, above all, its founders were able to transform the widespread feelings of insecurity and discomfort in different fields—economic, cultural, etc. but all attributable to the effects of globalisation—into consensus (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2017).

The Dutch Party of Freedom was founded in 2006, that is, before the onset of the Eurozone crisis, by Geert Wilders, an independent MP who left the centre right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy in 2004 after his disappointment with its moderate nationalist approach and favourable position on Turkey's accession to the EU (Van Kessel, 2015; Akkerman, 2016). Wilders developed radical anti-immigration ideas with a strong focus on Islam as a totalitarian, immutable ideology aimed at undermining the Western world (Vossen, 2017), along with the other typical issues of radical right parties such as law and order, aversion to the political elites and European Integration, nationalism (see Akkerman, 2016; Vossen, 2017).

The PVV gained 5.7% of the votes in its first elections in 2006, securing nine seats in the House of Representatives. Although the opposition strategy of its MPs in parliament was less cooperative than that of other opposition parties in this period, it still supported themajority of government legislative proposals in line with the Dutch tradition of consensual democracy (Otjes et al., 2018). The PVV barely made use of the legislative powers of the House of Representatives during this term with the party's representatives instead preferring to use checking powers such as tabling questions to the House, applying for emergency debates or interpellation and submitting motions to ensure publicity and media

attention, thus creating the impression of strong commitment and activism (Vossen, 2017).

The 2010 elections led to an important change as the PPV became the third largest party in parliament with 15.5% of votes. It became a support party of the minority coalition government of Liberal and Christian Democrats in exchange for the implementation of some of its key policies (Van Kessel, 2015). The party's new position also meant greater cooperation and efforts to compromise with other parties in parliament (Akkerman, 2016). But, the deal was short-lived as the government fell in April 2012 when PVV refused to support the government's planned austerity measures in response to the economic crisis. Following this, PVV reverted to the strategy of a radical programmatic course and opposition in parliament (Akkerman, 2016).

The Sweden Democrats is commonly considered part of the family of populist radical right parties (Jungar, 2016; Rydgren and van der Meiden, 2019). It was formed in 1988 with the merger of three nationalist parties and organisations representing the neo-populist nationalist and anti-immigration mobilisation of the 1980s (Jungar, 2016) and linked to neo-fascist and neo-Nazi subcultures. These historical roots prevented the party from gaining legitimate status and wider electoral support for a long time. However, since the mid-nineties, the party's radical attitudes have gradually mitigated and it started denying the association with neo-Nazi movements and distancing from its origin. The transformation of the party was completed when Jimmie Åkesson became the party leader in 2005.

The process of party de-radicalisation together with the investment in its organisation bore fruit in 2010, when the SD entered parliament with 5.7% of the votes. Nonetheless, the party was completely isolated in the parliamentary arena and the public debate (Aylott and Bolin, 2015); the other party groups in parliament tried to ignore and boycott the SD to minimise its influence, thus effectively applying a firm *cordon sanitaire* (Bergmann, 2017). However, the strategy of political isolation did not prevent the SD's further growth. In the 2014 and 2018 elections, the party obtained 12.9% and 17.5% of the votes, respectively.

The Dawn of Direct Democracy is a Czech political movement, founded by the popular Czech-Japanese businessman Tomio Okamura in 2013. Okamura, a well-known entrepreneur in the travel industry, had entered politics in 2012, elected as an independent senator. He took advantage of his image as a self-made man, deplored the incompetence of politicians and offered simple solutions—in particular, citizens' direct participation in political decision-making (Hloušek and Kopeček, 2018). However, he quickly realised that his position in the Upper House of parliament had only very limited political influence and therefore tried to run for the presidential election. After his petition for the presidential candidature was rejected due to the lack of valid signatures, he decided to found a political party to run for the early election of the Lower House. The Dawn's election

campaign was based on the introduction of elements of direct democracy and complemented by anti-establishment appeals, promises to purify the political system, and harsh statements against foreigners and the Roma minority (Šárovec, 2018). This programme and the leader's popularity allowed the Dawn to gain 6.9% of the votes and 14 seats in parliament. Despite expressing its availability, the Dawn was not considered as a credible coalition partner by the largest Czech parties in parliament and ended up in opposition. Nevertheless, the party signalled a cooperative attitude towards the new government by not voting against it in a vote of confidence but when it tried to push through its programme on direct democracy with several legislative initiatives, it was given almost no support from the government coalition. Dawn's parliamentary party was not homogeneous and a lack of connections between the party and its MPs led to a crisis soon after the elections; the situation was exacerbated substantially both by Okamura's unwillingness to allow his own MPs to become formal party members or to build up permanent organisational party structures, as well as his opaque management of party funds (Hloušek and Kopeček, 2018). In 2015, Okamura had lost the support of five (out of nine) official party members so he left the Dawn and established a new party called Freedom and Direct Democracy.

The Hungarian Jobbik emerged from the transformation of a group called the Community of Right Wing Youth (*Jobboldali Ifjúsági Közösség*), which was founded in 1999 and was supposed to become a platform for exchanging ideas and consolidating groups with similar right wing and nationalistic views. Disappointed by the electoral defeat of the right wing parties and by their lack of a more radical approach, the Community established its own party in 2003 and called it Jobbik—the Movement for a Better Hungary. Jobbik is considered an extreme right party (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2013; Pirro and Róna, 2019): its ideology is strongly nationalistic, combining opposition to capitalism and liberalism with anti-Semitic and anti-Roma rhetoric (Krekó and Mayer, 2015).

The first attempt to enter the parliament in the 2006 election was not successful. Jobbik had decided to join an electoral coalition with other extreme right parties to increase its chances of winning seats, but this resulted in a disappointing 2.2% of votes and Jobbik's rapid withdrawal from the alliance after the election. From 2006, under the leadership of the new party chairman, Gábor Vona, Jobbik took advantage of the widespread discontent with the Hungarian socialist government, took part in violent protests and organised the para-military Hungarian Guard in response to the salient topic at the time of the Roma criminality. Thanks to a better structured party organisation and the extra-parliamentary youth mobilisation (see Pirro and Róna, 2019), Jobbik managed to win seats in both the European Parliament (2009) and the National Assembly (2010), with 16.7% of votes. As the winner party, Fidesz (another right wing force), was able to obtain the majority in parliament and Jobbik became an opposition party with

a limited influence on law-making (Böcskei and Molnár, 2019). Its extreme positions after the elections remained unchanged and it operated in parliament more or less alone without the support of other parties, but not in complete isolation. In fact, most of the governing party and the parliamentary procedures forced the other opposition parties to cooperate with Jobbik to some extent (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2013). However, Jobbik recalibrated its electoral strategy in its second term in parliament (2014–2018) and tried to moderate its image in an attempt to present itself as a 'people's party' (Pirro and Róna, 2019) and attract the protest votes against the government. This shift was also in response to the radicalisation of Fidesz, which sought to neutralise its extreme right rival by implementing some of its own campaign promises (Krekó and Mayer, 2015; Böcskei and Molnár, 2019) but the symbolic separation of the two parties was carefully maintained and Fidesz never supports Jobbik's initiatives in parliament (Enyedi and Róna, 2018). In the 2014 and 2018 elections, Jobbik obtained significant support (∼20% of votes) and is currently the second strongest party in Hungary, albeit still in opposition.

The Slovakian Kotleba was established in 2010 by the members of a small right-wing extremist civic association, Slovak Togetherness (ST), led by a young teacher, Marián Kotleba. Kotleba and his group founded their first political party in 2005 as ST-National Party, but it was quickly dissolved in 2006 by the Supreme Court because of programmatic statements advocating unequal treatment of national minorities and the aim of establishing a corporatist state, which the Court deemed to be unconstitutional. After the establishment of L'SNS, the party altered its previous discourse calling for the renaissance of the Slovak nation with the glorification and appreciation of the legacy of the wartime Slovak state and anti-establishment and anti-minority appeals—mostly targeting Gypsies as parasites. Despite the resonance of these appeals, the party remained marginal in the 2010 and 2012 parliamentary elections and was unable to assure any parliamentary representation. The breakthrough came with the regional elections in 2013, when Marián Kotleba was unexpectably elected as governor in one of Slovakia's self-governed regions. His victory in this election and the media coverage of his initial activities as governor led to an increase in the level of L'SNS popularity. With the eruption of the economic and refugee crisis, the L'SNS cast even more blame on the political elites and intensified its rhetoric against the EU, foreigners and immigrants (Kluknavská and Smolík, 2016). This approach proved successful and the party achieved 8% of the votes in the parliamentary elections in 2016. For the first time since the war, an extreme right party entered the Slovak parliament and other parliamentary parties had to address the question of how to respond to its presence. During its first term in parliament L'SNS continued to present its radical agenda and opposed all other parties. Similarly, all

parliamentary parties shared a negative attitude towards L'SNS and refused to co-operate with it in parliament.

4. Data and methods

Our empirical analysis focuses on legislation co-sponsorship and relies on multiple sources of data, including data already collected for four cases (Briatte, 2016; Louwerse et al., 2018) and fresh data collected specifically for the Slovakian and the Italian case (De Giorgi and Dias, 2018). For each challenger party (Table 1), we collected data on their first term in parliament and ran three different kinds of analysis. First, we employed a simple SNA representation to draw a graph showing the co-sponsorship network in each parliament. This simple exercise is helpful as it shows the parties' pattern of cooperation on the proposal of new bills. In our graphs, each node, or point, represents an MP, with each colour representing the party to which she/he belongs, and each line between nodes, edges, representing the co-sponsorship of a certain bill.

For an easier representation of the co-sponsorship patterns, we employed the Fruchterman and Reingold (1991) algorithm to distribute the different nodes across the graph (Figure 1). Using this algorithm, the position of each node is determined by its connections, similarly to that of recoil springs. If two MPs share a connection, they will are drawn closer to each other, while other MPs who do not share any connection with these two are drawn further away. By calculating all these relative positions and combining the results, these graphs can be read intuitively, putting nodes with connections more closely together while drawing those that do not further apart.

Although very informative, these graphs fail to present a clear and systematic point of reference which is required for a more precise comparison of the different parties. To do this, we created an index of *intra opposition party bill differentiation*. This index ranges from 0 to 1, with the highest value meaning that none of the bills sponsored by that party was co-sponsored by another party, and zero meaning that all the bills sponsored by that party were also co-sponsored by another party (Figure 2).

Finally, the statistical significance of this possible new challenger effect was ensured by employing an exponential random graph model (Hunter et al., 2008), based on a Poisson distribution (Krivitsky, 2012) for each parliament, in which the dependent variable was the number of bills co-sponsored by each possible pair of legislators (Table 2). Exponential-family random graph models are probabilistic network models that are parametrised by sufficient statistics based on structural (i.e., graph-theoretic) properties. This family of models has been extensively used to model social networks, including patterns of political cooperation in parliaments (Bratton and Rouse, 2011).

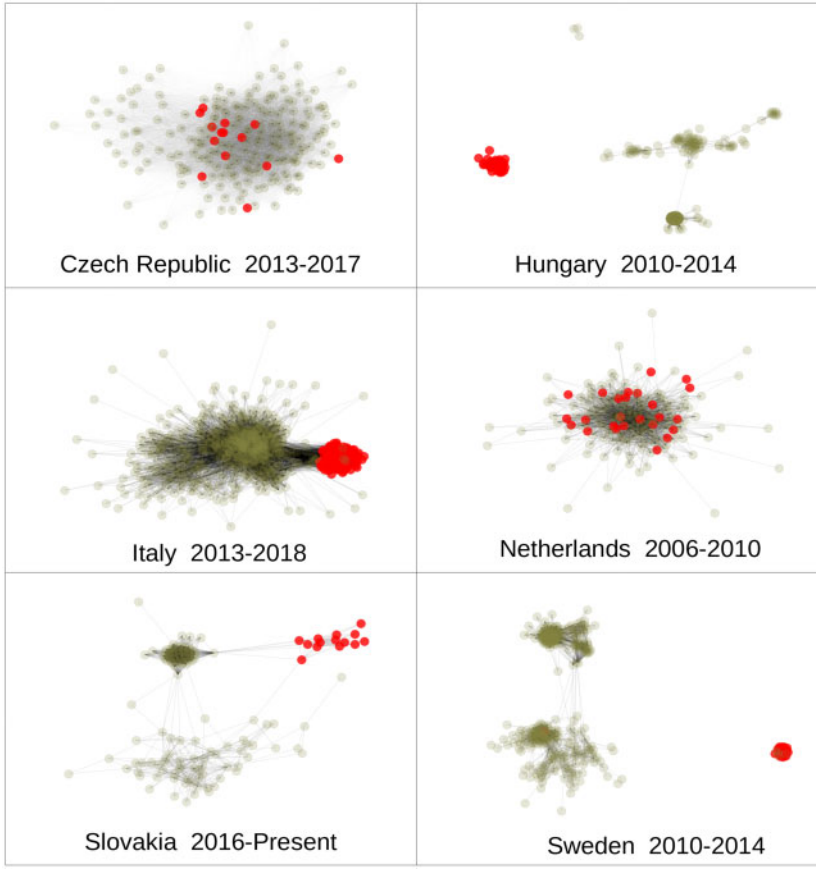

Figure 1. Social network plots in the parliaments under analysis (MPs—members of new challenger parties in red).

Our main independent variable differentiates between the possible pairs of legislators, namely those including only new challenger MPs, those comprising only non-new challenger MPs and those containing the combination of a new challenger MP and a non-new challenger MP. Two further variables were included to control for other factors that might also have an effect on co-sponsorship relations between MPs, namely one considering the case of both MPs belonging to the same party and one representing an absolute ideological difference between the two MPs' respective parties. This last variable was coded according to the Parlgov dataset (Döring and Mannow, 2012).[2]

[2]Note that to include this last variable when running the statistical models, independent MPs had to be removed from our analysis.

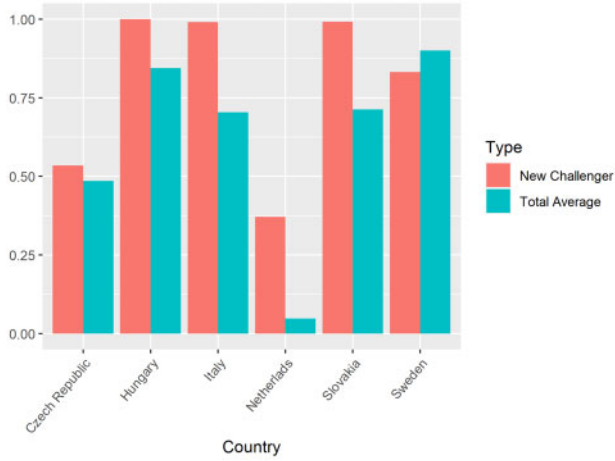

Figure 2. Intra-opposition party bill differentiation index for new challengers and average for all opposition parties, in their first term in parliament.

Table 2 Regression analysis

	Dependent variable:			
	Network			
	Czech Republic	**Italy**	**Netherlands**	**Slovakia**
Left–right difference	−0.266*	−0.457*	−0.093*	−0.301*
	(0.004)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.016)
Match party	0.405*	1.477*	−2.046*	1.959*
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.073)	(0.038)
New challenger: NO–NO	0.917*	−1.200*	−0.256*	−0.634*
	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.025)	(0.037)
New challenger: NO–YES	0.800*	−2.282*	−0.605*	−4.598*
	(0.019)	(0.035)	(0.050)	(0.361)
New challenger: YES–YES	2.137*	−0.097*	3.406*	−0.948*
	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.110)	(0.081)
Akaike Inf. Crit.	−13,345.910	−56,544.600	−7,359.116	−9,432.441
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	−13,306.070	−56,489.960	−7,321.020	−9,396.744

Note: *$p < 0.01$.

In all our cases, the parliamentary standing orders allow both an individual MP and a group of MPs (co-sponsors) to introduce a bill. There is no minimum or maximum number of sponsors required for a legislative proposal to be considered and co-sponsorship has no formal effect on the legislative process. In this respect, our cases work in the same way and can be compared. However, mention

should be made of some country-specific formal rules and practices that determine the prevailing origin of the introduced legislation and the MPs' activity patterns. In the first group of countries in our sample, MPs submit their own bills in relatively large numbers; the Czech Republic, Hungary,[3] Italy and Slovakia belong to this group. It should be noted that these can be either brand-new bills or proposals for amendments to existing laws because the creation of completely new and technically complex bills requires resources and expertise that MPs do not usually have. In the second group of countries, in which we find the Netherlands and Sweden, although it is uncommon for MPs to propose their own bills, they do introduce legislative amendments and motions; these are not proper legislative proposals, but requests to the government to start an investigation or introduce legislation on a certain topic (Louwerse and Otjes, 2015).

Finally, before proceeding with the analysis of our data, it is also worth noting some practices that might misrepresent the MPs' legislative initiative, such as the use of 'package bills' (which cover several and often unrelated policy areas) in Hungary and Italy; bills promoted by the majority party groups following a government's request in order to avoid adjustment procedures designed for government bills, in Hungary and Slovakia; or the use of legislative 'limpets' that introduce new legislation by amending totally unrelated laws in Czech Republic and Slovakia (Guasti and Mansfeldová, 2018).

However, although the co-sponsorship of different types of legislative initiative will be analysed depending on the country under examination (private member bills or motions), they will all help us explore the same thing: that is, the mutual relations between the parties in parliament, and in particular between the new challenger parties and the other PPGs.

5. Analysis

Turning to the empirical analysis, for each parliament we plotted the social network of the respective co-sponsorship, as can be seen in Figure 1. To clearly differentiate between the new challengers and the other party groups, the former are represented in red and the latter in grey. Figure 1 shows some interesting aspects of co-sponsorship in the different European countries under examination. First, there are stark differences between the number of bills that are co-sponsored. Whereas in Italy a significant number of proposals is signed by more than one MP, corresponding to a denser social network, almost no bills are sponsored by more than one MP in Hungary. Secondly, not all new challenger parties seem to

[3]It must be noted that Hungary belongs to this group in the specific parliamentary term under analysis, as the party in government used the legislative strategy of private member bills to avoid the normal legislative process.

behave in the same manner in parliament. Four of these parties—the Five Star Movement, Jobbik, Kotleba and Sweden Democrats—seem to make an effort to stand apart from the rest of parties when it comes to bill initiatives. These four cases therefore seem to confirm our hypothesis that the new challenger parties are not willing to cooperate with the mainstream parties, even if in opposition, in their first legislature in parliament. Nonetheless, it must be noted that in both the Hungarian and the Swedish case not even one bill sponsored by the challenger parties was co-signed by an MP belonging to a different party.[4] This similar pattern might be due to two inter-linked factors: some challenger parties themselves might take the decision to stay apart, but others might also appear isolated because of the other opposition parties' decision to isolate them (as we will see in greater depth below).

In the other two cases, that is, the Netherlands and Czech Republic, challenger parties cooperate more frequently with their national counterparts even in their first legislature in parliament, appearing as more central figures in the social network of co-sponsorship. While this might be a noteworthy outcome for the Dawn, the results for the Party of Freedom should be read more cautiously. In fact, most initiatives in the Dutch parliament are multi-partisan by nature (Louwerse and Otjes, 2015),[5] so this outcome does not necessarily imply a special collaborative attitude of the Party of Freedom.

However, as already noted, examining the percentages of co-sponsorships between members of the same party provides a different and more systematic analysis of this data. Thus, we calculated an *intra opposition party bill differentiation index* for each party, in all the cases under analysis. The results for all the new challenger parties and the average of their respective parliament are shown in Figure 2.

The figure shows that it is much more common to go across the aisle to propose new legislation in some countries (Czech Republic and the Netherlands) than in others (Italy and Hungary). Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in five out of six of our cases, the new challenger parties tend to cooperate less than the average opposition party. And in the case of the Sweden Democrats, their index is only this high due to their collaboration with two independent MPs, and otherwise it is completely excluded from the Swedish parliament social network, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 2 also confirms a peculiarity of the Party of Freedom. As pointed out above, multi-party initiative is more frequent in the Dutch parliament than in the

[4]In the Swedish case, some bills introduced by the Sweden Democrats were actually co-signed by one further MP not belonging to the party, but they were independent MPs that had previous relations with the Sweden Democrat party members.
[5]A result we also find in our statistical analysis.

other countries under analysis. But looking at the difference between the bars of the term average and that of the Party of Freedom, we can conclude that even in a context of strong cooperation, the Dutch challenger party tended to cooperate less in its first legislature in parliament.

It should be noted that even small differences in these indexes can have a large effect on the social network plots. The centrifugal effect that can be observed in the figures above does not correspond solely to these scores. The size of the party and the variety of parties or MPs that cooperated with the new challenger parties during their parliamentary debut are also relevant.

Finally, we assess whether this relative isolation of the new challenger parties is statistically significant by running six different exponential random graph models based on a Poisson distribution, one for each country, in which the number of co-sponsorships between each possible pair of MPs was the dependent variable. Unfortunately, due to the lack of any co-sponsorship between new challenger parties and other parties in Sweden and Hungary, we could not produce meaningful models for these two countries. The summary of results for the remaining four cases can be found in Table 2.

Before analysing the effect of being a new challenger on parliamentary cooperation, some interesting results were found for other variables. In particular, while (as expected) being co-partisan improves the chances of legislative cooperation in three of our cases, it has the opposite effect in another case. In the Dutch case, collaboration between parties occurs so frequently that it is more probable that two MPs belonging to different parties co-sponsor a bill than two MPs from the same party.

Furthermore, confirming our expectations, ideological distance seems to diminish the probability of co-sponsorship. In all our four cases, the chances of MPs sponsoring the same bill decrease as the left-right difference between them (as measured by their respective party position) grows.

Focusing on the effect of actually being a new challenger party on parliamentary cooperation, we included some terms in our model that allow us to differentiate the probability of co-sponsorship between a pair composed of MPs belonging to mainstream/traditional parties, a pair including one MP from an existing party and another from a new challenger party, and a pair of MPs both belonging to new challenger parties.[6] In line with our main hypothesis, cooperation between a new challenger and an existing party MP (the NO–YES category on Table 2) occurs less frequently than cooperation between two existing parties (NO–NO). This division of possible pairs into three groups implied that we could not run this kind of model in two countries, Sweden and Hungary, as there were

[6]Since we only have one new challenger party per country per legislature, this category overlaps with the matching party category.

Table 3 Regression analysis with targeted network

	Dependent variable: Network Italy
Left–right difference	−0.557*
	(0.010)
Match party	1.449*
	(0.020)
New challenger: NO–NO	−1.588*
	(0.019)
New challenger: YES–NO	−2.713*
	(0.060)
New challenger: NO–YES	−4.862*
	(0.154)
New challenger: YES–YES	−0.307*
	(0.050)
Akaike inf. crit.	−75,775.430
Bayesian inf. crit.	−75,705.700

Note: *$p < 0.01$.

no cases of co-sponsorship between new challenger parties and existing parties, and the models were unable to produce an exact parameter estimate.

Notwithstanding, Table 2 indicates that the number of co-sponsorships between a new challenger MP and an existing party MP in the four remaining cases for which we could produce results is significantly lower when compared with co-operation between two MPs of the latter category. Even in more cooperative contexts, such as the Netherlands and Czech Republic, we find that both the Party of Freedom and the Dawn tend to collaborate less than the average party group.

This raises the above mentioned question of the directionality of isolation. Are the new challenger parties excluded by the other parties or do they themselves decide to try to stand apart? Unfortunately, while we do have data on co-sponsorship for all six cases, we only have information on who started the initiative and who sponsored it later for one case, that is, Italy where we can see who signed the proposal first and who decided to support it afterwards. We therefore ran the same model for Italy (Table 3), but breaking the NO–YES category in Table 2, into two parts: the NO–YES category, which represents bills presented by non-challenger parties that were later endorsed by a challenger MP; and the YES–NO category, which represents proposals of new challengers that were supported by MPs from other parties.

The two coefficients in Table 3 allow us to conclude that both effects are found. Non-challenger parties tend to sponsor fewer of the challenger parties' bills than they do for bills presented by non-challenger MPs. But, these challenger MPs also tend to avoid sponsoring bills presented by traditional parties' MPs. In

fact, this latter effect is almost twice the size of the former. Obviously, it is impossible to generalise from data pertaining to only one case, but the Italian parliament suggests that the self-isolation of new challengers is greater than their exclusion by other parties, even though both effects are found.

At the end of this analysis, we believe it is possible to divide the new challenger parties into three groups according to their isolation tendency vis-à-vis the legislative cooperation. Thus, we created three categories, giving them a name that evokes the attitude of the parties within them. The Dawn and the Party of Freedom belong to the *distinct* group, as they are quite integrated within their respective parliament's network, but collaborate/co-sponsor less than their average colleague in parliament, despite the extremely cooperative environment in which they operate. The Five Star Movement can be labelled as *antagonistic*: they are not integrated within the parliament and cooperate very rarely with the other parties. They consider it important to keep their distance from the existing parties so as to maintain their image of 'other' when compared with the traditional parties. They clearly stand out from their parliament's network, despite the high number of co-sponsored bills notably in the Italian case. Nonetheless, they do cooperate on very rare occasions with other parties. They are not completely *isolated*, as in the case of our last category of parties formed by Jobbik, Kotleba and Sweden Democrats, which appear to be completely excluded from their respective parliament when it comes to legislative initiative and co-sponsorship. They do not share any ties with other parties, even when multi-party bills are frequently introduced, as in Sweden. Unlike the other cases analysed, they do not simply seem to be worried about maintaining their image as an alternative to the existing parties, but they are also isolated by the other parties.

6. Final considerations

Our analysis revealed some drivers that affect the degree of cooperation of new challenger parties with other opposition parties in parliament and, thus, their collaboration in terms of legislative initiative during their first term in parliament. Of course, the contextual factors of individual cases also play an important role. Parliamentary standards of cooperation and decision-making appear to be the first important factor. In our cases, we see differences between the cooperative parliamentary environment of the Netherlands, Czech Republic and Italy, where deputies cooperate across parties, and that of Sweden, Hungary and Slovakia. In the latter countries, the cooperation between members of different parties is not only less frequent, but leads to the complete isolation of the challenger parties.

Past experience may also affect the willingness of members of established parties to cooperate with new parties considered as challengers. This is clearly visible in the case of the Netherlands, where the isolation of extreme parties and

tabooing of some issues did not result into their elimination; moreover, after the Fortuyn and van Gogh murders, the Netherlands suddenly adopted the rule that it was no longer an option to ignore certain opinions (Vossen, 2017).

Cooperation with new challenger parties also depends on the extent of their radicalism and background to it. By their very nature, these parties always present a certain alternative to the current established norms of party politics and establishment. However, there is a significant difference in the content, degree of radicalism and ideological roots of these alternatives and, in line with this, the willingness of other parties to perceive them as legitimate alternatives suitable for cooperation in parliament. Our cases include problematic parties, such as the Ľ'SNS, Jobbik or SD, whose formation or important members are associated with neo-Nazi groups and movements. By acting together, established parties face questions and accusations of legitimising undemocratic ideologies, and this can cause significant political damage and makes them favour a non-cooperative approach to such challenger parties.

Finally, the inclusion or isolation of a new challenger party may also be the result of a strategic decision by the party leader (or leadership). After electoral success, these parties face the choice of either pursuing their programme priorities, which encourages the search for allies and cooperation with other parties, or maintaining their exclusivity with an emphasis on anti-establishment, anti-systemic appeals or controversial issues where cooperation with other parties is less important or likely. An example of such a choice was that of the Dawn's leader Tomi Okamura, who, on entering parliament, decided to take a favourable approach to other parties and the new government in order to pursue the key programmatic goal of establishing direct democracy. On the other hand, the leader of the Ľ'SNS, Marián Kotleba, defined himself from the outset as being against all other parties in parliament and totally unwilling to look for compromises and break the party's isolation.

The main purpose of this article was to understand whether it is possible to distinguish any common pattern of behaviour in parliament among the so-called new challenger parties. We have tried to do so by introducing a new dimension of analysis—that is, the relationship between the new challenger parties and the other parties in parliament—and applying that to the study of six parties, each a different country.

We expected to find a shared tendency among the new challenger parties to distinguish themselves in parliament by standing apart from the other party groups, be they in government or in opposition. We measured the distance between new challenger parties on the one hand and the traditional parties on the other hand by employing a SNA of the co-sponsorship of bills during the challenger parties' first legislative term in parliament. The data employed gave

support to our main expectations, with some exceptions that have been described above.

Further efforts are undoubtedly required to confirm the results obtained so far. In particular, it would very interesting to try to apply our three-fold typology—*distinct*, *antagonistic*, *isolated*—to further cases of challenger parties in Europe. Nonetheless, results on the parties taken into consideration here proved sufficiently effective to believe that this relational dimension might be employed in future works as an additional variable for distinguishing new challenger parties from the other parties in parliament and, in so doing, contributing to a new empirically based definition of this party type.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to report.

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