Mobilizing young voters? A cross-national analysis of contextual factors in pirate voting

Mattia Zulianello [ID]

Department of Political and Social Science, University of Florence, Florence, Italy

ABSTRACT

The emergence of the information society has resulted in an unprecedented debate on issues such as internet censorship and surveillance, privacy, and copyright. Such issues have been mobilized through the channels of party politics by pirate parties, which represent an almost ideal-typical manifestation of the niche party phenomenon. This paper provides the first comparative analysis of the impact of contextual factors on the cross-national variations in the levels of pirate voting by focussing on the 11 countries in which pirate parties contested EP elections between 2009 and 2014. The analysis is performed using QCA, and suggests that the interplay between five contextual factors play an important role in influencing the different levels of pirate voting across Europe: the saliency of macro-economic issues; the levels of trust in political parties; the levels of trust in the internet; the turnout of voters aged 18–24 and the de-alignment of the young voters aged 18–24. On the one hand, the analysis reveals that the failed electoral mobilization of young voters, as reflected in the low levels of turnout of young adults, plays a prominent role in explaining why the majority of pirate parties are electorally unsuccessful. On the other hand, however, the analysis of the most favourable breeding grounds for significant levels of pirate voting to take place suggests that such an outcome is usually not dependent on the levels of turnout of young voters, but is rather influenced by a more complex interaction between the other contextual factors under investigation.

Introduction

The 'digital revolution' has introduced important innovations into contemporary societies, and an abundant literature has explored the impact of new technologies on political life (e.g. Davis, 2010; Enli & Skogerbø, 2013).[1] Although new media has the potential to reshape the relationship between the social and political sphere in a more inclusive and democratic direction, a 'dark' side has also emerged; issues such as internet censorship and surveillance, privacy, copyright and intellectual property have become increasingly controversial (see Burkart, 2014, p. 109). Within this context, the emergence of actors such as Anonymous and WikiLeaks signals the 'emergence of a freedom of information movement' (Beyer, 2014), which has also found its concretization within the conventional

channels of party politics and representative democracy in the form of pirate parties. Such actors are 'cyber parties' *par excellence* (Hartleb, 2013): pirate parties are founded on the internet (Margetts, 2006), they fully conceive the latter as a new political space, and their communication essentially depends on new media (e.g. Erlingsson & Persson, 2011). Although recent years have seen the emergence of various actors that exploit the internet as a tool for political mobilization and participation, such as the Five Star Movement in Italy (Della Porta, Fernandez, Kouki, & Mosca, 2017; Zulianello, 2017b), pirate parties are the only formations that focus almost exclusively on internet-related issues in their agendas (Burkart, 2014; Jääsaari & Hildén, 2015a), and this qualifies them as paradigmatic cases of 'niche parties' (cf. Meguid, 2008; Meyer & Miller, 2015; Wagner, 2012). However, although pirate parties approximate to an almost ideal-typical manifestation of the niche party phenomenon, the otherwise comprehensive literature on the topic has not systematically explored their electoral fortunes. This paper aims to fill this gap by providing the first cross-national analysis of the impact of contextual, or background, factors on the levels of pirate voting. The first part of the paper conceptualizes the emergence of pirate parties as the appearance of a new and distinct party family (cf. Mair & Mudde, 1998), and argues that, in contrast to the traditional *familles spirituelles*, the pirates are best understood as a 'niche' party family (cf. Meguid, 2008, pp. 3–4). The second part of the paper explores the impact of contextual factors on pirate voting using QCA by focussing on the 11 countries in which pirate parties contested EP elections: Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. On the one hand, the analysis reveals that the failed electoral mobilization of young voters, as reflected in the low levels of turnout of young adults, plays a prominent role in explaining why the majority of pirate parties are electorally unsuccessful. On the other hand, however, the analysis of the most favourable breeding grounds for significant levels of pirate voting to take place suggests that such an outcome is usually not dependent on the levels of young voters turnout, but is rather influenced by a more complex interaction between the other contextual factors under investigation.

Pirate parties: a 2.0 niche party family

As Mair and Mudde (1998, p. 212) underline, 'the categorization of parties according to the broader families to which they belong has become a common procedure in comparative research on political parties and party systems'. Although the literature has extensively investigated the major *familles spirituelles* following the 'golden standard' of ideology (e.g. Von Beyme, 1985), very little attention has been dedicated to conceptualizing pirate parties as a distinct party family. Mair and Mudde (1998, pp. 223–224) suggest two approaches to identify party families:

> First, families of parties can and should be identified on the basis of their shared origins, that is, appropriately enough, on the basis of their shared *genetic identity* […] Our second suggestion is that families be characterized on the basis of their *ideological* (as opposed to simply policy) profile that is, again, on the basis of what they are rather than what they do (emphasis added).

In terms of their *genetic identity*, pirate parties present a common origin as they are the 'political manifestation of the new and politically relevant cleavages emerging in the

information society, where the conflict about knowledge is becoming increasingly significant to the division of power in society' (Demker, 2014, p. 189). Like the emergence of actors such as Anonymous and WikiLeaks, the appearance of pirate parties signals the 'emergence of a freedom of information movement' (Beyer, 2014) as a reaction to the perceived 'secrecy of the liberal state and a decline in civic liberties, lamenting a lack of balance between corporate/financial interests and societal interests' (Cammaerts, 2015, p. 32).

Such genetic traits find a direct translation in the *ideological profiles* of pirate parties throughout the world. As Jääsaari and Hildén (2015a, p. 874) underline, pirate parties follow a pattern of 'common [ideological] outlines, national implementations' and invariably focus on 'the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the digital age, consumer and authors' rights oriented reform of copyright and related rights, support of information privacy, transparency and free access to information'. The pirates' emphasis on achieving open and transparent societies results in organizational models that aim at maximizing 'inclusiveness and equality between members' (Bolleyer, Little, & von Nostitz, 2015, p. 162). As Cammaerts (2015, p. 25) underlines, the goal of 'real democracy' is usually pursued by the pirates by employing 'Liquid-Feedback'-type platforms as a crucial means 'to debate and subsequently vote on concrete ideas and/ or policy proposals formulated by one or several of their peers'.

Such considerations allow us to consider pirate parties as constituting a new and distinct party following both the alternative approaches suggested by Mair and Mudde (1998). However, in comparison to the major *familles spirituelles* (e.g. conservative, liberal, socialist parties) the pirates can be further conceptualized as a 'niche' party family, given their predominant focus on internet-related issues. Meguid (2008, pp. 3–4), who introduced the concept, defines niche parties as actors presenting three features: (I) they 'reject the traditional class-based orientation of politics [and] instead of prioritizing economic demands these parties politicize sets of issues which were previously outside of party competition'; (II) such issues 'are not only novel, but they often do not coincide with existing lines of political division'; (III) niche parties 'eschew the comprehensive policy platforms common to their mainstream party peers, instead adopting positions only on a restricted set of issues'. In this light, it can be argued that there are grounds to consider pirate parties to be an almost ideal-typical manifestation of the niche phenomenon.

Contextual factors and pirate voting in Europe: research design and method

Although the appearance of pirate parties effectively signals the emergence of a paradigmatic niche party family, scholars have paid very little attention to the analysis of pirate voting in a comparative perspective. In this respect, the existing research has explored the topic primarily by focussing on the study of the most successful cases, such as the electoral performance of the Czech (Maškarinec, 2017), German (e.g. Baldini & Bolgherini, 2015; Bieber, Rossteutscher, & Scherer, 2015; Niedermayer, 2013), and Swedish pirates (Demker, 2014; Erlingsson & Persson, 2011). Research on pirate voting in Europe generally highlights the importance of the saliency at the mass level of the 'core' pirate issues, such as copyright, intellectual property, file-sharing and Internet user-rights, access and privacy (e.g. Erlingsson & Persson, 2011), as well as of the turnout of first-time and young voters (Baldini & Bolgherini, 2015; Bieber et al., 2015; Erlingsson & Persson, 2011, p. 125;

Maškarinec, 2017). Nevertheless, although outside the scope of the present study, it is important to underline the fact that the highest performance ever registered by a pirate formation, that is the 14.5 per cent obtained by the Icelandic *Píratar* in the 2016 general election, had little to do with 'core pirate' issues. As Hardarson (2016) maintains, 'the pirates did not win because of the international pirate ideology', but rather thanks a more radical ideological profile that focussed on 'a new constitution, increased direct democracy, transparency in government, anti-corruption measures and the creation of a new Icelandic political culture'.

Even though these studies have provided much valuable knowledge of the motivations that underline decisions to vote for pirate parties, these analyses do not explain the variations in pirate voting across the different national contexts, as they rely on single-country approaches. Indeed, the analysis of support for pirate parties remains largely unexplored in a comparative perspective, and we know little about the contextual or background factors that influence pirate voting.[2] Following the valuable insights of the analysis by Van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie (2005) on the 'electoral potential' of anti-immigrant parties, this paper provides the first cross-national analysis of the contextual or background factors that influence the levels of pirate voting. In this respect, as Mudde (2007, p. 230) underlines, 'a fertile breeding ground is a *necessary* but not a *sufficient* condition' for party support; in this light pirate parties, like all political parties, are able to mobilize only a part of their potential voters. This point is especially relevant as pirate parties usually receive very little electoral support, despite the emergence of the information society and the unprecedented salience of internet-related issues.

The analysis of the impact of contextual factors on pirate voting is assessed by focussing on the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament elections. The choice of EU elections is due to their 'second-order' nature, which provides 'brighter prospects for small and new political parties' (Reif & Schmitt, 1980, p. 9). In particular, EP elections provide voters with the possibility to cast a 'sincere' vote, that is, one for parties that are closer to their ideal positions, even if they are small, instead of choosing parties that are more distant from their political views but have a realistic possibility of influencing the formation of national governments (Oppenhuis, van der Eijk, & Franklin, 1996; cf. see Carrubba & Timpone, 2005). The choice of the European level is also due to an important pragmatic reason, namely that pirate parties competed on the grounds of a common election programme in both the 2009 and 2014 EU elections. This fact represents a decisive advantage as it makes it possible to hold constant a crucial element of the internal-supply side of pirate parties (the programmatic offer) even in absence of a cross-country dataset on the topic.[3] Significantly, during a conference held in Uppsala in 2009, European pirate parties developed a (short) common declaration of political goals, focussing on copyright and patent law reform, civil rights, privacy, transparency and outlining the strategic priorities of the movement.[4] Subsequently, during a conference held in Athens in November 2013 the European pirates developed a Common European Election Programme[5], which was adopted by all European pirates running the 2014 EU elections except for the Swedish *Piratpartiet* (Jääsaari & Hildén, 2015a, p. 871). However, the Swedish pirates, too, despite their attempts to downplay the issue of file-sharing, predominantly competed on standard pirate issues 'such as Internet user-rights, access and privacy' (Jääsaari & Hildén, 2015b, p. 20).

The impact of contextual factors in pirate voting is explored through Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), which allows case-based comparisons by linking configurations of

causal conditions using Boolean algebra and set-theory to the outcome of interest (Ragin, 2008; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). In particular, QCA is epistemologically grounded on causal complexity, which makes it possible to explore crucial features of empirical phenomena, such as equifinality, conjunctural causation and asymmetry of set relationships (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). In the analysis of the impact of contextual factors on pirate voting, fsQCA is adopted, which allows for cases to be coded in terms of their degree of set membership in the causal conditions and the outcome, rather than the dichotomous perspective that characterized the early crisp-set version of QCA (Ragin, 2008). The degree of membership of the cases in both the causal conditions and the outcome are indicated in the form of values, ranging from 1.0 (full membership) to 0.0 (full non-membership), with a 'crossover value' of 0.5 representing the point of maximum ambiguity (in qualitative terms).

The outcome set: low levels of pirate voting (∼PIRATE_VOTING)

The electoral participation of pirate parties in EP elections is a recent phenomenon. Whereas in 2009 only the German *Piraten* and the Swedish *Piratpartiet* contested the EU elections, in 2014, pirate parties competed independently in eleven countries: Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK; in Austria, Greece and Poland they ran on a joint list with other parties, while in Estonia they supported an independent candidate. For the purposes of the present research, it is appropriate to focus only on the cases in which pirate parties ran on a separate list in EU elections (Table 1) in order to appropriately assess the impact of contextual factors on pirate voting.

The pirates, even more so than other niche actors, are small parties, and the very meaning of electoral success is different to that which applies to conventional, mainstream parties. First, the threshold for full membership in the outcome set low levels of pirate voting (∼PIRATE_VOTING) is set at the extremely low level of 0.1 per cent of the votes, a value that clearly points to a disastrous electoral performance. The crossover point, corresponding to the membership score of 0.5, is set at 2.0 per cent of the votes, a value that can be legitimately considered as a 'psychological barrier' and an achievement that can be trumpeted by the pirates as an important result. Finally, the threshold for full non-

Table 1. The electoral performance of pirate parties in EU elections.

Election	Party	Votes %	Set membership in ∼PIRATE_VOTING[a]
Croatia 2014	*Piratska Stranka*	0.39	0.92
Czech Republic 2014	*Pirátská Strana*	4.78	0.16
Finland 2014	*Piraattipuolue*	0.72	0.88
France 2014	*Parti Pirate*	0.20	0.94
Germany 2009	*Piratenpartei*	0.90	0.85
Germany 2014	*Piratenpartei*	1.45	0.72
Luxembourg 2014	*Piratepartei*	4.23	0.21
The Netherlands 2014	*Piratenpartij*	0.85	0.86
Slovenia 2014	*Piratska stranka*	2.56	0.42
Spain 2014	*Confederación Pirata*	0.25	0.94
Sweden 2009	*Piratpartiet*	7.10	0.05
Sweden 2014	*Piratpartiet*	2.23	0.47
United Kingdom 2014	Pirate Party UK	0.05	0.95

[a]Rounded to the second decimal place.

membership is set at the level of 7 per cent of the votes, a value that corresponds to the electoral performance of the Swedish *Piratpartiet* in 2009, which is the highest level of support registered by a pirate party in EU elections. The calibration of the outcome set, as well as of the causal conditions discussed in the following pages, is performed using the direct method[6] (Ragin, 2008).

Causal conditions

In developing causal conditions to explain the cross-national variation in the levels of pirate voting, this paper draws from a variety of sources, such as electoral studies on the Czech (Maškarinec, 2017), German (e.g. Baldini & Bolgherini, 2015; Bieber et al., 2015; Niedermayer, 2013), and Swedish pirates (e.g. Demker, 2014; Erlingsson & Persson, 2011), as well as from the broader literature on pirate parties (e.g. Beyer, 2014; Burkart, 2014; Cammaerts, 2015; Demker, 2014). Based on this literature, five causal conditions are used to assess the impact of contextual factors on pirate voting:

- the salience of macro-economic issues in driving voting choice (SAL_MACROECO);
- the levels of trust in political parties (TRUST_PARTIES);
- the levels of trust in the internet (TRUST_WEB);
- the dealignment of voters aged 18–24 (YOUNG_DEALIGN),
- the turnout of voters aged 18–24 (YOUNG_TURNOUT).

The importance of macro-economic issues in driving voting choice (SAL_MACROECO)

The first causal condition can be developed following the consideration that niche parties 'reject the traditional class-based orientation of politics [and] instead of prioritizing economic demands these parties politicize sets of issues which were previously outside of party competition' (Meguid, 2008, p. 3). In this respect, it is important to underline that, although pirate parties do not focus on 'traditional' macro-economic issues such as inflation, employment and pensions, they have politicized novel issues that fall into the domain of information policy (Burkart, 2014, p. 109) but that are inherently economic in nature, such as copyright, file-sharing and intellectual property. Pirate parties, in other words, focus on a new competitive dimension that challenges 'the perceived primacy of the standard, economically defined Left-Right spectrum' (Meguid, 2008, p. 23), which is usually structured around the previously mentioned macro-economic issues. For these reasons, the first causal condition assesses the salience of macro-economic motivations as drivers behind voting choice, a scenario that may negatively impact the levels of pirate voting. Such information can be obtained from the Eurobarometer post-electoral surveys on European elections, which include the following question: 'What are the issues which make you vote in the European elections? Firstly?' (European Commission, 2009, 2014a). The importance of macro-economic issues in driving voting choice is then calculated by summing the percentage of the total voters selecting the following responses: 'unemployment', 'economic growth', 'the single currency, the Euro', 'the future of pensions', and 'inflation and purchasing power'. The threshold for full membership in the causal condition (SAL_MACROECO) is set at 66 per cent, a value denoting that the ample majority of the voters (two-thirds) cast a vote driven by macro-economic

motivations. The cross-over point is set at 50 per cent, indicating that half the voters voted following macro-economic considerations, while the threshold for full set non-membership is set at 33 per cent, a value denoting that only one third of the voters cast their ballots on economic grounds.

Trust in political parties (TRUST_PARTIES)

Given pirate parties' emphasis on liquid democracy, e-participation and direct forms of citizen involvement in political life, it is not surprising that they are extremely critical of established political parties and mediated forms of representation (Niedermayer, 2013). For this reason, it is important to assess whether public attitudes towards political parties influence levels of support for the pirates. The data for the causal condition 'trust in political parties' (TRUST_PARTIES) are taken from the Eurobarometer surveys (European Commission, 2010, 2014b), which include the following question: 'I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions […] political parties'. Given the widespread discontent and disaffection towards political parties, the threshold for full membership in the condition (TRUST_PARTIES) is set at 50 per cent of respondents who 'tend to trust' political parties. This value corresponds to the highest levels of trust registered in the EU across 2009 and 2014 and was registered in Denmark (European Commission, 2010, 2014b), a country that, despite the fact that it is not included in the present analysis because of the absence of pirate parties contesting EP elections, can be employed to assign set membership scores according to external criteria, in line with good QCA practice (cf. Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Following this external criterion, the cross-over point is set to 24.99, a value that allows us to consider 'more in than out' the present causal condition the countries presenting at least half the levels of trust registered in the Danish case, and in which, accordingly, at least one-fourth of the respondents 'tend to trust political parties'. This value also reflects a noticeable gap in data distribution between Germany in 2014 (21 per cent) and Luxembourg (25 per cent). Finally, the threshold for full set non-membership is set at the very low value of 10 per cent, which indicates that the overwhelming majority of respondents tend 'not to trust' political parties.

Trust in the internet (TRUST_WEB)

As the literature on pirate politics has consistently underlined the link between the Web 2.0 ethos and pirate politics (e.g. Burkart, 2014; Demker, 2014), it is important to introduce a causal condition that reflects the level of trust in the internet (TRUST_WEB), which can be considered as a precondition for getting involved in forms of 2.0 political engagement. Such data are found in the Eurobarometer surveys, which include the following question: 'I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions […] the internet' (European Commission, 2010, 2014b). The threshold for full membership in the condition TRUST_WEB is set at 60 per cent of respondents who 'tend to trust' the internet. As with the condition TRUST_PARTIES, this value corresponds to the highest levels of trust in the internet registered in the EU in the periods of interest – namely Slovakia in 2014 (European Commission, 2010, 2014b). The cross-over point is set at 40 per cent, which indicates that a consistent portion of the respondents trust the internet;

such a choice is inspired by the considerable gap present in the data between the values of Luxembourg (37 per cent) and the Netherlands (44 per cent). Finally, the threshold for full set non-membership is set at the value of 27 per cent, which refers to the levels of trust in the internet in France and Germany in 2014, the lowest values registered across EU countries in the period under analysis (European Commission, 2014b).

Dealignment of young voters aged 18–24 (YOUNG_DEALIGN) and the turnout of young voters aged 18–24 (YOUNG_TURNOUT)

Existing research clearly indicates that pirate parties are over-represented among young voters (Erlingsson & Persson, 2011, p. 125; Maškarinec, 2017), especially among first-time voters and in particular among the under-25s (Baldini & Bolgherini, 2015; see also Bieber et al., 2015). Unsurprisingly, as Burkart (2014, p. 47) underlines, the pirate message is intended to target young voters. For these reasons, two causal conditions are developed to assess the relationship between young voters and pirate voting: the dealignment of young voters aged 18–24 (YOUNG_DEALIGN) and the turnout of young voters aged 18–24 (YOUNG_TURNOUT).

The literature has widely discussed the process of electoral dealignment that has occurred in advanced industrial democracies – a gradual erosion of the linkage mechanisms between voters and political parties, which creates the potential for increasing levels of electoral volatility, abstentionism, and increased support for minor parties (e.g. Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002). For the purposes of this paper, focus is placed on the dealignment of young voters aged 18–24, the primary competitive target demographic of pirate parties. The condition YOUNG_DEALIGN is constructed using the data from the EU post-election survey (European Commission, 2009, 2014a), which include the following question: 'Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular political party?'. The focus on the levels of dealignment of young adults aged 18–24 allows us to assess whether the presence of a significant pool of 'available' voters, who do not consider themselves to be close to any political party, in such a group age influences the levels of pirate voting. The threshold for full membership in the causal condition (YOUNG_DEALIGN) is set at 70 per cent, a remarkable value, indicating that a considerable majority of the young voters aged 18–24 *do not feel close to any political party*, which makes it possible to attribute the set membership score of 1.0 to the cases of Germany (2009) and Sweden (2009). The cross-over point is set at 50 per cent, a value indicating half of the voters in this age group identify with a political party, while the threshold for full non-membership is set at 30 per cent, a value indicating that a minority of the voters aged 18–24 do not feel close to any partisan actor.

The other causal condition focussing on youth politics assesses the electoral participation of voters aged 18–24, using data from the aforementioned 2009 and 2014 post-election surveys on European elections (European Commission, 2009, 2014a). In developing the condition YOUNG_TURNOUT, the focus is placed not on the turnout of young voters *per se*, but rather on the degree of electoral participation of voters aged 18–24 in comparison with overall turnout. In this way, it is possible to determine whether the over-representation of young voters in the electoral process influences the level of pirate voting. Following a similar logic to the previous causal conditions, TRUST_PARTIES and TRUST_WEB, the threshold for full membership in the causal condition

(YOUNG_TURNOUT) is set at +15 per cent – corresponding with the highest levels registered in the EU in the periods of interest (namely Sweden in 2014) – a value that informs us that the turnout of young voters aged 18–24 was 15 per cent higher than the overall turnout. The cross-over point is set at 0 per cent, a value indicating no difference between the turnout of young voters age 18–24 and the overall turnout, while the threshold for full non-membership is set at -15, a value which suggests that the turnout of young voters was 15 per cent below the overall level of turnout.

Empirical analysis

The QCA module in R (Duşa, 2007) is used to analyse the outcome ~PIRATE_VOTING. As is often the case in applied QCA, no single condition can be legitimately considered as necessary for the outcome to occur, and this suggests that the cross-national variations in pirate voting need to be evaluated in terms of sufficiency.

Seeking sufficient paths to low levels of pirate voting (~PIRATE_VOTING)

The crucial step in any QCA is the construction of a truth table consisting of all the logical combinations of the five causal conditions included in the analysis. To determine which causal configurations can be considered as leading to ~PIRATE_VOTING a consistency cut-off is set at 0.88, a value reflecting the natural gap in the distribution of cases and that is abundantly above the 0.75 minimum suggested in the literature (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 279).

The conservative solution, which includes only the rows presenting empirically-occurring cases, presents a very high level of consistency (0.934) and coverage (0.822), and identifies two causal paths to ~PIRATE_VOTING. The most parsimonious solution, including all the rows containing logical remainders, is also produced, and consists of two paths to ~PIRATE_VOTING. However, the results of most parsimonious solutions need to be evaluated with caution, as they make simplifying assumptions regarding all logical remainders, that is, both easy and difficult counterfactuals (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 168–177).

The next step in QCA is to produce an intermediate solution, which incorporates only 'good counterfactuals' (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 168–177). The intermediate solution is at the centre of the substantive discussion of any QCA analysis because it is produced following 'directional expectations' (Ragin, 2008) – that is, by including only 'easy' or 'good' counterfactuals that 'are in line with both the empirical evidence at hand and existing theoretical knowledge on the effect of the single conditions that compose the logical remainder' (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 168; 279). Given the centrality of the mobilization of younger voters in both the theoretical and empirical literature on pirate pirates (e.g. Baldini & Bolgherini, 2015; Burkart, 2014; Erlingsson & Persson, 2011, p. 125; Niedermayer, 2013), only one directional expectation is made, namely that the causal condition 'turnout of young voters aged 18–24' is a good counterfactual for the occurrence of low levels of pirate voting (~PIRATE_VOTING) when is absent (~YOUNG_TURNOUT). Nevertheless, by including this directional expectation, the intermediate solution does not differ from the conservative one, which is produced only on the grounds of empirical evidence.

The intermediate solution identifies two paths leading to ~PIRATE_VOTING, and presents very high values of consistency (0.934) and coverage (0.822) (Table 2). A visual

inspection of the cases' set membership in the solution and the outcome confirms the robustness of the results (Figure 1). As Figure 1 shows, no cases remained uncovered by the solution and no deviant cases emerge from the results. This means that all the instances of low levels of pirate voting in the countries under analysis are explained by the solution.

Path 1: Abstention of young voters in contexts with low trust in political parties and in the internet (~TRUST_PARTIES* ~TRUST_WEB*~YOUNG_TURNOUT)

This path combines contexts characterized by low levels of turnout of young voters aged 18–24 in which the levels of trust in both political parties and in the Internet, are low. The configuration ~TRUST_PARTIES* ~TRUST_WEB*~YOUNG_TURNOUT presents a high coverage, as it allows for the low levels of pirate voting in Croatia, Germany (both 2009 and 2014), France, Spain and the UK to be explained. In such countries, the under-representation of young voters in the electoral process deprives pirate parties from a decisive element of their 'electoral potential' (cf. Van der Brug et al., 2005), as the pirates' 'message is directed primarily to young adults' (Burkart, 2014, p. 47). In addition, the simultaneous presence of low levels of trust in the internet further undermine the prospects for pirate voting, as pirate politics emphasizes Web 2.0 as a forum for political engagement, and a precondition of this is a degree of trust in the Web (Kaldor & Selchow, 2013, pp. 90–91). Significantly, the concurrent presence of both low levels of trust in the internet (~TRUST_WEB) and the low turnout of young voters (~YOUNG_TURNOUT) nullifies the potentially favourable opportunity represented by other contextual factor that emerge in this path – that is, distrust towards political parties (~TRUST_PARTIES). Although dissatisfaction towards established political parties and the occurrence of protest voting is often seen as benefitting the pirates (Burkart, 2014, p. 43), the under-participation of young voters and the simultaneous presence of low levels of trust in the internet produce a context that is capitalized on in electoral terms by other challengers to traditional political parties rather than by pirate parties. Indeed, it is worth noting that all the instances of low levels of pirate voting covered by this path display considerable electoral performances by populist parties (Mudde, 2004), which, in the period under analysis, also qualified as 'anti-system', given their antagonistic behavioural posture
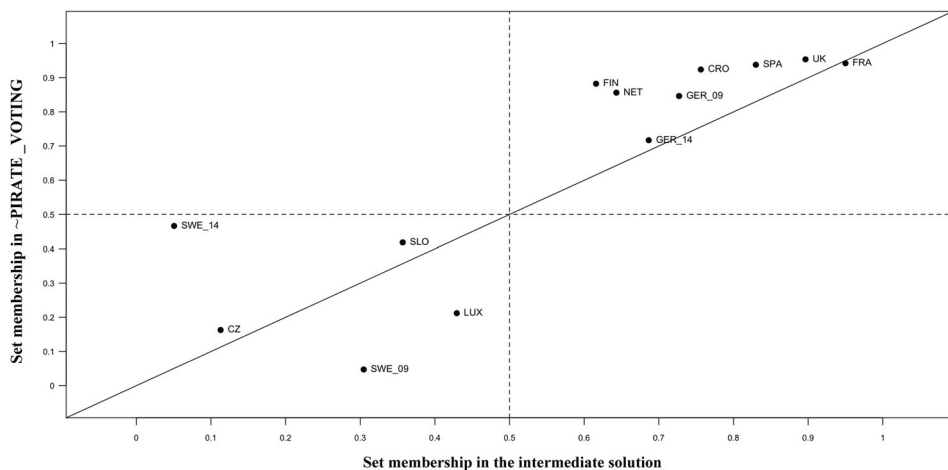
Figure 1. XY plot of the intermediate solution for the low levels of pirate voting (~PIRATE_VOTING).

Table 2. Intermediate solution for ~PIRATE_VOTING.

	Consistency	PRI	Coverage	Unique Coverage	Cases
~TRUST_PARTIES* ~TRUST_WEB*~YOUNG_TURNOUT	0.926	0.900	0.725	0.577	Croatia, France, Germany (2009), Germany (2014), Luxembourg, Spain, United Kingdom
~SAL_MACROECO*TRUST_PARTIES*TRUST_WEB*~YOUNG_TURNOUT	0.865	0.765	0.246	0.097	Finland, the Netherlands
Solution	**0.934**	**0.914**	**0.822**		

within the party system[7] (see Zulianello, 2017a). More specifically, the presence of 'credible' populist parties (Van Kessel, 2015), located at the margins of their national party systems (Zulianello, 2017a) in contexts characterized by ∼TRUST_PARTIES* ∼TRUST_WEB*∼YOUNG_TURNOUT, effectively shattered the competitiveness of pirate parties as the possible beneficiaries of protest voting.

Path 2: Abstention of younger voters in contexts with high levels of trust in political parties and in the web, and the prevalence of non-economic issues as drivers of voting choice (∼SAL_MACROECO*TRUST_PARTIES*TRUST_WEB*∼YOUNG_TURNOUT)

This path covers the low levels of pirate voting in Finland (2014) and the Netherlands (2014). In such contexts, the relatively high levels of trust in political parties (TRUST_PARTIES), combined with the substantial abstention of voters aged 18–24 (∼YOUNG_TURNOUT), result in the two conditions that may potentially favour pirate voting – predominance of non-economic motivations behind voting choice (∼MACROECO_ISSUES) and trust in the web (TRUST_WEB) – advantaging established parties that engaged in a process of strategic positioning on IP and internet issues, such as the Green-Left (*Groen-Links*) in the Netherlands and the Green League (*Vihreä liitto*) in Finland (for a similar view, see Erlingsson & Persson, 2011, pp. 126–127). Indeed, both parties successfully attacked and impaired the competitive niche of the pirates over the last few years: the Finnish Greens adopted a copyright policy in 2010 and an information-society manifesto in 2011 (Jääsaari & Hildén, 2015a), while the Dutch Green-Left focussed increasingly on internet-related issues, as highlighted by the focus on the introduction of an 'Internet Bill of Rights' in 2010.[8]

Are pirate parties doomed to failure? Favourable breeding grounds for pirate voting

It is now possible to determine why in some other cases the levels of pirate voting have been relatively high and can be considered significant (PIRATE_VOTING). In explaining such an outcome, the same causal conditions previously discussed are used, yet a new truth table needs to be constructed (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 113). The consistency cut-off for the analysis of PIRATE_VOTING is set at the score of 0.76. By introducing the directional expectation that the *presence* of YOUNG_TURNOUT is a good counterfactual for the occurrence of PIRATE_VOTING, the intermediate solution returns three paths to the outcome with good values of consistency (0.811) and coverage (0.817). Again, no cases remained uncovered by the solution and no deviant cases emerge from the analysis of the favourable breeding grounds for pirate voting. This means that all the instances of significant levels of pirate voting in the countries under analysis (> than 2 per cent) are explained by the solution (Table 3).

Path 1: Trust in the internet, distrust in political parties, and the prevalence of economic issues in driving voting choice (SAL_MACROECO*∼TRUST_PARTIES*TRUST_WEB)

The first path for PIRATE_VOTING covers the Czech and Slovenian pirates, which obtained, respectively, 4.78 per cent and 2.56 per cent of the vote in 2014. Whereas the high levels of trust in the internet probably indicate that a limited portion of pirate voting in the Czech Republic and Slovenia in 2014 was linked to the presence of a number of voters embracing 'ethos of how to do things' (cf. Kaldor & Selchow, 2013, pp. 90–91) that characterizes Web 2.0, the bulk of pirate voting in such countries appears to

Table 3. Intermediate solution for PIRATE_VOTING.

	Consistency	PRI	Coverage	Unique Coverage	Cases
SAL_MACROECO*~TRUST_PARTIES*TRUST_WEB	0.865	0.685	0.489	0.288	Czech Republic, Slovenia
~SAL_MACROECO*TRUST_PARTIES* ~TRUST_WEB* YOUNG_DEALIGN	0.760	0.598	0.298	0.154	Sweden (2009)
~SAL_MACROECO*TRUST_PARTIES* ~TRUST_WEB* YOUNG_TURNOUT	0.927	0.766	0.302	0.172	Luxembourg, Sweden (2014)
Solution	**0.811**	**0.665**	**0.817**		

be primarily related to protest voting against established parties (cf. Brusis, 2016). Indeed, both the Czech Republic and Slovenia were severely hit by the global economic and financial crisis, and in both countries the adoption of unpopular austerity programmes was accompanied by revelations regarding the corruption of high-profile politicians (Brusis, 2016). This produced a widespread popular discontent, which enabled the emergence of a favourable context for significant levels of pirate voting to take place, albeit primarily motivated by economic voting directed against the incumbents (SAL_MACROECO) and protest voting fuelled by public outrage over corruption scandals (~TRUST_PARTIES).

Path 2: Young voter dealignment in contexts with distrust in the internet, trust in political parties, and the prevalence of economic issues in driving voting choice (~SAL_MACROECO*TRUST_PARTIES*~TRUST_WEB*YOUNG_DEALIGN)

The second configuration to PIRATE_VOTING uniquely covers the breakthrough of the Swedish *Piratpartiet* in the 2009 European election, the highest performance of a pirate party in EP elections (7.13 per cent). In this path, despite the potentially unfavourable factors represented by the low levels of trust in the web and the relatively high levels of trust in political parties, the substantial levels of de-alignment of young voters aged 18–24 provided a decisive triggering factor for significant levels of pirate voting to occur, thanks to the concurrent limited relevance of macro-economic issues as drivers for voting choice. The causal configuration ~SAL_MACROECO*TRUST_PARTIES*~TRUST_-WEB*YOUNG_DEALIGN is consistent with the analysis of the electoral support for the Swedish pirates in 2009 by Erlingsson and Persson (2011, pp. 126–127), who argue that

> voters in general did not show any strong dissatisfaction with how the established parties performed. However, a substantial number of voters found that one particularly important issue was not sufficiently handled by the established parties. Hence, the Pirate Party was the only party that represented the views of these voters on this broad issue – personal integrity and downloading from the Internet.

The results from the QCA analysis make it possible to identify a crucial mechanism that, combined with the unprecedented salience of internet-related issues in the 2009 EP election in Sweden, opened up an extremely favourable window of opportunity for pirate voting to take place: the high levels of de-alignment of young voters aged 18–24. As de-alignment is often associated with short-term voting motives such as issue-voting (Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989), in the very peculiar context of the 2009 EP elections the *Piratpartiet* capitalized in electoral terms from the public salience of the issues touching its ideological core, in particular following the Pirate Bay trial, which were in turn particularly appealing among young voters (see Erlingsson & Persson, 2011; Widfeldt, 2010).

Path 3: Young voter over-representation at the polls in contexts with distrust in the internet, trust in political parties, and the prevalence of economic issues in driving voting choice ~SAL_-MACROECO*TRUST_PARTIES*~TRUST_WEB *YOUNG_TURNOUT

The last path to PIRATE_VOTING differs from the second path in only one INUS condition.[9] Whereas in path 2 the decisive background factor triggering pirate voting in contexts characterized by ~SAL_MACROECO*TRUST_PARTIES*~TRUST_WEB was the high levels of de-alignment of young voters, path 3 indicates that another triggering factor higher levels of turnout among the 18–24 age group in comparison to overall turnout represent another triggering factor. The path ~SAL_MACROECO*TRUST_PARTIES*~TRUST_WEB *YOUNG_TURNOUT covers the cases of the *Piratepartei* in Luxembourg and the Swedish pirates in 2014, who obtained, respectively, 4.23 per cent and 2.23 per cent of the vote. Whereas the high turnout of young voters in Luxembourg in 2014 was significantly influenced by the tradition of compulsory voting in the country, in the case of Sweden 2014 it was favoured by the reorganization of the system for absentee voting in mid-2000s (Dahlberg, 2016). Significantly, while minor parties in general usually benefit from high turnout because it 'mobilises disproportionately more swinging and uncommitted voters' (Mackerras & McAllister, 1999, p. 229), the over-representation of young groups aged 18–24 in the electoral process represented a decisive triggering factor for significant levels of pirate voting to take place, as a significant pool of the 'potential voters' of the pirates (cf. Van der Brug et al., 2005) *actually* took part in the election. In particular, the high turnout of young adults plays a crucial role in explaining why, despite the totally different conditions under which the 2014 elections took place in comparison to 2009 (that is, with an almost complete absence of salient internet-related issues), the *Piratpartiet* still managed to perform better in comparison with the vast majority of its sister parties across Europe, although the 2.23 per cent it received was insufficient to maintain representation in Strasbourg.

Concluding remarks: 'full sails' or 'sinking ships'?

This paper has contributed in several respects to the literature on pirate parties. First, such actors are conceptualized as a peculiar and distinctive party family, given their genetic and ideological features (Mair & Mudde, 1998). At the same time, given the predominant focus of internet issues in their competitive outlook, pirate parties are considered to be an almost ideal-typical manifestation of the niche party phenomenon (cf. Meguid, 2008; Meyer & Miller, 2015; Wagner, 2012). Second, this paper has explored the impact of five contextual factors (the salience of macro-economic issues in driving voting choice, the levels of trust in political parties, the levels of trust in the internet, the dealignment of young voters aged 18–24, and the turnout of voters aged 18–24) in the cross-national variations of pirate voting by focussing on EU parliamentary elections.

The results of two distinct QCA analyses suggest that the effect of the interplay between different contextual factors affecting pirate voting is more complex than suggested by previous research. On the one hand, although not representing a necessary condition, the lower turnout of voters aged 18–24 in comparison to overall turnout is present in both the paths leading to low levels of pirate voting. This suggests that the low levels of turnout of young adults play, in comparison to the other contextual factors, a prominent role in negatively affecting the levels of support registered by the pirates (cf. Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 281). As the pirates' message is primarily

directed at young adults (Burkart, 2014), the under-representation of such an age group at the polls deprives pirate parties of most of their 'electoral potential' (see Van der Brug et al., 2005). However, the analysis of the favourable breeding grounds for significant levels of pirate voting to take place suggests that the importance of a high turnout of young voters should not be overestimated. Indeed, in combination with other contextual factors, the spectacular result of the Swedish pirates in 2009 – the highest performance registered by a pirate party in EU elections – occurred in a context with a *lower* turnout of young voters aged 18–24 in comparison with the overall turnout but characterized by high levels of dealignment within this age group. At the same time, while two out of three paths identified by the QCA analysis as favourable breeding grounds for significant levels of pirate voting to take place include a background factors related to younger voters (the high turnout of the young voters aged 18–24 in one path, and the high levels of dealignment of the same age group in the other), the pirates also achieved notable performances in the Czech Republic and Slovenia, contexts in which such factors were absent. As argued in the paper, in both countries, the high levels of pirate support had little to do with factors related to young voters and were instead decisively influenced by voters' tendency to punish established parties for poor management of the economic crisis and for revelations regarding corruption scandals, as well as, though to a limited extent, the noticeable levels of trust in the internet at the mass-level.

Whereas the presence of favourable breeding grounds plays a crucial role in the potential for significant levels of pirate voting to occur, pirate parties are, like all other parties, responsible for their own success. However, given their 'nicheness' (cf. Meyer & Miller, 2015), pirate parties in Europe have so far failed to be perceived as anything more than parties for file-sharing (with the exception of the Czech Republic and Iceland over the last few years) despite their recent attempts to extend their competitive profile. The broad implications of internet-related issues beyond file-sharing are not generally grasped by voters, and the emergence of streaming services over the last few years (e.g. Spotify), coupled with the introduction of more restrictive legislation on file-sharing, such as the Intellectual Property Enforcement Directive, has significantly reduced the appeal of the pirates' message, even among young voters. In addition, largely in response to the emergence of the pirate movement, other political parties have introduced information policy and internet-related issues into their programmatic offer, and this has further undermined the competitiveness of the pirate parties in the large majority of European countries.

Notes

1. I thank the three anonymous referees for their comments of an earlier version of this article.
2. In this respect, it is important to underline that the absence of comprehensive cross-country datasets providing information on the salience of the core pirate issues at the mass level inhibits the possibility of carrying out a comparative analysis on pirate issue-voting.
3. Especially if we consider that the most commonly used dataset for the study of niche parties, the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, & Tanenbaum, 2001; cf. Zulianello, 2014), does not cover the overwhelming majority of pirate parties.
4. The text of the Uppsala declaration is available at http://lists.pirateweb.net/pipermail/pp. international.general/2008-June/001203.html
5. Available at http://ppeu.net/wiki/doku.php?id=programme:ceep:final_cut.
6. As a logistic function is used for direct calibration, the actual set membership scores received by the cases in outcome set as well as the causal conditions are, respectively, 0.05 for full

non-membership and 0.95 for full membership (see Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 35, fn5).

7. Such parties are the Croatian Party of Rights, the French *Front National*, the Left Party and *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany, Podemos in Spain, and the United Kingdom Independence Party.

8. See the link https://groenlinks.nl/nieuws/groenlinks-pleit-voor-digitale-burgerrechten.

9. INUS stands for a 'single condition that is insufficient for producing the outcome on its own but which is a necessary part of a conjunction that, in turn, is unnecessary but sufficient for producing the outcome' (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 328).

ORCID

Mattia Zulianello http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6329-2851

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