Electoral Competition after Party Splits

Abstract

While party splits are a relatively frequent phenomenon in many new and established democracies, the systematic empirical research on electoral competition after schisms is limited. The analysis of more than 200 splits across 25 European countries in the post-war period addresses this gap in the literature. The study shows that the vote share of rump and splinter parties in the first election after fission are strongly related to their membership strength and the share of splinter legislators. This relationship is present in both Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe. Additionally, economic growth affects the support of rump parties that hold government office while party system fragmentation and party funding regulations correlate with the electoral performance of splinter parties.

Introduction

Political parties play a key role in a modern representative democracy by providing structure to political competition in elections and legislatures, facilitating voter representation and accountability, and mobilizing voters. Parties' ability to fulfil these functions depends crucially on their stability and unity. Political science research has therefore analyzed extensively the causes and consequences of parties' disunity in legislative voting and party switching by individual legislators.

Sometimes, however, party unity breaks to such an extent that the party splits permanently in the sense that some of its members establish a new splinter party that competes with the rump party in the next electoral cycle.[1] The outcomes of this post-fission competition vary greatly. For example, the Popular Unity party in Greece, established by the MPs of the Syriza party who disagreed with the terms of the Greek bailout by the EU, gained less than 3 percent of the vote in the September 2015 election, while the Syriza party lost less than 1 percentage point of its vote in comparison to the previous election. In contrast, the Social Democratic Party in the UK (established in 1981 by a group of deputies from the Labour party) won a respectable 11.6 percent of the vote in the 1983 general election. As a result of this split, the rump Labour party obtained only 27.6 percent of the vote, thus losing more than 9 percentage points of its support relative to the 1979 election. In other cases the splinter party performs even better than the rump party. This was the case in the 1998 election in Denmark, when the Progress Party received 2.4 percent of the vote, while its splinter, the Danish People's Party, gained 7.4 percent.

What factors determine this substantial variation in parties' aggregate electoral support after splits? Currently the scholarship lacks a systematic comparative study investigating this question empirically. The extant research on new parties suggests electoral demands and political opportunity structures such as institutional thresholds and party competition as the main explanations of the electoral performance of new parties. However, it is not clear whether these explanations can account for the electoral support of both genuinely new and splinter parties. Similarly, there is little research on the extent to which these theories can explain the dynamics in the electoral support of both these established parties that experienced splits and those that compete with new parties

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[1]The rump party is defined here as the main successor party, which is the most continuous with regard to the original party before fission in organizational terms, and which normally keeps the name of this original, "parent" party.

that are not their own splinters. Also, the importance of party organization and candidates for the electoral competition between new and established parties is under-researched in the literature. This study addresses these gaps by examining how rump and splinter parties perform in the first election after fission using a new dataset on splits in 25 EU member states in the post-war period. The research makes two main contributions to the literature. First, it examines whether the factors suggested by the electoral demand, institutional and party competition explanations are able to account for the electoral support of both rump and splinter parties. Second, it elaborates and tests the argument that the appeal of rump and splinter parties' candidates and their membership strength account for the electoral competition after splits.

Understanding the variation in parties' electoral support after fission is important for several reasons. First, voter response to splits determines their impact on party system stabilization and change in terms of the number and identity of relevant parties and the patterns of cooperation and competition among them. Splits can change the legislative strength of parties and their bargaining power in a single legislative period (Laver and Benoit, 2003). However, party fission can be even more consequential if/when splits are followed by a substantial electoral change. The first election after the schism is particularly crucial, as it shows whether the splinter party has the potential to become a viable player in the party system on the long term, and whether the rump party is likely to remain relevant after its split. In established party systems, the electoral change related to fission may be substantial enough to change radically the patterns of party competition and cooperation, as for example in Ireland after the emergence of the Progressive Democrats (PD) as a splinter party of Fianna Fail in the late 1980s. In young party systems, frequent splits that lead to the redistribution of parties' support could impede the emergence of a stable set of parties and structured patterns of cooperation among them. This usually translates into low levels of citizens' trust in political parties and poor quality of representation and electoral accountability.

Second, electoral change induced by splits can also deprive substantial voter groups of legislative representation and shift public policies toward the over-represented minority groups. For instance, numerous splits of Polish right-wing parties before the 1993 election explain to a large extent their failure to reach the electoral threshold in that election, leading to the formation of the centre-left government supported by only a minority of the electorate.

Third, explaining the patterns of electoral change after splits is key for understanding the

persistence of individual parties. While some scholars demonstrate that splits lead to the electoral decline of parties (Bakke and Sitter, 2013), not all splits have the same effect on party persistence as illustrated by the examples discussed above. However, under what conditions splits are most likely to lead to party disappearance represents an under-researched question in the literature.

Last but not least, the empirical prevalence of splits justifies further the study of their electoral implications. As discussed below, in 25 countries analyzed here, more than one third of electoral periods witnessed an emergence of a splinter party. In some countries, especially in younger democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, splits were frequent enough so that their impact on electoral outcomes was considered as more important than that of parties' policy positions (Kaminski, 2001, 294).

The study first critically reviews the most prominent theoretical explanations in the literature. It then presents the theoretical hypotheses on how candidate appeal and membership size affect the electoral support of parties after splits. Next, the design and results of the analysis are presented. The concluding section summarizes the findings and their implications.

Explaining party success after splits: electoral demands, institutions and party competition

Electoral demand, institutional thresholds and party competition have been suggested in the literature as the main explanations of the electoral performance of both genuinely new and splinter parties (Selb and Pituctin, 2010). However, the literature has not systematically considered how the specific context characterizing the emergence of splinter parties affects the extent to which they can account for electoral dynamics after splits. I address this gap by discussing the implications of this context, focusing in particular on the organizational and programmatic links between the splinter and the parent party that makes the former less "new" in comparison to a genuinely new party (Barnea and Rahat, 2011).[2]

Specifically, influential arguments in the literature suggest that the electoral success of new

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[2]I draw mostly on the literature on all new parties (i.e. genuinely new and splinter parties (Hug, 2001)) for developing the theoretical framework of this study because the systematic comparative research focusing on splinter parties only has so far examined only the causes of splits (Ceron, 2015; Mutlu-Eren, 2015) or party switching by individual legislators (Desposato, 2006; O'Brien and Shomer, 2013).

parties is unlikely when the electorate has strong *partisan attachments* to the established parties or when the latter are embedded in well-developed and stable *cleavages.* However, a split may undermine or weaken voters' attachments to the rump party given that stable parties are a key condition for the development of voter partisanship (Dalton and Weldon, 2007; Lupu and Stokes, 2009). Moreover, the splinter party may attract some partisan voters of its parent party by claiming to be a "true" representative of its identity. Similarly, both rump and splinter parties, as successors of the parent party, can credibly claim to be representatives of the same social groups associated with this party. For example, Aimer and Vowles (1993) show that in the 1990 parliamentary election in New Zealand, the splinter of the Labour party (called the New Labour Party) drew its support primarily from the traditional Labour electoral base, namely the working class voters. Also, the Most-Hid party founded by a former leader of the main ethnic Hungarian minority party in Slovakia (Party of the Hungarian Coalition), attracted a substantial share of the ethnic Hungarian voters in the 2010 parliamentary election that previously supported its parent party. Thus, the extent to which voter partisanship and well-developed cleavage structures insulate the rump party from the damaging electoral consequences of splits and prevent the electoral breakthrough of new splinter parties is unclear.

Another demand-side explanation emphasizes poor *economic conditions*, which should increase the support of new parties (Hanley and Sikk, 2014; Tavits, 2008) because voters seek alternatives to the established parties. However, since splinter parties are less "new" due to their previous organizational links with their parent parties, they may not be able to benefit from voter frustration brought about the mismanagement of the economy. This is especially likely to be the case if their parent parties were in government, because voters can then associate the splinter parties with the policies of the parent party that led to poor economic outcomes. Furthermore, splits may intermediate the effect of economic factors on the electoral performance of rump parties because fission can be viewed as an indication of the disunity within these parties. The perceived lack of cohesion of incumbent rump parties could reduce the clarity of their responsibility for policy outcomes (Powell and Whitten, 1993), or the credibility of the rump parties that are in opposition at the time of a split as alternative governments in waiting (Anderson, 2000).

Institutional explanations suggest that new parties are more successful under more proportional electoral institutions or party funding regimes that do not favour established parties. However, in

comparison to genuinely new parties, splinter parties may find it easier to establish their electoral or financial viability because they frequently include prominent elites from the parent party. The effect of institutional thresholds on the electoral success of rump and splinter parties would then be weakened.

Finally, factors related to *party competition* may also affect the electoral success of new parties. For example, new parties are more successful when established parties are not able or willing to address salient issues that are picked up by new parties or when new parties are ideologically distant from their established competitors (Hino, 2012; Hug, 2001; Meguid, 2005; Selb and Pituctin, 2010). Furthermore, higher party system fragmentation signals an open electoral market in which new parties may be serious contenders for legislative seats and government office (Mainwaring, Gervasoni and España-Najera, 2016), thus increasing the electoral success of new parties at the expense of established parties (see also Kselman, Powell and Tucker 2016). These arguments assume that successful new parties are able to differentiate themselves in ideological and policy terms from their established competitors. The latter assumption could however be questioned due to the (recent) affiliation of the members of splinter parties with at least one of the older parties.

Party candidates and members

Apart from the aforementioned research, a smaller number of studies on new parties suggest that the resources of the new party matter for its initial success. For example, Bolin (2010), Lucardie (2000) and Sikk (2006) argue that the new party needs members, leadership, media access and money to become visible to the electorate as a credible contender. Without spending sufficient resources to promote its message, the new party is unlikely to attract many voters. A number of scholars of new radical right parties have also emphasized the importance of leadership and organization, although these effects are debated in the literature (see Mudde 2007 for a review of these arguments). This is mainly because systematic empirical tests of the effect of the resources of new parties on their success remain an exception rather than a rule (Golder, 2016, 489). However, several case studies on splits suggest that the electoral success of rump and splinter parties depended on the personal popularity of their leaders and candidates (Aimer and Vowles, 1993; Crewe and King, 1995; Ivaldi, 2003; Rybár and Deegan-Krause, 2008) and the strength of party organization

(Hanley, 2008; Luther, 2008).

These arguments are also in line with the criticisms of other explanations outlined above. Thus, in the context where group loyalties, partisanship, performance evaluations, party programmes or electoral viability potentially provide only limited cues to voters when choosing between rump and splinter parties, such considerations as the personal appeal of parties' candidates and leaders and their membership strength are likely to have an important effect on vote choice. More specifically, the electoral performance of the splinter party may be improved if the elites of the parent party that join it have high name recognition, thus increasing the splinter party's visibility to the electorate. Furthermore, and probably more importantly, the splinter party may benefit from the personal electoral appeal of the switcher elites. A number of studies in the voting behaviour literature indicate that personal voting, both due to the policy positions or the perceived competence and personalities of leaders and candidates, matters for voters' party choices (Karp et al., 2002; McAllister, 2007; Moser and Scheiner, 2005; Rahat and Sheafer, 2007).

Conversely, the rump party that loses leaders and candidates with high name recognition and/or personal appeal is unlikely to be able to replace them with the politicians of equal standing, at least not before the next parliamentary election. In line with this argument I develop the following two hypotheses:

H1: The electoral support of the rump party is lower if the candidates of the splinter party have high name recognition and personal appeal.

H2: The electoral support of the splinter party is higher if its candidates have high name recognition and personal appeal.

Large membership is also important for the electoral success of both rump and splinter parties. Party members provide a pool of loyal voters, spread the party's message through their personal social networks, serve as a workforce that can effectively mobilize electoral support for the party during electoral campaigns, inform the party about the public opinion at the grass-roots level, and signal the legitimacy of the party to the electorate (Scarrow, 2015; Tavits, 2013).[3] Thus, large membership helps splinter parties to establish themselves as viable contenders, while for rump parties it is a way to assure their continued relevance following a split. Based on this logic, I expect

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[3]The present study defines party members as those members who are affiliated with the party as individuals and through formal procedures of affiliation (cf. Scarrow 2015).

that:

> *H3: A larger membership of the rump party increases its electoral support.*

> *H4: A larger membership of the splinter party increases its electoral support.*

Before proceeding to the empirical section, it is important to note that the literature also suggests important counter-arguments to the hypotheses presented above. Specifically, several scholars have stressed that the effects of leader and candidate evaluations on vote choice are limited (Karvonen, 2007; King, 2002; Tverdova, 2011). Similarly, a number of studies question the impact of party organization on parties' electoral performance (see Tavits (2013, 36-38) for a review of these arguments), especially in the context of its decline in Western European democracies in the last several decades, and the low levels of party membership in most young democracies even decades after their democratic transitions. Furthermore, studies on radical right parties argue that party organization is important only for their electoral consolidation and persistence but not for an initial breakthrough (Art, 2011; Carter, 2005; Mudde, 2007; Norris, 2005). These counter-arguments suggest that there is a certain level of theoretical ambiguity/controversy in the scholarship over the effect of these two explanatory factors and provide further theoretical justification for testing the aforementioned hypotheses systematically in a large-n analysis.

Data and measurement

The theoretical expectations are tested using an original dataset on party splits that occurred in 25 member states of the European Union in the post-war period.[4] The analysis includes the splits of the parties that obtained at least 3 percent of seats in the lower house of the national legislature in the last election before a split (however, no threshold of electoral support was applied when measuring the vote share of rump and splinter parties *after* a split). This selection criterion allows me to consider almost all parties that are relevant for government formation and policymaking in the selected set of countries. In contrast, the splits of small and/or ephemeral parties are less likely to matter substantively because the parties that experience these splits have little influence, and such splits are also unlikely to lead to the emergence of splinter parties that are sufficiently large to be relevant for government formation or policymaking. The findings of the study are therefore not

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[4]To identify the splits, 286 electoral periods were examined. The list of countries and time periods is provided in Online Appendix B.

generalizable to the latter set of splits. Moreover, from a more practical point of view, a threshold of relevance is required since the splits of very small parties are much harder to record and also raise difficulties with regard to the measurement of key predictor variables, such as membership strength or personal appeal of leaders and candidates.

The dataset distinguishes between individual parties and electoral coalitions that are present in both Western and Central and Eastern European countries (Golder, 2006; Greene and Haber, 2016b; Ibenskas, 2016). The break-ups of electoral coalitions are therefore not considered as party splits. The main criterion for identifying an organization as an individual party was whether it could recruit individual members without the latter automatically becoming the members of the broader alliance or coalition that this organization was a member of. Thus, highly factionalized parties, such as the Christian Democracy in Italy, were coded as parties given that they were characterized by the existence of the unified membership organization despite well-established factional affiliations of individual members.

Measurement of dependent variables

Party splits were identified based on the triangulation of information from a variety of academic, media and official sources.[5] As mentioned above, in order to reduce the chances of selecting only electorally successful splits, no minimum threshold of electoral success of splinter parties was used for coding party splits and substantial effort was made to identify the splinter parties with very limited electoral support. Furthermore, the analysis excludes the splits of the merged parties that were formed in the same period when the split occurred, and it also does not consider splits if the parent or splinter party merged with another party after the split. These "split-mergers" are more complex phenomena than simple splits, and therefore the theoretical expectations of this study may only partially apply to them.

The total count of splinter parties included in the sample was 228. They were formed as a

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[5]In the absolute majority of cases the identification of successor parties as either rump or splinter parties was straightforward because data sources specify explicitly which party was a new party founded by a faction from another party. Furthermore, splinter parties adopt the names that are distinct from those of their parent parties in order to differentiate themselves electorally and/or to comply with the legal regulation of parties by the state. In several cases where organizational continuity between the parent and rump parties was not straightforward to establish (e.g. where due to the split both successor parties adopt the names that were different from that of their parent party), the successor party founded by the largest organizational faction was considered as a rump party (following the approach suggested by Bolleyer (2013, 26)).

results of splits in 136 parent parties.[6] These splits occurred in 120 electoral periods or 42 percent of the total number of periods included in the sample. Italy has had the highest number of splinter parties (25). Among the older European democracies, also France and the Netherlands experienced the formation of more than 10 splinter parties. However, splits on average were more frequent in newer democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, with almost one half (110) splinter parties coming from this region, even if the length of democratic experience of these countries has been substantially shorter when compared to Western and Southern European countries.

The dependent variables in the cross-national analysis are the individual and combined vote shares of the rump and splinter parties.[7] While the theoretical hypotheses refer to the *individual* electoral success of rump and splinter parties, understanding the *total support* of successor parties is also of interest because it also indirectly represents the vote share of the parties other than the rump and splinter parties. Thus, the analysis of this variable indicates when a split of a party benefits other parties in the system, either because they attract the supporters of the party that experienced a split or because these voters abstain.

Since some parties split more than once in a single electoral period, the unit of analysis in the model that explains the support of splinter parties is the dyad of the splinter party and electoral period. The models that explain the performance of rump parties and the combined support of rump and splinter parties use the dyads of rump parties and electoral periods as units of analysis.

Measurement of predictor variables

To test Hypotheses 1 and 2 on the effect of candidates' *personal popularity and name recognition*, the analysis uses the ratio between the number of lower chamber legislators of the parent party who joined the splinter party at the time of a split and the total number of MPs.[8] This measure is in line with the causal mechanisms of Hypotheses 1 and 2 as incumbent MPs have on average a stronger personal popularity and name recognition than other candidates. Moreover, given the focus of this study on party electoral success in parliamentary elections, it is important

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[6]However, the number of parent party - electoral period dyads was 192 because some parties split in two or more electoral terms.

[7]For the parties that lack individual vote share records due to their participation in electoral alliances, the share of the vote is estimated as the product of the electoral strength of the alliance and the share of the legislators that the party obtained from the total number of legislators won by the coalition.

[8]The number of switcher MPs was identified on the basis of various country-specific and comparative studies on parties, media sources, and the records on party affiliation provided on the websites of legislatures concerned.

that incumbent legislators are more likely to participate in these elections in comparison to, for example, parliamentary candidates in the previous national election that did not win seats.

The main measure used to test Hypotheses 3 and 4 on the effect of *party membership organization* is the ratio between the number of members of the parent party and the size of the electorate.[9] The ratio between the size of party membership and the electorate is recognized in the literature as one of the most established measures of the strength of party membership (Katz and Mair, 1994; Tavits, 2013). While the estimates or records of the size of party membership suffer from the problems related to their reliability and comparability, especially in a cross-national context, they still provide among the best available proxies and correlate highly with with the declared membership in mass surveys (Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012).

Although separate measures of the membership strength of rump and splinter parties would provide a more direct test of Hypotheses 3 and 4, they are also characterized by missing data. Specifically, the information on party membership is not available for 57 percent of splinter parties and 9 percent of rump parties. For the observations that the data is available for the membership of parent parties correlates highly with that of rump parties (the value of the correlation coefficient is 0.93) but not with the membership of splinter parties (the correlation coefficient equals 0.28). Thus, the membership of the parent party captures well the membership of the rump parties, but it is only a proxy measure of the membership of the splinter party. To improve the empirical test of Hypothesis 4, I also present the analyses that use the ratio between the number of members in splinter parties and the size of the electorate. These analyses thus cover 43 percent of the splinter parties in the sample.

The measures for electoral demands, institutional thresholds and party competition are the following. *Voter partisanship* is operationalized as the age of the parent party in the year of the split. The embedment of the parent party in a strong *cleavage structure* is captured by the dichotomous variable that indicates communist and social democratic parties in countries with high trade union density (the threshold of 30 percent, which is close to the median value observed in the sample, is used; the data is provided by Visser 2013). Such leftist parties that represent an organized working class should be less likely to lose votes after splits in line with the theoretical discussion above. The dichotomous variable for the presence of rump parties in government within one year before the

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[9]Online Appendix A provides detailed information on the sources used to code this variable.

election, interacted with the rate of economic growth, tests the argument of retrospective *economic voting*. *Effective electoral threshold* (Lijphart, 1994), the values of which are provided by Carey and Hix (2011), measures electoral system disproportionality. The access of new splinter parties to financial resources is captured by a dichotomous variable that indicates whether *direct public funding* provided by national government was available only to the parties with representation at the national legislature (coded based on the information provided by Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2012) and Biezen (2013)). Such a restrictive funding regime may limit the ability of new parties to achieve an electoral breakthrough in line with the arguments on cartel parties (Katz and Mair, 1995; Potter and Tavits, 2015).

The importance of *party competition* is examined using three variables. The first one indicates whether the ideological families of the rump and splinter parties are different.[10] This variable serves as a proxy for the positional differences between the successor parties on the key dimensions of party competition and the salience they attach to different issues.[11] Higher number of issues that are not addressed by the main established parties in their programmes could also increase the support of the splinter party by providing it with more "political space". Following Zons (2015), this measure was constructed based on the information from the Manifesto Project Database as the number of the coding categories that were not addressed in established parties' manifestoes at the time of the first election after fission. Additionally, party system fragmentation is measured by the effective number of parties (data provided by Gallagher 2016). Finally, the analyses also control for the presence of the splinter party in government within one year before the election, multiple splits of the same party in a single electoral period, and the vote share of the parent party in the last national parliamentary election before a split.

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[10] The variable therefore also captures the arguments about the importance of the ideology of new parties for their electoral success. Its coding was based on the scheme of Döring and Manow (2012), who distinguish between 11 party families; they also provided the information on the families of most parties in the sample. The missing information was coded based on comparative handbooks on party politics, such as Bugajski (2002), and various country-specific sources.

[11] In the absence of detailed information on the policies of most splinter parties because of their small size, it was not possible to construct more direct measures of the response of the established parties (including rump parties) to the emergence of splinter parties as used by, for example, Meguid (2005) or Hino (2012).

Analysis and results

Electoral performance after splits: descriptive analysis

Figure 1 presents the electoral performance of rump and splinter parties in the first election after the split (plotted on Y axis) in comparison to the vote share of the parent party in the last election before the split (plotted on X axis). The figure also includes 45 degree lines to differentiate between the cases where a successor party's (or parties') support was higher than that of its (their) parent party.

Figure 1: Party vote before and after fission
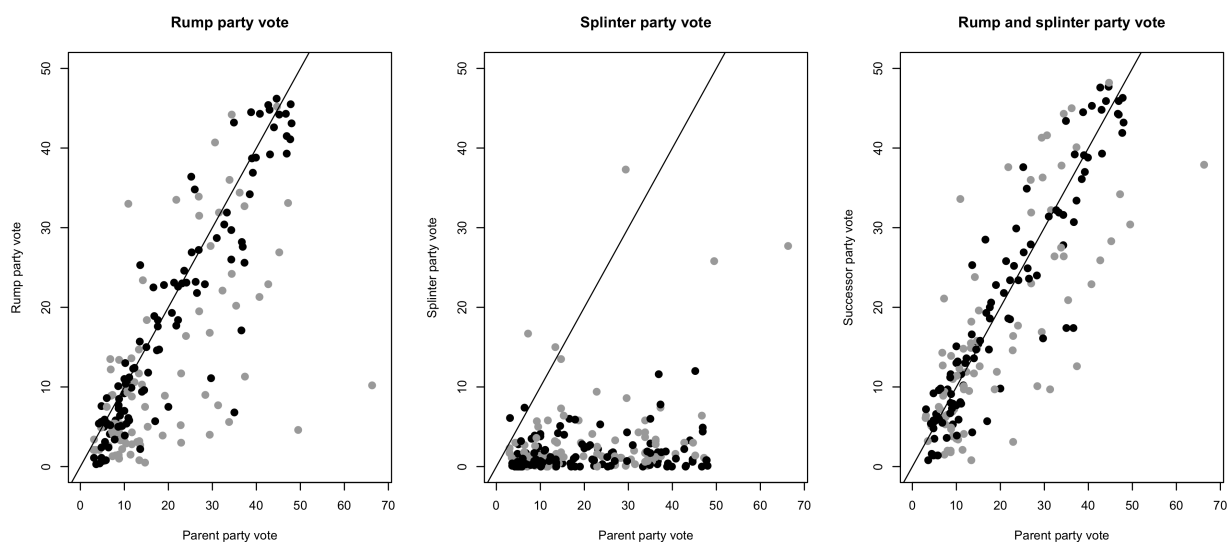
Note: observations from Western Europe are represented by black points while the gray points indicate the Central and Eastern European cases.

The figure demonstrates several interesting patterns in the variation in the electoral performance of parties after splits. First, the scatterplot on the left indicates strong correlation (the correlation coefficient is equal to 0.79) between the support of rump and parent parties. On average, rump parties tend to lose only some support in comparison to their parent parties but there is a non-negligible group of rump parties, mostly in post-communist democracies, that perform substantially worse than their parent parties. Second, as shown by the middle scatterplot, the vote share of splinter parties tends to be much lower than and correlates only weakly (at 0.24) with that of their parent parties. Third, the total support of successor parties tends to be close to that of their parent

parties (the value of the correlation coefficient is 0.86), which suggests that the patterns of vote redistribution after splits occur first and foremost among the successor parties as opposed to voter switching to other parties that are not related to the split.

Modelling strategy

As Figure 1 shows, the distribution of parties' vote shares after splits is highly skewed to the right. Several predictor variables are also characterised by right-skewness. Two modelling strategies are adopted to deal with this challenge. First, Models 1-4 in Table 1 present linear multi-level models (with random intercept terms for countries, elections and parent parties) in which parties' vote shares and right-skewed predictor variables (the share of splinter MPs, membership and electorate ratio, party age, effective electoral threshold and the vote share of the parent party) are logged.[12] Due to logarithmic transformations, the regression coefficients do not represent the change in raw vote shares for one unit change in predictor variables. Thus, Figure 2 presents the substantive effects of the share of splinter MPs and party membership. Second, Models 4-6 are robust regression models with raw vote shares as dependent variables.[13]

Since the literature on new parties emphasizes important differences between established and new democracies, both linear multi-level and robust regression models are estimated for Western European and younger Central and Eastern European democracies. Tables 2 and 3 present the results of these analyses.

The literature also indicates that the studies of new party electoral performance may be susceptible to selection bias because some of the factors that affect new party success could also impact on their emergence (Golder, 2003; Hug, 2001). To account for this possibility, Online Appendix B presents the results of Heckman's sample selection models, where the selection equation models party splits by using the factors suggested in the existing studies on party splits and new party entry, while the outcome equation models the electoral support of rump and splinter parties. The

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[12]Since for some parties that participated in electoral alliances the estimated vote share was 0, the constant of 0.5 was added to the dependent variables before their logarithmic transformations. The constant of the same magnitude was also added to the variable that captures the share of splinter MPs because some splinter parties were not joined by any MPs.

[13]MM-estimator is probably the most commonly employed robust regression technique due to their high breakdown point (i.e. the minimum percentage of extreme observations that can lead to the estimator producing arbitrary results) and high efficiency (Andersen, 2008). The models were estimated using the *robustbase* package in the R statistical environment (Rousseeuw et al., 2016).

substantive results do not change when sample selection models are used.

Candidates' appeal and party membership

The results support Hypotheses 1 and 2: a higher share of switcher legislators increases the electoral support of splinter parties and decreases the vote share of rump parties (Models 1-3 and 5-7). The magnitude of these effects is substantial. According to Figure 2, the increase in the share of splinter MPs from 0 to 7 percent (corresponding roughly to the 10th and 90th percentiles of the observed distribution of this variable) decreases the expected vote share of the rump party from 9 percent to 6 percent and increases the expected vote share of the splinter party from 0.5 percent to 2 percent. The robust regression estimates suggest stronger effects. According to Models 5 and 6, the increase in the share of splinter MPs by 1 percentage point leads to the loss of 0.83 percentage points of the vote for the rump party and the gain of 0.38 percentage points for the splinter party. Thus, the exit of 7 percent of national legislators translates into the loss of almost 6 percent of the vote for the rump party and the gain of almost 3 percent for the splinter party. The results largely hold for both Western European and Central and Eastern European sub-samples (Tables 2 and 3), although the statistical and substantive significance of the effects of party membership is somewhat stronger in the former than in the latter.

However, the effect of the share of splinter MPs on the combined vote share of rump and splinter parties is significant (at the 0.1 level) only in Model 8, but not in Model 4. Thus, there is only limited evidence that a greater extent of fission at the parliamentary elite level benefits other parties in the system, although multiple splits do so.[14]

Hypothesis 3 is also substantiated. As Figure 2 shows, the estimates of Model 1 indicate that the increase in the member-electorate ratio of the parent party from 0.1 to 5 percent (these values roughly correspond to the 10th and 90th percentiles of the observed distribution) increases the expected vote share of the rump party from 6 to 10 percent. According to the estimates of Model 5, the increase in the membership-electorate ratio by 1 percentage point leads to the increase in

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[14]Specifically, rump parties perform significantly worse (by 3.8 percentage points according to Model 5) when multiple splits occur in a single electoral period, but this variable has no effect on the support of splinter parties (Models 2 and 6). However, multiple splits decrease the total support of successor parties (Models 4 and 8), which suggests that they benefit other parties in the system. A possible interpretation of these results is that the emergence of every additional splinter party, independently of how many legislators join it, strengthens the perception that the rump party is divided, thus increasing its electoral losses (cf. Greene and Haber 2016a).

Table 1: Electoral competition after splits: full sample

	Linear multi-level regression				Robust regression			
	Rump	Splinter		Rump+ splinter	Rump	Splinter		Rump+ splinter
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Intercept	0.60	−0.83	−0.20	0.48	7.57*	−0.65	−0.71	3.29
	(0.35)	(0.44)	(0.75)	(0.30)	(2.35)	(0.45)	(1.33)	(2.43)
Share of splinter MPs	−0.15*	0.52*	0.36*	−0.00	−0.83*	0.38*	0.32*	−0.34
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.04)	(0.18)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.18)
Member-electorate ratio (parent party)	0.12*	0.11*		0.11*	0.71*	0.05		0.55*
	(0.04)	(0.05)		(0.03)	(0.19)	(0.04)		(0.20)
Member-electorate ratio (splinter party)			0.21*				3.76	
			(0.06)				(2.02)	
Socdem or communist & high	0.10	0.04	0.47*	0.13	1.42	−0.00	0.47	1.10
union density	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.22)	(0.08)	(1.03)	(0.20)	(0.64)	(1.07)
Parent party age	−0.02	0.07	0.11	0.02	−0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Economic growth	−0.01	0.01	−0.02	−0.01	−0.12	−0.00	0.04	−0.14
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.18)	(0.03)	(0.15)	(0.19)
Rump party in government	−0.44*	0.21	−0.02	−0.31*	−5.02*	0.31	−0.01	−5.33*
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.27)	(0.09)	(1.10)	(0.20)	(0.79)	(1.17)
Rump party in gov * economic growth	0.07*	−0.03	−0.01	0.03	0.65*	−0.03	−0.09	0.72*
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.02)	(0.25)	(0.05)	(0.18)	(0.27)
Effective electoral threshold	0.03	−0.00	0.02	0.02	2.18	−0.39	−0.33	3.05
	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.04)	(4.42)	(0.86)	(2.51)	(4.65)
Direct public funding for leg. parties only	0.08	−0.36*	−0.53*	−0.05	2.00	−0.49*	−1.22*	0.75
	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.21)	(0.09)	(1.08)	(0.22)	(0.58)	(1.12)
Effective number of parties	−0.04	0.12*	0.11*	0.01	−0.84*	0.13*	0.11	−0.36
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.02)	(0.26)	(0.05)	(0.13)	(0.27)
No of zero categories	−0.00	0.01	−0.00	0.01	−0.12	0.02	0.02	0.04
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.09)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.09)
Different ideologies	0.03	0.19*	0.48*	0.15*	1.59	0.20	1.13*	2.05*
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.17)	(0.07)	(0.92)	(0.18)	(0.54)	(0.96)
Splinter in government	−0.14	0.10	−0.13	−0.09	−1.21	0.27	−0.29	−0.80
	(0.17)	(0.21)	(0.31)	(0.15)	(1.88)	(0.39)	(1.00)	(2.00)
Multiple splits	−0.44*	−0.13	0.15	−0.33*	−3.81*	−0.09	0.47	−2.42
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.22)	(0.10)	(1.19)	(0.18)	(0.59)	(1.23)
Previous vote	0.90*	0.09	0.20	0.82*	0.79*	0.01	0.02	0.86*
	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.13)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.04)
Party-level variance	0.00	0.04	0.11	0.00				
Election-level variance	0.00	0.10	0.19	0.00				
Country-level variance	0.01	0.04	0.00	0.01				
Residual variance	0.28	0.33	0.27	0.20				
Number of parties	136	129	76	136				
Number of elections	120	120	71	120				
Number of countries	25	25	23	25				
N	192	228	98	192	192	228	98	192
Log Likelihood	-180.26	-258.65	-123.49	-152.12				

Note: dependent variables in Models 1-4 are logged vote shares of rump and splinter parties and the variables capturing the share of splinter MPs, membership-electorate ratio, party age and effective threshold are also logged in these models. MM-estimator used for robust regression models. $^*p < 0.05$

Figure 2: Expected vote shares of rump and splinter parties: cross-national analysis

Share of splinter MPs and the support of the rump party (Model 1)

Share of splinter MPs and the support of the splinter party (Model 2)

Membership strength and the support of the rump party (Model 1)

Membership strength and the support of the splinter party (Model 3)
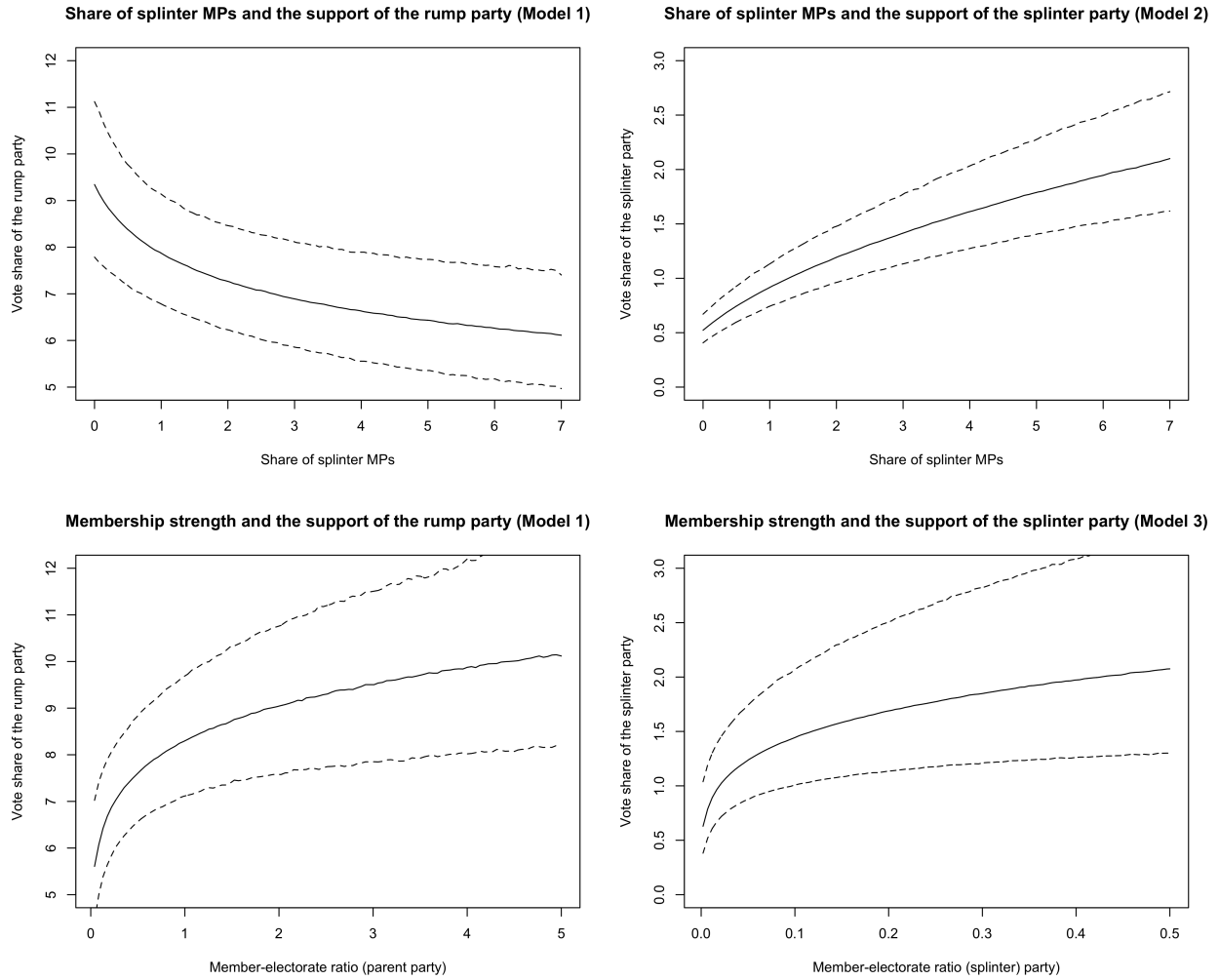
Note: Simulations of expected vote shares with 95% confidence intervals. The values of other variables are held constant at their mean values.

the vote share of the rump party by 0.71 percentage point. Thus, the change in the size of relative size of party membership by 4.9 percentage points on average increases the vote share of the rump party by approximately 3.5 percentage points.

The evidence supporting Hypothesis 4 is also relatively strong. The membership of the parent party has a significant effect in Model 2 although not in Model 6; while the membership of the splinter party has a significant effect in Models 3 (at the 0.01 level of significance) and 7 (at the 0.1 level of significance). With regard to substantive effects, Figure 2 shows (based on the estimates of Model 3) that when the ratio between the membership size and the electorate increases from 0.01 percent (the 10th percentile of the observed distribution) to 0.3 percent (the 90th percentile of the distribution), the expected vote share of the splinter party increases by more than 1 percentage point. The substantive effect of this variable as estimated in Model 7 is of similar magnitude.

The membership variable remains a statistically significant predictor of the electoral success of rump and splinter parties in most regression models for both sub-samples. Although the substantive effect of the membership of splinter parties seems to be substantially larger in Central and Eastern Europe (compare Models 11 and 15 with Models 19 and 23), the large number of missing observations in these models limits the extent to which strong inferences about regional differences can be made.

Electoral demands, institutions and party competition

The results also show some support to the demand-side, institutional and party competition explanations. Specifically, government parties that experience splits benefit from good economic conditions. Every additional point in economic growth increases their support by half a percentage point (based on the estimates of Model 5).[15] However, low or negative economic growth does not increase the vote share of splinter parties (regardless of whether rump parties are in government or not). This finding stands in contrast to the studies that find the substantial effects of economic performance on the initial electoral success of new parties (Mainwaring, Gervasoni and España-Najera, 2016; Tavits, 2008). This suggests that the latter relationship may hold only for genuinely new parties. The significant and positive effect of economic growth on the *combined* vote share of

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[15]The effect of economic growth is less reliable in post-communist democracies where, as argued by previous studies (Roberts, 2010), government parties lose elections even in good economic times.

Table 2: Electoral competition after splits: Western Europe

	Linear multi-level regression				Robust regression			
	Rump	Splinter		Rump+ splinter	Rump	Splinter		Rump+ splinter
	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)
Intercept	0.42	−0.87	0.78	0.74*	3.94	−0.31	−1.77	1.19
	(0.45)	(0.75)	(1.12)	(0.37)	(2.67)	(0.61)	(1.59)	(2.69)
Share of splinter MPs	−0.17*	0.65*	0.35*	−0.03	−0.84*	0.47*	0.40*	−0.31
	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.15)	(0.05)	(0.32)	(0.07)	(0.13)	(0.32)
Member-electorate ratio (parent party)	0.15*	0.11		0.13*	0.09	0.09*		0.08
	(0.05)	(0.08)		(0.04)	(0.17)	(0.04)		(0.18)
Member-electorate ratio (splinter party)			0.24*				2.61	
			(0.09)				(1.50)	
Socdem or communist & high	−0.01	0.01	0.35	0.03	−1.95*	−0.01	0.44	−1.34
union density	(0.09)	(0.14)	(0.22)	(0.07)	(0.91)	(0.21)	(0.44)	(0.90)
Parent party age	−0.04	0.09	0.21*	0.00	−0.02	0.01	0.01*	−0.00
	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Economic growth	−0.02	0.00	0.12	−0.02	0.04	−0.06	0.15	0.12
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.11)	(0.02)	(0.29)	(0.07)	(0.23)	(0.30)
Rump party in government	−0.36*	0.13	0.10	−0.32*	−3.25*	0.07	0.62	−2.90*
	(0.12)	(0.21)	(0.45)	(0.10)	(1.33)	(0.30)	(0.85)	(1.34)
Rump party in gov * economic growth	0.08	0.03	−0.04	0.08*	0.58	0.13	−0.18	0.51
	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.16)	(0.03)	(0.44)	(0.10)	(0.32)	(0.44)
Effective electoral threshold	0.02	0.00	0.16	0.03	0.65	−0.87	0.49	1.78
	(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.04)	(3.94)	(0.95)	(2.03)	(3.94)
Direct public funding for leg. parties only	0.10	−0.22	−0.41	0.07	1.83	−0.40	−0.27	1.55
	(0.12)	(0.21)	(0.27)	(0.10)	(1.10)	(0.26)	(0.50)	(1.09)
Effective number of parties	−0.01	0.12*	0.06	−0.01	−0.61*	0.12	0.26	−0.30
	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.03)	(0.29)	(0.06)	(0.15)	(0.28)
No of zero categories	0.00	−0.00	−0.03	0.01	0.11	−0.00	−0.01	0.18
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.10)	(0.02)	(0.04)	(0.10)
Different party families	0.02	0.08	0.32	0.05	−0.33	−0.03	0.20	−0.45
	(0.08)	(0.14)	(0.25)	(0.07)	(0.89)	(0.21)	(0.55)	(0.90)
Splinter in government	0.32	0.24	−0.02	0.25	1.97	0.15	0.14	2.28
	(0.20)	(0.33)	(0.44)	(0.16)	(2.30)	(0.58)	(0.97)	(2.31)
Multiple splits	−0.23	−0.17	0.25	−0.22*	−2.40	−0.35	−0.12	−2.52
	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.36)	(0.11)	(1.28)	(0.25)	(0.59)	(1.28)
Previous vote	0.93*	0.13	−0.02	0.81*	0.95*	0.01	0.01	0.98*
	(0.08)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.04)
Party-level variance	0.04	0.11	0.00	0.02				
Election-level variance	0.00	0.08	0.19	0.00				
Country-level variance	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.01				
Residual variance	0.10	0.29	0.35	0.07				
Number of parties	69	66	35	69				
Number of elections	76	76	39	76				
Number of countries	14	14	12	14				
N	107	118	46	107	107	118	46	107
Log Likelihood	-74.95	-133.40	-53.06	-57.39				

Note: dependent variables in Models 1-4 are logged vote shares of rump and splinter parties and the variables capturing the share of splinter MPs, membership-electorate ratio, party age and effective threshold are also logged in these models. MM-estimator used for robust regression models. $^*p < 0.05$

Table 3: Electoral competition after splits: Central and Eastern Europe

	Linear multi-level regression				Robust regression			
	Rump	Splinter		Rump+splinter	Rump	Splinter		Rump+splinter
	(17)	(18)	(19)	(20)	(21)	(22)	(23)	(24)
Intercept	0.86	−1.06	−1.99	0.15	5.25	−0.60	−0.82	1.83
	(0.59)	(0.68)	(1.35)	(0.51)	(4.18)	(0.85)	(2.61)	(4.88)
Share of splinter MPs	−0.10	0.40*	0.19	0.05	−0.73*	0.26*	−0.04	0.02
	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.20)	(0.08)	(0.25)	(0.06)	(0.15)	(0.29)
Member-electorate ratio (parent party)	0.10	0.16*		0.13*	1.71*	0.06		1.03
	(0.07)	(0.08)		(0.06)	(0.50)	(0.09)		(0.58)
Member-electorate ratio (splinter party)			0.28*				31.97*	
			(0.10)				(3.68)	
Socdem or communist & high	0.38	−0.03	0.38	0.28	6.05*	−0.24	3.05	3.93
union density	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.55)	(0.19)	(2.23)	(0.43)	(1.98)	(2.59)
Parent party age	−0.06	−0.08	0.03	0.00	−0.04	−0.02	−0.04	0.02
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.18)	(0.09)	(0.05)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.06)
Economic growth	−0.00	0.03	−0.02	−0.00	−0.14	0.01	−0.26	−0.23
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.02)	(0.26)	(0.05)	(0.24)	(0.30)
Rump party in government	−0.58*	0.29	0.12	−0.42*	−5.69*	0.48	1.43	−6.18*
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.41)	(0.16)	(1.85)	(0.36)	(1.56)	(2.16)
Rump in gov * economic growth	0.05	−0.06	−0.01	0.02	0.64	−0.09	−0.20	0.65
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.34)	(0.07)	(0.29)	(0.39)
Effective electoral threshold	0.11	−0.22	−0.43	−0.04	8.42	−1.26	−14.13*	2.11
	(0.13)	(0.17)	(0.28)	(0.11)	(10.42)	(1.92)	(5.90)	(12.21)
Direct public funding for leg. parties only	0.07	−0.85*	−1.03*	−0.28	1.36	−1.19*	−4.21*	0.19
	(0.22)	(0.28)	(0.40)	(0.19)	(2.36)	(0.52)	(1.21)	(2.74)
Effective number of parties	−0.03	0.15*	0.19*	0.05	−0.22	0.11	0.62*	0.03
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.46)	(0.10)	(0.24)	(0.53)
No of zero categories	−0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	−0.05	0.08*	0.01	0.07
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.17)	(0.03)	(0.10)	(0.20)
Different party families	0.07	0.24	0.50	0.29*	1.45	0.28	−0.43	4.36*
	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.29)	(0.14)	(1.67)	(0.34)	(0.94)	(1.95)
Splinter in government	−0.44	−0.07	−0.68	−0.36	−1.79	−0.16	−4.91*	−2.92
	(0.29)	(0.28)	(0.54)	(0.25)	(3.06)	(0.62)	(2.05)	(3.51)
Multiple splits	−0.57*	−0.31	−0.01	−0.44*	−5.09*	−0.15	−1.40	−2.67
	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.32)	(0.17)	(2.00)	(0.33)	(1.04)	(2.35)
Previous vote	0.89*	0.10	0.45	0.77*	0.53*	0.02	0.09*	0.66*
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.23)	(0.12)	(0.08)	(0.01)	(0.04)	(0.09)
Party-level variance	0.00	0.21	0.12	0.00				
Election-level variance	0.00	0.07	0.36	0.00				
Country-level variance	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00				
Residual variance	0.45	0.27	0.26	0.33				
Number of parties	66	62	41	66				
Number of elections	44	44	33	44				
Number of countries	11	11	11	11				
N	85	110	52	85	85	110	52	85
Log Likelihood	-103.06	-131.07	-68.68	-92.70				

Note: dependent variables in Models 1-4 are logged vote shares of rump and splinter parties and the variables capturing the share of splinter MPs, membership-electorate ratio, party age and effective threshold are also logged in these models. MM-estimator used for robust regression models. $^*p < 0.05$

successor parties when the rump party is in government (Model 8) provides further evidence that poor economic performance leads incumbent rump parties to lose votes not to their splinters, but to other parties in the system.

However, the arguments in the literature on the importance of cleavage structures and voter partisanship for new party success provide limited leverage for understanding electoral competition after splits. Thus, although according to Model 21 rump leftist parties that compete in the environments of relatively high trade union density lose fewer votes in Central and Eastern Europe (in line with theoretical expectations), the same variable has a negative effect on the vote share of rump parties in Western Europe (Model 13) and in neither sub-sample it is a significant predictor of the support of splinter parties. The evidence that the age of the parent party affects the support of either rump or splinter parties is also limited.

Turning to institutional explanations, electoral system disproportionality has no effect on the vote share of rump or splinter parties, but the public funding regime that favours legislative parties reduces the support of splinter parties, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. These findings indicate that the effects of "funding parity" on new and small party success (Potter and Tavits, 2015) are also applicable to splinter parties.

The effective number of parties is also related to the individual but not combined electoral performance of rump and splinter parties. Specifically, the estimates of Model 5 indicate that the electoral support of rump parties decreases by 0.84 percentage points for each additional "effective party" - or by 3.8 points when the effective number of parties increases from the 10th to the 90th percentile of the observed distribution (3.1 and 7.6 parties, respectively).[16] Furthermore, a higher effective number of parties increases the electoral performance of splinter parties (the effect is present in both regions), although the substantive size of the effect is rather modest (each additional effective party increases the support of splinter parties by 0.13 percentage points according to Model 6). Overall, these results indicate support to the argument in literature on initial success of new parties (Mainwaring, Gervasoni and España-Najera, 2016) that the supporters of the parent party are more likely to support the new splinter party when party system fragmentation is high.

Another party competition variable - ideological families of successor parties - is a statistically significant predictor of the total vote share of successor parties (although in the analyses for Western

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[16]However, the effect is not statistically or substantively significant in the post-communist sub-sample.

Europe only) and, in some models, of the support of splinter parties (Model 2). The stronger effect in post-communist countries may be a consequence of lower diversity in parties' positions (Roberts, 2010) and lower dimensionality of party systems (Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012) in this region, which allows new splinter parties to attract more voters if they provide ideological innovations as compared to their parent parties. However, there was no evidence that the third variable of party competition - the diversity of established parties' programmes - is important for the outcomes of electoral competition after splits. In combination these findings provide some support to the arguments in the research on new parties on the impact of policy and issue competition on new party success.

Among the control variables, the vote share of the parent parties has a strong effect on the support of rump parties and the combined support of successor parties but not on the vote share of splinter parties. These results support the descriptive patterns presented in Figure 1. In contrast, the presence of splinter parties in government seems to be inconsequential for the support of either rump or splinter parties.

Conclusion

This study aimed to map the patterns of party electoral performance in the first election after party fission and to explain the variation in them. The cross-national analysis of 25 countries in Europe suggests a number of new results and important implications. First, the study shows that the patterns of electoral competition after splits in Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe are quite similar, thus providing an important contribution to the debate on the differences between the two regions in terms of their parties and party systems.

Second, the study finds that splinter parties, on average, attract limited support. However, those parties that include a substantial number of legislators from the parent party and build at least some organization on the ground are more electorally successful. The electoral success of splinter parties also depends on political opportunity structures, such as party system fragmentation and favourable public party funding regimes, but no support was found for demand-side explanations. Given the substantial evidence in line with the electoral demand, institutional and party competition explanations of new party electoral performance, the findings of the present research suggest that

the factors explaining the electoral support of genuinely new and splinter parties may be different.

Third, the study also shows that most parties withstand the electoral competition after party splits relatively unscathed. Nevertheless, a split may be highly damaging if the party loses a substantial share of its legislators to the splinter party and if it lacks a large strong membership. Splits also do not affect the well-established effect of economic indicators on the electoral support of government parties. However, apart from party system fragmentation, the relevance of institutional and party competition factors explaining the support of rump parties is limited. By addressing a previously under-researched but important question of how parties perform after splits, the present study makes an important contribution to the literature on party electoral persistence.

Finally, the study also demonstrates that the combined support of rump and splinter parties in the first election after the split is on average close to the electoral performance of the parent party in the last election before fission. However, other parties in the system are more likely to benefit from splits of their competitors if the latter splits multiple times in the same electoral term, lack large memberships and represent similar ideologies. These findings shed light on the broader electoral consequences of fission and legislative party switching in the party system beyond the electoral fate of splinter parties or the parties that experience splits.

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