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How established parties reduce other parties' electoral support: the strategy of parroting the pariah

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ABSTRACT

In every democracy, established political parties are challenged by other parties. Established parties react in various ways to other parties' presence. A key hypothesis in the relevant literature is that established parties can decrease another party's electoral support by parroting it, i.e. adopting its core policy issue position. This article argues, and demonstrates empirically, that this hypothesised effect mainly occurs in the event that a critical prerequisite is in place. Parroting a party decreases its support only if that party is ostracised at the same time. The article classifies a party as ostracised if its largest established competitor systematically rules out all political cooperation with it. Analysing 296 election results of 28 West European parties (1944–2011), evidence is found for a parrot effect – however, concerning ostracised parties only. On several occasions established parties have substantially decreased another party's support by simultaneously parroting that party and ostracising it.

KEYWORDS Anti-immigration parties; Communist parties; elections; party strategy; niche parties

In each democracy around the world, only a few political parties dominate the electoral arena. Their dominant position is almost constantly challenged by other parties. Many of these challenger parties fall under the rubrics of 'anti-political-establishment parties' (Schedler 1996) and 'niche parties' (Meguid 2005). These two party labels have in common that they mainly include anti-immigration and Communist parties (e.g. Abedi 2004; Ezrow 2008).¹ Their electoral performance partly depends on established parties' reactions to them (Meguid 2008). Although established parties respond in various ways, previous studies have mainly focused on *issue-based* reactions. A key hypothesis in the

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relevant literature is that established parties can decrease a challenger party's electoral support by adopting its core policy issue position (e.g. Meguid 2005). We call this the *Parrot Hypothesis*.

However, if established parties copy a rival's key policies, they have no guarantee that the challenger's voters will switch to one of the established parties – not even those voters who previously voted for the challenger party in order to have these policies enacted (see Kedar 2009). This is because policy-oriented voters face countervailing pressures in that case. They do not only have incentives to vote for an established parrot party, but also to vote for the challenger party again. On the one hand, the established parties may be better positioned to implement the desired policies because of, among other things, their greater experience in policy-making (see Meguid 2008). On the other hand, voters may trust the challenger party more than established parrot parties in trying to enact these policies. After all, these policies have always been key to the challenger party's agenda, and not to the established parties' agenda.

There is a particular condition, however, under which the established parrot parties are surely more attractive to policy-oriented voters than their challenger rival. That is the condition that established parties systematically ostracise the challenger party so that the latter is unable to affect policy-making. In that case, policy-driven voters² have no reason to vote for the parroted party: the only option to possibly have their desired policies enacted is to vote for a parrot. In this article, we thus argue that the hypothesised parrot effect only occurs in the event that a critical prerequisite is in place. Parroting a challenger party reduces its support only if it is ostracised at the same time. The analysis reported in this article provides empirical evidence in support of this hypothesis, which we call the *Parroting the Pariah Hypothesis*.

Let us consider some examples. Between 2007 and 2010 the major French, Flemish, Danish and Austrian parties adopted tough immigration stances. As predicted, the French National Front (FN) vote and the Flemish Interest (VB) vote plummeted. However, the vote for the Danish People's Party (DF) and the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) went up. Similarly, between 1949 and 1953 the main German, Swiss, Finnish and Icelandic parties embraced the idea of economic planning. Consistent with the Parroting Hypothesis, the German and Swiss Communists subsequently lost more than a third of their national vote share. In contrast with that hypothesis, their Finnish and Icelandic comrades did not lose votes. What the FN, the VB and the German and Swiss Communists have in common is that they were consistently ostracised. The DF, the FPÖ and the Finnish and Icelandic Communists were not.

In this article, we add to the relevant literature in four ways. First, existing analytical frameworks, most importantly spatial theories of electoral behaviour, revolve around *issue-based* established party reactions to a challenger party such as parroting that party. We refine spatial models to encompass a *non-issue-based* response with which parroting can be combined, ostracising the party. We

define ‘ostracising’ a party as systematically refusing to cooperate with that party politically. Second, we empirically test propositions derived from this refined framework. In doing so, we demonstrate that two core hypotheses from the literature do not hold up while a rival hypothesis does. Third, in our analysis we include an often-ignored challenger party subset, Cold War Communists. These parties, many of which were ostracised, have typically been neglected in studies of challenger parties.³ Fourth, compared to earlier work we expand the empirical analysis by analysing more data points. We take into account more parties as well as a longer time period, which provides us with more statistical leverage compared to earlier studies.

The Parroting the Pariah Effect is important beyond its scientific relevance. First, many challenger parties are controversial, accused of political extremism or violence. Second, parroting them is equally controversial. Third, ostracising parties is controversial as well. It may keep politicians from government participation, and from functioning effectively in bodies to which they were elected. It therefore implies a (justified or unjustified) restriction of political competition (see Fennema and Maussen 2000) – and such competition is widely considered a necessary condition for democracy (e.g. Dahl 1971). This calls for maximally informed decisions on whether or not to ostracise a specific party – which requires knowledge about the electoral effects of such decisions. The findings reported in this article may inform public debates about how democratic systems should deal with such parties.

The parrot effect

Several scholars have posited some version of what we call the Parrot Hypothesis (e.g. Meguid 2005). This hypothesis is based on the dominant type of theory here: spatial theories of electoral competition (following Downs 1957). Spatial theories predict that a challenger party loses votes when aped by established parties.⁴ These theories include proximity theory (e.g. Enelow and Hinich 1990), directional theory (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989) as well as position, salience and ownership (PSO) theory (Meguid 2005). The last-mentioned theory begins from the notion that a challenger party has a core issue on which it mobilises voters (Meguid 2005, 2008). Established parties can react in various issue-based ways. What is relevant here is the claim that these parties can steal votes from the challenger party by copying its position on the issue. This, Meguid (2008) argues, is because voters decide on the basis of their familiarity with the party and its governing experience in that case and therefore prefer an established party to a challenger one. Meguid (2005) demonstrates this effect based on data from 17 Western European countries between 1970 and 1998. According to her PSO theory as well as her empirical findings, both the country’s main left-wing and main right-wing party should parrot the challenger

party for this effect to occur. Thus, this is slightly different from the effect implied by the other theories, which is under investigation in this study.

Historically, parroted parties have included anti-immigration and Communist parties, among others. Anti-immigration parties, for example, did well in elections in the 2000s in France, Flanders, Denmark and Austria and were subsequently parroted, as mentioned above (see also van Spanje 2010; Han 2015; Abou-Chadi 2016). By the end of the decade, none of these countries' major parties failed to criticise the ideal of the multicultural society in their manifesto. As another case in point, Communists fared well in the first post-war elections in Germany, Switzerland, Finland and Iceland. As mentioned above, the main left-wing and right-wing parties in each of these four countries shifted to the left on the issue of economic planning in the election that followed (own analysis of data from Volkens *et al.* 2014).

Pariah parties

Spatial theories' main focus is on *issue-based* tactics. However, applying issue-based tactics is not the only way in which established parties react to a challenger party. Such a party often faces *non-issue-based* responses as well. A common non-issue-based reaction is to ostracise the challenger party. Examples of ostracised parties include anti-immigration and Communist parties. Several *anti-immigration parties* are currently being ostracised. For instance, the FN is ostracised by all main French parties (Mayer 2013). As another example, the VB has been completely isolated since five other Belgian parties signed a formal agreement to ostracise the party in 1989 (Damen 2001). And *Communist parties* were ousted from government coalitions across Western Europe in 1947 and most of them subsequently were ostracised (Tannahill 1978) – for example, in Germany and Switzerland.

Of all scholars who study challenger parties, only a few mention this ostracism. One of these few is Downs (2001, 2002, 2012). Downs distinguishes between 'engage' and 'disengage' strategies of the establishment, the latter being either to 'ignore' or to 'isolate' the challenger party. In his view, isolating strategies can be divided into 'legal restrictions' (*de jure*) and 'blocking coalitions' (*de facto*). Clearly, ostracising a party is a 'de facto isolation' reaction. That said, in this study we see ostracising a party as encompassing more than just pacts to block government coalitions with it (for such 'anti-pacts', see Debus 2007; Martin and Stevenson 2001). Ostracising a party often also involves various other measures. Many Cold War Communists, for instance, 'were excluded not simply from governments and from governing majorities but from regular participation in bodies to which they were elected' (McInnes 1975: 167).

Indeed, many cases of ostracism cannot be convincingly linked to coalition blocking. For instance, the FN and the VB as well as the German and Swiss Communists were fringe parties rather than potential governing partners at the

time that challenger parties agreed to ostracise them. Thus, we extend Downs' coalition blocking category to, more generally, systematic refusals to cooperate politically. We consider a party ostracised only if it is ruled out from all political cooperation. Cooperation between parties commonly includes – but is not limited to – joint press releases, electoral alliances, joint legislative activities, asking support for such activities, and giving support regarding such activities. All these forms of cooperation have been explicitly mentioned in, for example, Belgian parties' formal agreement to ostracise the VB in 1989 (Damen 2001: 92).

The scarce literature on non-issue-based established party reactions is almost exclusively about reactions to *anti-immigration parties* (e.g. Downs 2012; Eatwell and Mudde 2004). However, various types of parties have faced ostracism – including fascist, socialist and Nazi parties (Ingraham 1979). In this article, we therefore examine two major challenger party types in post-war established democracies: anti-immigration and Communist parties (see Adams *et al.* 2006; Ezrow 2008). In the following, we refer to these parties as 'challenger parties'.

The parrot effect and pariah parties

Established parties might combine the (issue-based) reaction of parroting and the (non-issue-based) reaction of ostracism. This means that their efforts to control the electoral marketplace can be divided up according to four possible responses to challenger parties. These are being parroted, being ostracised, both, or neither. This is obviously a simplification of reality, as each of these categories lumps together several subcategories of established party reaction. In making our argument, however, we consider it a useful simplification. Figure 1 sums up the possibilities.

Established parties can turn a challenger party that is neither parroted nor a pariah (A) into a parroted party that is not a pariah (B), a pariah that is not parroted (C), or a parroted pariah (D). In this article, we argue that a challenger party's electoral support is not reduced unless it is simultaneously parroted and treated as a pariah (D).

This expectation is based on instrumental accounts of rational voting (e.g. Enelow and Hinich 1990; Shepsle 1991). That said, we acknowledge that expressive accounts have explanatory power as well (e.g. Brennan and Hamlin 1998; Greene and Nelson 2002). Although we do not deny the existence of expressive voting, or that there are voters who vote on the basis of their perceived identity,

	Not parroting challenger party	Parroting challenger party
Not treating challenger party as a pariah	A	B
Treating challenger party as a pariah	C	D

Figure 1. A typology of established party responses to the existence of challenger parties.

electoral effects of parroting a party and of ostracising it are expected to occur among voters who primarily vote in order to influence policy-making.

How does a policy-oriented voter who agrees with the challenger party's position on its core policy issue react to each of the four scenarios?

If the challenger is neither parroted nor a pariah (A), the voter is expected to vote for it, for one of two reasons. Either the voter expects the challenger to have what Sartori (1976) calls 'coalition potential': the challenger may – in government or otherwise – cooperate with other parties to implement the policy the voter desires. Or the voter expects the challenger to have, in Sartori's terminology, only 'blackmail potential': the challenger may influence established parties' policies. If the party has coalition potential, the voter's vote would serve to maximise the challenger's policy power. If the party has mere blackmail potential, that vote would be a signal to other parties that parties copying a challenger's key policy issue stance would be more likely to receive the vote. Either way, the voter would vote for the challenger.

If the challenger party is parroted but not a pariah (B), the second reason disappears. In this scenario, it does not matter for the voter whether or not the challenger has blackmail potential because the voter's preferred policies are already offered by other parties. The voter is pressurised to switch to a parrot to the extent that s/he thinks that that party will be better able to implement the preferred policy in light of its greater policy-making experience (see Meguid 2008), and to stick with the challenger instead to the extent that the voter discounts current policy positions of parties that have previously held different positions (see Tomz and van Houweling 2010).

If the challenger party is a pariah but not parroted (C),⁵ the first reason disappears. In this scenario, the challenger lacks coalition potential. The voter is expected to abstain if s/he feels that its lack of *direct* influence on policy-making is more important, and to keep on voting for the pariah if s/he feels that the *indirect* influence on policy-making it still has is more important.

If the challenger party is a parroted pariah (D), both reasons disappear. In this scenario, the challenger has neither blackmail potential nor coalition potential. The voter is hypothesised to switch to the parrot if s/he (still likes that party enough and) believes the party is willing to implement the preferred policy, and to abstain if s/he does not. The voter will not vote for the parroted pariah in either case, because for policy-oriented voters, a vote for a parroted pariah is a wasted one. The FN experienced the consequences of this mechanism in 2007 (see Mayer 2007).

Parroting *on its own* should not work.⁶ If established parties merely copy a rival's key policies, they cannot count on that party's voters to switch to an established party, as these voters have no reason to doubt that the parroted party is still committed to its own key policies. It is plausible to assume that the party retains its 'issue ownership' (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Petrocik 1996), i.e. that voters still consider the party competent in handling its core policy

issue. Regardless of these parties' greater experience with implementing policies in general, policy-driven voters are not expected to abandon the challenger party as long as it has some chance of implementing their preferred policies. In Denmark, for instance, the DF has ample policy influence (e.g. Albæk 2003). In negotiations with challenger parties, it may strike policy deals about its core issues, which concern immigration. Therefore, the DF is hardly vulnerable, if at all, to challenger parties hijacking its immigration policy proposals: Even when they exactly copy these proposals, a likeminded voter has no reason to trust these parties more than the DF when it comes to implementing them. On this point, our theoretical expectation diverges from Meguid's (2008: 26), who asserts that her PSO theory – including the parrot effect – works (the same) for all challenger parties.

Ostracism *on its own* should not work either. To explain this, let us go back to the example of the FN. Because a party in a multiparty system cannot substantially affect policy-making unless it cooperates with other parties, FN has minimal policy influence. However, a vote for the party is not necessarily useless for policy-oriented voters. Indeed, an FN vote might produce a particularly powerful signal, as large numbers of votes for a pariah create considerable media attention. Thus, a pariah's signalling function compensates for its lack of direct policy influence. The extent to which it compensates, or even overcompensates, is expected to depend on party characteristics that influence this signalling power. Our prediction on this point nuances the common expectation that ostracism generally damages the targeted party (e.g. Art 2011).

Similar arguments have been made in past research. However, they have been based on few observations and have never been rigorously tested. In a study of two parties, Art (2006: 8) posits that 'the most effective strategy' to 'combat right-wing populist challengers' is a combination of ostracism and parroting. Pauwels (2011), based on interviews with 42 voters, attributes the VB's 2010 demise to its isolated position combined with other Flemish parties copying its issue agenda. He also suggests that the same might have happened to the FN in 2007. In this article, we provide evidence for these ideas. We do so using more data than any previous analysis. Furthermore, we theorise about the mechanism underlying this effect. In addition, we demonstrate that the effect holds up not only for right-wing parties but also for left-wing ones, and in various political contexts, suggesting that this is a general phenomenon.

It may seem difficult to combine parroting, on the one hand, with ostracism, on the other. However, it is perfectly possible for skilled politicians to do so. This is because the ostracism is not necessarily based on the policies that the challenger party offers. It often has to do with other characteristics of the party that are labelled 'beyond the pale', including *how* the policies are proposed. Just as an example, in 1991 Dutch main right-wing leader Frits Bolkestein combined 'the same' criticism of Islam as anti-immigration party leader Hans Janmaat with consistently ruling out all political cooperation with Janmaat, who was

systematically ignored by all members of parliament (Tillie 2008: 6). The current consensus is that this was a profitable strategic move (Tillie 2008). Bolkestein remained the main right-wing party's leader for another seven years.

Hypotheses

Our expectations diverge from predictions in the literature about the effects of established party reaction to challenger parties on election outcomes.⁷ We start with a hypothesis about an issue-based reaction, the kind of response that standard spatial models of electoral competition (e.g. Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1990) typically focus on. The ideological positioning of the challenger's 'largest mainstream competitor' is key in spatial models (van der Brug *et al.* 2005). For rightist challengers, the largest mainstream competitor is the largest party on the right-wing side of the country's political spectrum. For leftist ones, it is the country's Social Democratic party. Based on these models, it is expected that its largest mainstream competitor can reduce a challenger's electoral support by parroting it. This has been argued in cross-national studies of anti-immigration parties in Western Europe. However, the evidence has been mixed (Carter 2005; van der Brug *et al.* 2005). Although we have theoretical reasons to expect that this will not work unless a party is also ostracised (see above), we nonetheless test this often-stated proposition. Hence our first hypothesis:

H1: If a challenger party is parroted, its electoral support decreases.

Turning to non-issue-based reactions to challenger parties, Art (2011: 46) argues that ostracism affects anti-immigration party recruitment.

With a cordon sanitaire in place, it is difficult to imagine how anyone who cares about policy-making would run for municipal office on a far-right ticket ... When a cordon sanitaire is not in place, however, joining a radical right party can be an attractive option for moderates and opportunists.

As a result, ostracism might inhibit an anti-immigration party's electoral success – no matter the mainstream parties' issue-based tactics. After all, the ostracised parties' isolated position prevents them from recruiting 'the type of activists they need to succeed' (Art 2011: 49). This is a compelling argument. As mentioned above, we believe that a direct effect also plays a role here: policy-driven voters are expected not to support an ostracised party, as it is unable to get their preferred policies enacted. On the other hand, we expect such effects to be countered by ostracised parties' signalling function (see above). No convincing evidence has been found in cross-national studies for negative net effects of ostracism of parties on their electoral support (Downs 2002; van Spanje and van der Brug 2009). Because this has been tested in only two studies, and only concerning anti-immigration parties, we formulate a second hypothesis, the *Pariah Hypothesis*:

H2: If a challenger party is treated as a pariah, its electoral support decreases.

This article's core argument, however, is about an expected effect of the combination of parroting and ostracism. Our refinement of spatial theories allows for the possibility that established parties ostracise a challenger and parrot it (i.e. adopt its core policies) at the same time. The adopting of a pariah party's policy pronouncements by its largest mainstream competitor is expected to negatively affect the pariah's support. This is in line with the claims by Art (2006: 8) and by Pauwels (2011) mentioned above. A third hypothesis is formulated:

H3: If a challenger party is parroted and treated as a pariah, its electoral support decreases.

Operationalisations

We select 13 anti-immigration parties from the 15 Western European countries that have held consecutive free and fair elections since World War II. These are all the Western European parties that, according to reliable and valid data, fulfil two criteria: they are anti-immigration and attach much importance to immigration issues, as attested by the results of various expert surveys conducted in the past (see van Spanje 2011a).⁸ In addition, we include in each of the countries under study the largest party that defines itself as 'communist' – no matter the precise meaning that it may attribute to this term. This leads us to study the same parties as other studies of West European Communist parties (e.g. Tannahill 1978). We focus on party competition at the *national* level, as does Meguid (2005, 2008) and comparable studies (Adams *et al.* 2006; Ezrow 2008).⁹ This makes sense, as the national level is where inter-party behaviour is bound to have the greatest impact on the electorate. After all, both voters and parties consider national elections the most important elections (see Reif and Schmitt 1980).

Just as Meguid (2005, 2008) does, we measure parroting and other issue-based tactics in a valid and reliable way, using Comparative Manifesto Project items (Volkens *et al.* 2014). Where possible, we use the same items as Meguid does. For anti-immigration parties, the tactics are coded based on the proportion of the main right-wing parties' manifesto devoted to item 608 (anti-multiculturalism). If the main right-wing party mentions multiculturalism more negatively than the election before, its reaction is coded parroting. Concerning Communist parties, we examine the item called *Market regulation* (item 403).¹⁰ If the Social Democratic party mentions market regulation more than the election before, its reaction is coded parroting. The parroting of a challenger party¹¹ turns out to be quite a common tactic, occurring in 68 out of 296 observations (23%).

Turning to the non-issue-based 'ostracism' response, the challenger parties are classified as 'ostracised' or not based on an assessment of their largest

mainstream rival's reactions. The attitude of the mainstream right is generally crucial for anti-immigration parties' chances of influencing policy-making, and the mainstream left's attitude for Communist parties' chances. This is because voters' party choice is not expected to be affected by the mere fact that ideologically remote parties keep a challenger party at arm's length as long as its natural allies do not.

To measure the ostracism of challenger parties, we conducted a survey of party experts.¹² The experts were carefully selected on the basis of the websites of universities in each country under study. We provided the experts with our definition of ostracism mentioned above, and asked them to assess whether or not the (specified) anti-immigration or Communist party in the country of their expertise was ostracised or not by the (specified) mainstream right-wing or left-wing party at the national level at several (specified) time points at which national-level elections were held in the country. The answer options were 'yes' and 'no', and the experts were asked to answer each question with the actual behaviour of the party leadership in mind. The survey was thus designed with a view to ensuring maximum validity (Steenbergen and Marks 2007). The overall response rate of 149 useful replies to 313 participation requests (48%) is comparable to that of similar expert surveys conducted in the past (e.g. Hooghe *et al.* 2010; Lubbers 2001). Table 1 sums up the survey results.

As it turns out (not shown), challenger parties were ostracised in 135 out of 296 elections (45%). The agreement between experts is considerable. Not even one expert classifies the Communist parties of Finland, Iceland or Italy as 'ostracised' at any point in time.¹³ Nor does any one of the experts categorise the Austrian FPÖ, the Progress Party and the DF in Denmark, the Northern League in Italy, or the Dutch List Pim Fortuyn as ostracised. We also have 100% agreement on all other Communist parties in the sense that all experts categorised as 'ostracised' the Communist parties of Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland for at least one election year.¹⁴ Between 84% and 100% of the experts were similarly in agreement with regard to the VB and Walloon National Front in Belgium, the French FN, German People's Union, Republicans in Germany, National Democratic Party of Germany and Swiss Democrats.¹⁵

There is some over-time variation in the ostracism of challenger parties, which is largely due to three factors. First, riding a wave of popularity following their fight against fascism in World War II, Communists were generally not ostracised in 1945 and 1946 (Fennema 1988). Second, in some countries their exclusion ended after international tension had subsided in the 1960s (McInnes 1975). By 1973, the ostracism of the Belgian, Danish, Dutch, French, Luxembourgian and Swedish Communist parties had come to an end, according to the experts. Third, it took quite some time for established parties to reach a formal agreement to not cooperate in any way with the VB and National Front in Belgium, and the FN in France. Before these agreements, the established

Table 1. The Communist and anti-immigrant parties under study, their largest mainstream competitor, and their ostracism coding.

Country	English translation of party name (abbreviation)	Largest mainstream competitor (abbreviation)	Ostracism	No ostracism
Austria	Communist Party of Austria (KPÖ)	Socialist/Social Democratic Party (SPÖ)	1953–1962 1970–1986	1945–1949 1966
Belgium	Communist Party of Belgium (KPB-PCB)	Socialist Party (BSP-PSB)	1949–1958	1946 1961–1987
Britain	Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB)	Labour Party (Lab)	1945–1987 1947–1971	1945
Denmark	Denmark's Communist Party (DKP)	Social Democrats (SD)	—	1973–1988
Finland	Finnish People's Democratic League (SKDL)	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	1951–1958	1945–1987
France	French Communist Party (PCF)	Socialist Party (SFIO/PS)	—	1945–1946 1962–1988
Germany	Communist Party of Germany (KPD/BdD/DFU/ADF/DKP)	Social Democratic Party (SPD)	1949–1983	—
Iceland	United People's Party – Socialist Party/People's Alliance (SF/AB)	Social Democratic Party (AF)	—	1946–1987
Ireland	Communist Party of Ireland (CPI)	Labour Party (Lab)	1951–1989	—
Italy	Italian Communist Party (PCI)	Socialist Party (PSI)	—	1948–1987
Luxembourg	Communist Party of Luxembourg (KPL-PCL)	Socialist Workers' Party (LSAP-POS(L))	1951–1959	1945–1948 1964–1989
Netherlands	Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN)	Labour Party (PvdA)	1948–1967	1946 1971–1986
Norway	Norway's Communist Party (NKP)	Labour Party (A)	1949–1969	1945
Sweden	Sweden's Communist Party/Left Party – Communists (SKP/Vpk)	Social Democratic Workers' Party (SAP)	1948–1956 1960–1964 1947–1987	1958 1968–1988
Switzerland	Swiss Labour Party (PdA-PST-POP-PSdL)	Social Democratic Party (SPS)	—	—
Austria	Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)	People's Party (ÖVP)	1991–2007	1956–2008
Belgium: Flanders	Flemish Bloc/Flemish Interest (VB)	Liberals & Democrats (PVV/MLD)	—	1981–1987
Belgium: Wallonia	National Front (FN)	Reformist Movement (PRL-FDF-MCC/MR)	1991–2010	1985–1987
Denmark	Progress Party (FrP), Danish People's Party (DF)	Liberals (V)	—	1973–2011
France	National Front (FN)	Union for a Popular Movement (UMP)	1988–2007	1973–1986
Germany	People's Party, Nat'l Democratic Party, Republicans (DVU,NPD,REP)	Christian Democratic Union (CDU-CSU)	1965–2009	—
Italy	Lombard League/Northern League (LL/LIN)	Christian Democracy (DC); Go Italy (FI)	—	1987–2008
Netherlands	List Pim Fortuyn (LPF)	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)	—	2002–2006
Switzerland	National Action/Swiss Democrats (NA/SD)	Farmers' Trade & Citizens'/People's Party (BGB/SVP)	1967–2003	—

Notes: The numbers in the last two columns indicate national-level elections in which the non-mainstream party participated. Reading example: the KPÖ was ostracised in all Austrian federal elections from 1945 until 1986 except for those in 1945, 1949 and 1966.

parties had largely ignored the VB (e.g. Maddens and Fiers 1998), the Belgian National Front (Delwit *et al.* 1998) and the French FN (Kestel and Godmer 2004).

Method

With regard to our data analysing strategy, we follow Meguid (2005, 2008). We aim to explain the challenger party's national vote share. To do so, we analyse all the 296 national-level elections that the 28 challenger parties under study contested between 1944 and 2011 (data from www.parties-and-elections.eu, and from Nohlen and Stöver 2010). When we simply view the data, parroting the pariah appears to be strikingly effective. We have identified 39 occasions (elections) in post-war Western Europe when the largest parties have reacted in this way to a challenger party. In only 21% of these 39 cases did the targeted party increase its support. In 54% of the 39 cases it actually lost at least a quarter of its vote share. These cases include the four examples mentioned above: the French FN in 2007, the VB in Flanders in 2010, and the Communist parties of Switzerland (1951) and Germany (1953). *Only* parroting a challenger party, or *only* treating the party as a pariah does not appear to matter. In these 125 cases combined, 38% increased support and only 23% lost a quarter. What seems to work is the combination of these responses.

However, the picture may be different when we control for other factors that are theoretically expected to affect changes in challenger party performance across the elections in question. We therefore perform multiple regression analysis. Our dependent variable consists of party-specific series of national election results. Our key independent variables include dichotomous identifiers that indicate for each election whether or not the challenger party was parroted by its largest mainstream competitor in the country (H1) and whether or not it was ostracised by that competitor at that election (H2) as well as the interaction of these two variables (H3).

To assess our hypotheses, we pool the data so as to obtain a so-called time-series cross-sectional data structure. The standard way of dealing with this kind of data and the many methodological problems associated with it (see Kittel 1999; Stimson 1985) is by performing OLS regression analysis using panel-corrected standard errors and including party dummies as well as a lagged dependent variable (Beck and Katz 1995, 1996; but see Beck 2007).¹⁶ Through the inclusion of the lagged dependent variable we control for parties' previous electoral performance. This is not only a conservative way of testing but also important, as we should be aware that any causality between ostracism and electoral performance may run both ways: a party's poor performance may mean that other parties do not need to cooperate with it, and might therefore enhance the party's chance of being ostracised.

We perform three series of analyses, one regarding all challenger parties, one concerning anti-immigration parties only, and one with regard to the Communists only. According to the Parroting Hypothesis, the parroting variable is theoretically predicted to have a negative impact. According to the Pariah Hypothesis, the pariah variable is expected to yield a negative effect. According to the Parroting the Pariah Hypothesis, the interaction of the parroting variable and the pariah variable should have a negative coefficient.¹⁷

We control for two *party characteristics*. First, some challenger parties were represented in the national parliament at the time of an election whereas others were not. The former group of parties thus had resources that the latter group of parties might not have had, such as paid staff or free media access, which is likely to make them more successful. If the parliamentary parties are unequally distributed among the four categories, this may contaminate our results. We would then perhaps attribute electoral success to, for example, being parroted instead of to being represented in parliament. Thus, we control for parliamentary representation.

Second, we control for a party's governing or opposition status because it has been shown that there is an electoral 'cost of governing' in Western European party systems (e.g. Nannestad and Paldam 2002; Paldam 1986; Powell and Whitten 1993; Rose and Mackie 1983; Strøm 1990). This means that, on average, parties in contemporary Western Europe lose votes after having participated in government. These costs have been shown to be even greater for Communist and anti-immigration parties (Bolleyer *et al.* 2012; Buelens and Hino 2008; Heinisch 2003; van Spanje 2011b). Thus, we control for the incumbency of the challenger party in each election result that we observe. A dichotomous variable is added, which identifies national government parties (data from Woldendorp *et al.* 1998).¹⁸

Regarding *contextual characteristics*, we also add two controls. Firstly, electoral system traits are expected to affect the electoral performance of challenger parties as well. Most notably, the more disproportional the electoral system, the fewer votes relatively small parties such as challenger parties will receive – without any help from Parroting the Pariah Effects. After all, an institutional environment where only large parties stand a chance of gaining seats in the national parliament provides potential challenger party voters with a strong incentive to strategically opt for one of the established parties, or to stay at home. The variable that we add here is the natural logarithm of the average electoral district magnitude. The data are from Bormann and Golder (2013) and from Johnson and Wallack (2012).

Secondly, we include the general economic measure of GDP growth. The reason to control for this basic economic measure is that the economic voting literature suggests that many voters take economic conditions into account when casting their ballot (van der Brug *et al.* 2007; Duch and Stevenson 2008). The expectation here is that voters blame incumbent parties for a poor economy,

from which challenger parties might benefit. The data are the GDP per capita in 1990 international Geary-Khamis dollars (The Maddison Project 2013).¹⁹

Results

The results of our analyses are presented in Table 2.

As we see in Table 2, challenger parties that are parroted and also treated as a pariah lose out. We find this regardless if we look at all parties (Models 2 and 4), anti-immigration parties only (Models 6 and 8), or Communist parties only (Models 10 and 12). Moreover, this conclusion holds no matter whether we include controls (Models 4, 8 and 12) or not (Models 2, 6 and 10) (the control variables generally yield the expected results and are not discussed at length in this article). Anti-immigration parties lose twice as much as Communists and all effects are greater than 1.4 percentage point and significant at the $p = 0.05$ level (one-tailed). This suggests that established parties can deal a blow to a challenger rival by parroting it and treating it as a pariah at the same time (H3).

Interestingly, only parroting a challenger party does not have the desired effect. No empirical evidence is found for the Parroting Hypothesis (H1). If anything, parroting a party seems to slightly strengthen that party. Turning to the Pariah Hypothesis (H2), treating a party as a pariah has different effects on anti-immigration parties than on Communists. On average, anti-immigration parties seem to benefit from being ostracised – in line with expectations by Mudde (2007) and Meguid (2008). These effects seem considerable yet would not have reached conventional levels of statistical significance if we had formulated a hypothesis that is the exact opposite of the Pariah Hypothesis (Models 5 and 7). Communists, by contrast, suffered from being isolated according to the model that includes control variables (Model 11). This does not only hold for our over-time analysis but also in between-party comparison (not shown), as at each point in time each ostracised Communist party received a smaller vote share than each non-ostracised counterpart, with only one exception – the powerful French PCF.

So, we can now be a little more precise in our assessment of the Parroting the Pariah Hypothesis. Established parties can hurt their challenger rivals by parroting them and treating them as a pariah at the same time. This means that they can make a challenger party suffer. In order to illustrate our findings, we calculate the predictive margins of challenger party electoral performance. We do so on the basis of the most relevant model, Model 4. See Figure 2 for the results.

In Figure 2 we see that there is a significant negative effect of being a parroted pariah (on the right). Being a parroted pariah has a negative effect, reducing its electoral performance with 0.9 percentage points on average (the difference between the two bars in Figure 2), all else held constant. This amounts to an 18% reduction compared to such a party's expected electoral performance.

Table 2. Models explaining the electoral performance of 28 challenger parties in 15 countries, 1944–2011.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
		All parties			Anti-immigration parties only			Communist parties only				
Previous performance challenger party	0.70** (0.07)	0.70** (0.07)	0.70** (0.07)	0.70** (0.07)	0.59** (0.11)	0.59** (0.11)	0.62** (0.10)	0.63** (0.10)	0.76** (0.06)	0.76** (0.06)	0.65** (0.06)	0.65** (0.06)
Parroted	0.05 (0.39)	1.01 (0.75)	0.10 (0.37)	1.25 (0.70)	-0.55 (0.79)	0.78 (1.18)	-0.68 (0.79)	0.74 (1.17)	0.39 (0.37)	1.32 (0.78)	0.24 (0.36)	1.15 (0.70)
A pariah	0.09 (0.44)	0.45 (0.42)	-0.51 (0.47)	-0.09 (0.47)	2.38 (2.03)	3.24 (2.00)	2.85 (1.95)	3.67 (1.75)	-0.35 (0.39)	-0.08 (0.38)	-1.54** (0.41)	-1.24** (0.39)
A parroted pariah		-1.73* (0.83)		-2.05** (0.81)		-3.05* (1.55)		-3.01* (1.51)		-1.49* (0.81)		-1.42* (0.73)
In parliament			0.08 (0.46)	0.36 (0.48)			-0.44 (1.77)	-0.32 (1.69)			-0.65 (0.35)	-0.42 (0.35)
In government			-1.34* (0.61)	-1.52** (0.60)			-2.39 (1.96)	-2.75 (1.94)			-1.08* (0.54)	-1.18* (0.55)
Electoral district magnitude in country			1.64** (0.48)	1.73** (0.48)			2.70** (1.08)	2.59** (1.05)			1.25** (0.49)	1.39** (0.50)
GDP per capita			-0.14** (0.05)	-0.13** (0.05)			0.00 (0.14)	-0.02 (0.13)			-0.22** (0.05)	-0.21** (0.05)
N parties	28	28	28	28	13	13	13	13	15	15	15	15
N obs	296	296	296	296	89	89	89	89	207	207	207	207
R-squared	0.5538	0.5634	0.5944	0.6074	0.4812	0.5032	0.5458	0.5665	0.6342	0.6423	0.6926	0.6994

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (one-tailed); panel-corrected standard errors shown within parentheses. Party dummies included in all models (not shown).

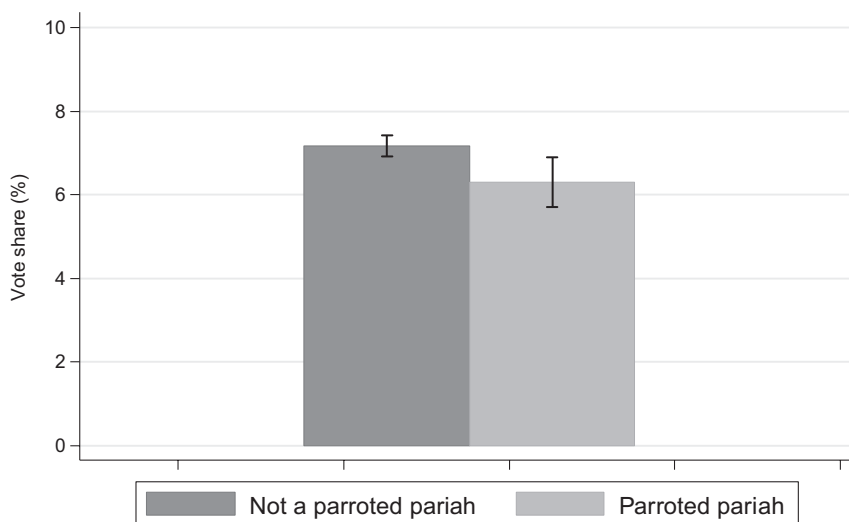


Figure 2. Predictive margins of electoral performance of challenger parties in 15 West-European countries, 1944–2011.

Note: Error bars represent 90% confidence bands.

Sensitivity analyses

Additional analyses show that our conclusions hold when using data and method used by Meguid (2008).²⁰ Furthermore, we perform several additional analyses to check the robustness of our findings. First of all, our results could be due to the inclusion of one particular country. To check this, we rerun our fourth model 15 times, each time excluding one of the countries from the analysis. The Parroting the Pariah variable has an average coefficient of $b = -2.05$, with a standard deviation of 0.31. The minimum value that the Parroting the Pariah coefficient takes on is $b = -2.82$ (when Denmark is excluded from the analysis), and the maximum value $b = -1.28$ (leaving out Austria). Notwithstanding the loss of cases at each re-estimation, the Parroting the Pariah Effect remains significant at the $p = 0.05$ level (one-tailed) regardless of which country is omitted from the analysis.

Second, it is plausible to argue that Green parties also belong in our analysis. We leave out the ecologist parties because they are arguably less anti-system and less politically extremist than many anti-immigration and Communist parties are, or were a few decades ago. In addition, and related to this, none of the Greens has been systematically ostracised by its largest established competitor as far as we can tell (see Debus 2007). This sharply contrasts with the anti-immigration and Communist parties, many of which have been ostracised by their established rivals for protracted time periods in post-war Western

Europe. Because of the absence of strong negative reactions to the Greens, adding them to the analysis is simply not helpful for our purposes. However, Green parties have been included in studies of ‘niche parties’ (e.g. Adams *et al.* 2006; Ezrow 2008; Meguid 2005) so by taking them into account we stand in a tradition of studying niche parties. Re-estimating Model 4 while including the Green parties results in a highly similar Parroting the Pariah Effect ($b = -2.00$; $SE = 0.81$). Adding the ecologists increases our dataset to 399 observations, and the effect reaches statistical significance at the $p = 0.01$ level (one-tailed).

Third, our conclusions may heavily depend on exactly how we divide the challenger parties into ostracised and non-ostracised ones. Although our classification is based on an extensive review of the secondary literature, cross-validated by the expertise of many anti-immigration party experts and Communist party experts, we check to see if our results hold when we apply a simple coding rule based on common knowledge. We assume for a moment that none of the challenger parties was ostracised except two categories: the classic cases of the Belgian, French and German anti-immigration parties, and all Communist parties in the 1950s. Does our story still hold up in that case? Yes, using this simplistic coding scheme we still find evidence for a Parroting the Pariah Effect. The corresponding interaction variable has a coefficient of $b = -2.15$ ($SE = 0.78$; significant at the $p = 0.01$ level, one-tailed) based on this ostracism coding, similar to the coefficient reported in Table 2 above ($b = -2.05$).

Conclusion

In this article, we have built on spatial theories of party competition, and have made suggestions to refine them. Using the much larger number of cases that are now available, we have looked beyond issue-based reactions to challenger parties. We have extended spatial theories by bringing in a non-issue-based response, consistently ostracising a party, and its interaction with an issue-based reaction, parroting a party. In doing so we have significantly furthered our understanding of party competition.

Does an established parties’ parroting of a challenger party decrease its support? We have found that, in the absence of systematic ostracism, it does not. On average, 28 West European anti-immigration and Communist parties did not lose electoral support as a result of established parties’ parroting strategies between 1944 and 2011 (H1). Our results suggest that the parrot effect only applies in the situation that a challenger party is consistently ostracised at the same time. Such ostracism occurs frequently. However, some party types often face ostracism while others never do. This explains why in some of her models Meguid (2005, 2008) finds a parrot effect concerning ‘radical right’ parties but not Green parties.

Our conclusions also explain null findings in previous studies of electoral effects of the ostracism of anti-immigration parties (Downs 2002; van Spanje

and van der Brug 2009). Ostracising a party (H2) yields only a small negative impact for Communist parties and no negative effect for anti-immigration parties. Only when the main parties in their country also parrot the pariah party does the latter incur substantial losses (H3). This conclusion is in line with Pauwels's (2011) suggestion and with observations in case studies. Art (2006), for instance, argued that the German Republicans suffered electorally as a result of being ostracised. We think this is correct, but only because their main rivals criticised multiculturalism at the same time. Similarly, Mudde (2007: 289) suggests that ostracism did not hurt the FN and the VB. That may have been the case up until 2007. More recently, the main right-wing and left-wing parties have been criticising multiculturalism, and the FN (in 2007) and the VB have lost many votes.

This said, we do find empirical support for H2 when we only look at Communist parties. Although the Communists performed even worse whenever they were *parroted* pariahs, they also did poorly whenever they were *non-parroted* pariahs. On average, ostracised Communists lost (in some of our models) while ostracised anti-immigration parties did not. Perhaps mass media access is crucial for ostracised parties. Whereas many anti-immigration parties receive much media attention, many Communist parties were ignored by the established mass media. For instance, the Communist Party of Belgium (PCB) was 'systematically excluded' from 'the mass media' (Hotterbeex 1988: 180). As another example, the Dutch government banned the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) from public broadcasting (Hoebink 2004: 671, 672; Verrips 1992: 100) for about two decades (Mol 1993). Such media boycotts may be important because without media attention, instrumental voters would be unable to send a policy-related signal to other parties and may therefore stop voting for the party. Further research is necessary on this point, however.

If the ostracism–accommodation combination is, on average, effective, why is it that established parties do not use this strategy more often? First, established parties face constraints in their desire to ostracise challenger parties. As a consequence of the uncertainty associated with electoral outcomes, a party cannot always be sure whether or not it will need to cooperate politically with a specific other party in order to reach its goals. Second, parties face constraints in co-opting challenger parties' policy agenda. Ostracism needs to be combined with parroting the pariah to have maximum electoral effect, but an established party is not always willing and able to apply such tactics. Copying a challenger party's issue stances while ostracising it is especially problematic for an established party. After all, if a party is so odious that it should be ostracised, co-opting its policy proposals does not seem particularly consistent or desirable. This said, it is certainly possible, as the Bolkestein versus Janmaat example shows.

On a final note, our finding has implications for those interested in the 'defence of democracy' (e.g. Capoccia 2005; Pedahzur 2004). Political elites can effectively prevent parties from gaining access to power by ostracising

them. After all, without collaboration from established parties, these challengers cannot get to power (as long as they do not hold a majority in parliament). In addition, the challenger parties lose votes, on average, when they are ostracised. And they lose even more when imitated at the same time. This is important to know, as antidemocratic parties have emerged in the past and may emerge again in the future. If their established rivals do not lose, or even gain votes on average, this would make parroting the pariah, where possible, an effective way for the political establishment to safeguard democracy – or just hold on to power.

Notes

1. In this article we report findings with as well as without Communist parties, as no consensus exists about the ‘niceness’ of these parties (Meyer and Miller 2015; Wagner 2012).
2. Although many voters are policy-oriented (e.g. Adams *et al.* 2005; Kedar 2009), we realise that some voters are not. However, for our argument it is not required that all voters are policy-driven – just that some substantial number of them are.
3. Whereas post-1989 Communist parties have been studied as ‘niche parties’ in past research (Adams *et al.* 2006; Ezrow 2008), pre-1989 Communist parties have not.
4. Another strand of the literature discusses the adjacent topic of mainstream parties aiming to induce strategic voting in response to the presence of challenger parties (e.g. Givens 2005).
5. It is certainly possible to ostracise a challenger without taking a stance on its key policy issue. This was, for example, the reaction of all Dutch mainstream parties to the emergence of the *Centrum Partij* in the early 1980s. At that place and time, immigration issues were such taboo that the established parties would commonly shy away from even mentioning them. At the same time these parties ruled out the *Centrum Partij* from all political cooperation. Indeed, whenever its leader stepped up to the microphone in parliament, all other parliamentarians left the chamber in protest.
6. A possible exception to this general rule may be that challenger parties that are too small to have coalition potential to begin with may lose votes when parroted, without needing to be ostracised. However, this effect would be too small to detect, precisely because the parties are so small.
7. In PSO theory, the argument is more complex. According to this theory, the parrot effect applies to both major parties’ policy-based tactics (Meguid 2005). If only one of the main parties copies the challenger party’s policy position, PSO theory holds that the electoral effect depends on the other main party’s issue-based tactics. Due to data restrictions, we focus on the argument made in older spatial models (limited to the largest mainstream competitor) in this article, leaving PSO theory’s more complicated propositions for future research to test on this point.
8. See van Spanje (2011a) for 12 parties. The thirteenth party is the Freedom Party (PVV) in the Netherlands. At the time of publication of van Spanje (2011a), there was a lack of readily comparable information on the party’s stance on immigration issues and the importance it attaches to these issues. However, we now have quite some information about the party from other sources. The only two PVV manifestos that have been coded thus far, from

2006 and from 2010, consisted of no less than 20% (2006) and 15% (2010) of law and order, and 15% (2006) and 14% (2010) of criticism of multiculturalism. These two were the largest categories by far, outnumbering the third largest category (national way of life: positive) two to one in both years. In addition, the leader and only member of the party, Geert Wilders, almost exclusively talks about multiculturalism, and always in a heavily critical way. Clearly, the PVV fulfilled both criteria for being an anti-immigration party. Thus, in this article we consider the party 'anti-immigration'. The party has never been ostracised; in fact, it was invited to support a minority government right after its second general election participation, in 2010 (see also van Heerden and Creusen 2014). The exclusion of the PVV from the analyses does not alter any of this article's conclusions.

9. With regard to this operationalisation of ostracism, it is problematic that parties may have been ostracised at other levels but not at the national level, or vice versa. Future research should address the question of to what extent such differences have occurred, and to what extent this changes our conclusions about voting behaviour in national-level elections.
10. We have also tested our hypotheses using other relevant Comparative Manifesto Project items, with similar results. Also, the use of continuous variables (i.e. the unmodified Comparative Manifesto Project items) results in findings that support our overall conclusions.
11. In the analyses presented, we code parroting only up to three times. This is because after that in all 14 remaining cases the parroted pariah was reduced to less than 1.5% of the vote, so that floor effects prevent us from precisely estimating the effect of parroting the pariah beyond that point. In four out of these 14 cases the party was already at 0%. Out of the remaining 10 parties, four lost more than 25% of their electoral support following being a parroted pariah, which is consistent with our argument.
12. Of course, there are several ways in which to collect these data other than by means of expert surveys (Mair 2001: 12–17). However, expert surveys have several advantages over the alternatives (Benoit and Laver 2006: 71–6; Mair 2001: 17).
13. Three out of four Italian Communist Party experts mentioned that the socialists were hostile to the party in the 1980s yet also highlighted that 'ostracism', as defined in this study, is not the appropriate label for this hostility.
14. Concerning seven Communist parties, experts did not all agree on the exact time period that the party was ostracised. In these cases, we coded the party 'ostracised' only in election years that all experts agreed that it was ostracised. For example, three French Communist Party experts said that the party was ostracised in 1951, 1956 and 1958, whereas three others thought this period was one election year longer, and a seventh one felt it lasted for yet another election year. We thus coded the party 'ostracised' from 1951 until 1958. Coding the ostracism of the seven parties in various other ways does not substantially change our results.
15. The parties were judged by eight party experts on average, ranging from three for the Austrian, Belgian and Luxembourgian Communists to 19 for the National Democratic Party and the Republicans in Germany (standard deviation equals five). The number of judgements is higher than the number of replies we received from the experts, as some experts were asked about several parties in the party system of their expertise.

16. Based on results of analyses using OLS regression combined with clustered robust standard errors, change models, multilevel analysis, difference-in-difference analysis or various matching techniques (so as to account for potential selection bias: it is possible that the outcome among the parroted pariahs systematically differs from the outcome among the other groups regardless of the established parties' strategies), we still find empirical evidence in support of H3, and no evidence supporting H1 or H2. The same holds when we exclude the party dummies from Model 4, and when we leave out the lagged dependent variable (or the variables concerning GDP growth and district magnitude, as the estimation of their effect may be problematic due to their almost time-invariant structure – see Kittel and Winner 2005).
17. Note that severe problems associated with multicollinearity are absent. The VIF statistics are 2.51 (parroting status), 2.91 (parroting the pariah status), 2.93 (pariah status) and 4.58 (previous performance).
18. The results of our analysis are robust to alternative model specifications that include another party characteristic, a party ideology variable that deals with the challenger party's attitude towards democracy. What Carter (2005) categorises as 'neonazi', 'neofascist' or 'authoritarian xenophobic' parties are coded 'antidemocratic'. Communist parties are put into categories on the basis of Tannahill (1978: 36–48). A Communist party is classified as 'antidemocratic' for the period that Tannahill (1978) calls that party 'revolutionary'. The inclusion of this variable does not change the conclusions with regard to any of the three hypotheses.
19. When we also control for two additional contextual factors regarding Models 5–8 (anti-immigration parties) our results remain substantively unchanged. These are immigration (Golder 2003; Knigge 1998; Lubbers *et al.* 2002) and unemployment rates (Golder 2003; Knigge 1998; Lubbers 2001; Lubbers and Scheepers 2005). We use the Golder (2003) dataset and extend it to the period under study on the basis of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) data on immigration and unemployment (for both, see www.oecd.org). The results do not change either when we add yet another factor to our analyses pertaining to Communist parties (Models 9–12). This is the idea that in the pre-Cold War era Communist parties fared better than after that. This singles out just two of the 207 elections in which Communist parties participated, leaving our conclusions unaffected.
20. In this study, we build on standard spatial modelling and focus on the proximal competitor's response only. However, we might want to build on PSO theory instead, considering the issue-based tactics of both major parties in each country and replicating Meguid's analysis so as to remain as close as possible to the relevant literature. When we perform additional analyses on the basis of Meguid (2008) the results are similar, with the H3 variable reaching an effect of -1.82 in Model 4, statistically significant at the $p = 0.01$ level (one-tailed).

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