

Is There a Newness Premium?

New Parties and Engagement on Facebook in Europe, 2010 to 2020

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Abstract

New parties are often said to do well on social media, which offers them an audience without the organisation and media access that established parties have. Do new parties' Facebook posts draw more engagement than those of established parties? I use 650,092 posts from 108 party pages and 186,939 posts from 74 party leaders' pages in 20 European countries, posted between 2010 and 2020 and exported from CrowdTangle in 2020, and measure a party's age from its first national or European Parliament election recorded in ParlGov. Compared with other parties in the same country and month, and holding constant vote share, government status and party family, parties within five years of their first election drew about 32% more interactions per post, but the estimate is imprecise and its confidence interval includes no difference. It depends on how a handful of parties are dated, it is smaller once the size of a page's audience is taken into account, and there is no evidence of it for populist parties or leaders' pages. Comparing parties with themselves, posts in a party's first years drew about 48% more than its later posts. This honeymoon comes mainly from parties first elected around 2010 and from the early 2010s: it is not found in posts from 2013 onwards, and it cannot be separated from these parties' electoral fortunes or from the growth of the platform. The evidence for a general newness premium on Facebook is therefore weak: new parties did not reliably out-perform established ones, and where they did, the advantage was brief.

Keywords: new parties; party age; Facebook; social media engagement; political parties; party leaders; Europe; CrowdTangle; ParlGov

1 Introduction

New parties have won a growing share of the vote in Western Europe ([Emanuele and Chiamonte 2018](#)), and since 2010 many have entered party systems across the continent, from Podemos and Vox in Spain to En Marche in France, Momentum in Hungary and the Brexit Party in Britain. Many of them grew up with social media, and it is often assumed that these platforms suit them: they offer an audience without the organisation, money and media access that established parties enjoy, and an image of novelty that fits the medium. Studies of the internet and party competition have long asked whether digital media

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equalise competition between small and large, new and old parties, or whether established parties carry their advantages online (Margolis and Resnick 2000; Gibson and McAllister 2015).

This paper asks a narrow version of that question. On Facebook, do posts by new parties draw more engagement than posts by established parties, once their size, status and ideology are taken into account? And if new parties enjoy a premium, does it last? My earlier work on populist parties included party age among its controls (Hotham 2026a), but did not examine the relationship in its own right.

I ask three questions using posts from 108 party pages and 74 leaders' pages in 20 European countries between 2010 and 2020. **RQ1.** Compared with other parties at the same time and place, do new parties draw more engagement per post? **RQ2.** Compared with themselves at other times, do parties draw more engagement in their first years? **RQ3.** Does any premium depend on the party's audience, ideology or period?

The answers are mostly negative. The difference between new and established parties is positive but imprecise and sensitive to choices of sample and coding. Within parties, there is a honeymoon in the first years after the first election, but it comes from the early 2010s and is not found in later years.

2 Background

The appeal of newness. New parties compete with established ones that have members, money, local organisation and regular access to news media (Bolleyer 2013). They can offer voters something the others cannot: newness itself, a promise of change that does not depend on a particular ideology (Sikk 2012).

Social media. Social media lower the cost of reaching an audience, which might favour parties without established channels. The evidence on whether the internet equalises party competition is mixed: early accounts expected established parties to carry their advantages online (Margolis and Resnick 2000), while later work found some equalising effects (Gibson and McAllister 2015). Research on European parties' Facebook pages shows that engagement depends on the content and style of posts (Bene et al. 2022), and my earlier work shows that it also depends on parties' size, government status and ideology (Hotham 2026a,b).

Expectations. If newness attracts attention, new parties' posts should draw more engagement than those of comparable established parties, and the advantage should fade as the party ages. Other processes could produce the same pattern. New parties' pages are often new pages, and a page that has just built an audience may have followers who are unusually engaged. New parties often rise and fall quickly at the polls, so a fading premium may reflect their electoral fortunes. And new parties that survive into the data may be the successful ones. The analysis tries to separate these where the data allow, which is not always.

3 Data

Pages and posts. The posts come from CrowdTangle lists of official party and party leader pages that I built for my doctoral research and exported in October 2020 (CrowdTangle Team 2020; Hotham 2021). I use posts from January 2010 to September 2020 by pages that I could link to a party in ParlGov (Döring and Manow 2024): 650,092 posts from 108 party pages and 186,939 posts from 74 leaders' pages, covering 127 parties in 20 countries (party pages in 17; Belgium, Denmark and Latvia appear only

through leaders' pages). Four pages of parties in Northern Ireland and Wales that are not in ParlGov are excluded.

Party age. I measure a party's age as the calendar year of the post minus the year of the party's first national or European Parliament election recorded in ParlGov. I call a party new in the calendar year of that election and the five years after (ages 0 to 5), and I group age into bands. Posts made before a party's first election are kept as a separate band, and in the main indicator count as new. Thirty-four party pages are new at some point in the data, from parties first elected between 2008 and 2020, and 24% of party posts come from new parties. ParlGov's first-election year can be ambiguous when a party is coded together with a predecessor, successor or alliance, when it contested an earlier election with a negligible vote, or when its first recorded election is later than its founding. I flag ten party pages where the year is uncertain on these grounds: the two Catalan nationalist parties, Compromís, EH Bildu and Ciudadanos in Spain, En Marche and Debout la France in France, USR in Romania, Levica in Slovenia and the Norwegian Greens, and show results without them.

Measures. The outcome is the number of interactions a post received (likes, comments, shares and emoji reactions), in logs. Controls are the party's vote share at the previous national election (in logs), an indicator for parties with no previous result, an indicator for parties in government, and the party family as coded in my earlier work. Page likes at the time of posting are recorded for most posts from 2016, about a fifth of posts in 2015 and almost none earlier.

4 Method

The first comparison is between parties at the same time and place. For post i by party p in country c and month m ,

$$\log(1 + Y_i) = \beta \text{New}_{pm} + X'_{pm}\gamma + \lambda_{cm} + \phi_{f(p)} + \tau_{\text{type}(i)} + \varepsilon_i, \quad (1)$$

where New_{pm} marks new parties, X_{pm} are the controls, λ_{cm} are country-month effects, ϕ party-family effects and τ post-type effects. The coefficient β compares new and established parties posting in the same country in the same month. The second comparison adds a page fixed effect, so that β compares a party's posts in its first years with its own later posts, relative to other parties in the same country-month. This is identified only by the 16 party pages that were new at the start of the data and older by the end. Standard errors are clustered by party throughout. Because only some clusters identify the estimates, I also report wild cluster bootstrap p -values (Rademacher weights, 4,999 draws, with the null imposed).

5 Results

Raw differences are small. The median post by a new party drew 184 interactions, compared with 169 for an established party.

5.1 New and established parties

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the estimates. Compared with other parties in the same country and month, new parties drew about 32% more interactions per post (0.28 log points, SE 0.25; wild bootstrap $p = 0.28$). The confidence interval runs from a small deficit to a large premium. The estimate moves a good deal with the sample. Without the ten pages with uncertain dates, it is about 100% (0.70, SE 0.22);

Table 1. Difference in interactions per post for parties within five years of their first election.

	Log points (SE)	%	N posts
<i>Compared with other parties in the same country-month</i>			
Party pages, main estimate	0.28 (0.25)	+32	650,092
posts with page likes (mostly 2016 to 2020)	0.25 (0.30)	+28	384,877
same posts, controlling for page likes	0.13 (0.20)	+13	384,877
excluding 10 pages with uncertain dates	0.70 (0.22)	+101	592,915
excluding posts before the first election	0.29 (0.24)	+34	623,505
excluding Spain	0.60 (0.15)	+83	518,777
populist parties only	-0.07 (0.24)	-7	158,987
non-populist parties only	0.35 (0.29)	+42	491,091
2010 to 2014	0.60 (0.35)	+82	187,132
2015 to 2020	0.18 (0.29)	+19	462,960
likes only	0.29 (0.23)	+33	650,092
comments only	0.22 (0.27)	+25	650,092
shares only	0.09 (0.25)	+10	650,092
Leader pages	-0.03 (0.43)	-3	186,910
<i>Compared with the same page at other times (page fixed effects)</i>			
Party pages	0.39 (0.18)	+48	650,092
excluding 10 pages with uncertain dates	0.48 (0.18)	+61	592,915
excluding Spain	0.56 (0.20)	+75	518,777
2010 to 2015	0.62 (0.31)	+86	244,849
2010 to 2019	0.65 (0.22)	+92	571,204
2013 to 2020	0.07 (0.16)	+7	547,942
2016 to 2020	-0.21 (0.18)	-19	405,243
posts with page likes	-0.14 (0.18)	-13	384,877
same posts, controlling for page likes	-0.02 (0.12)	-2	384,877
Leader pages	0.10 (0.17)	+11	186,910

Note: Post-level regressions of $\log(1+\text{interactions})$ on an indicator for a party in the calendar year of its first national or European Parliament election in ParlGov or the five years after, or before that election, with vote share at the last national election, an indicator for parties without a previous result, an indicator for government, and post-type fixed effects. The first panel adds country-month and party-family fixed effects; the second page and country-month fixed effects. Leader pages are coded by the age of the leader's party; 29 leader posts in singleton cells are dropped. Standard errors clustered by party (107 party clusters). Wild cluster bootstrap p -values for the two party-page main estimates are 0.28 and 0.05.

without Spain, which contributes many new parties, about 80%; without France, close to zero (0.06). Removing any other single country leaves it between 0.21 and 0.32, and removing any single new party between 0.23 and 0.46. On the posts with page likes, mostly from 2016, the estimate falls from 0.25 to 0.13 when page likes are controlled, consistent with part of any difference running through the size of new parties' audiences, though the estimates are too imprecise to say how much. Among populist parties, compared with other populists in the same country-month, the point estimate was close to zero (-0.07 , SE 0.24), and among other parties it was 0.35 (SE 0.29); the two do not differ clearly. There is no evidence that leaders of new parties drew more than other leaders (SE 0.43).

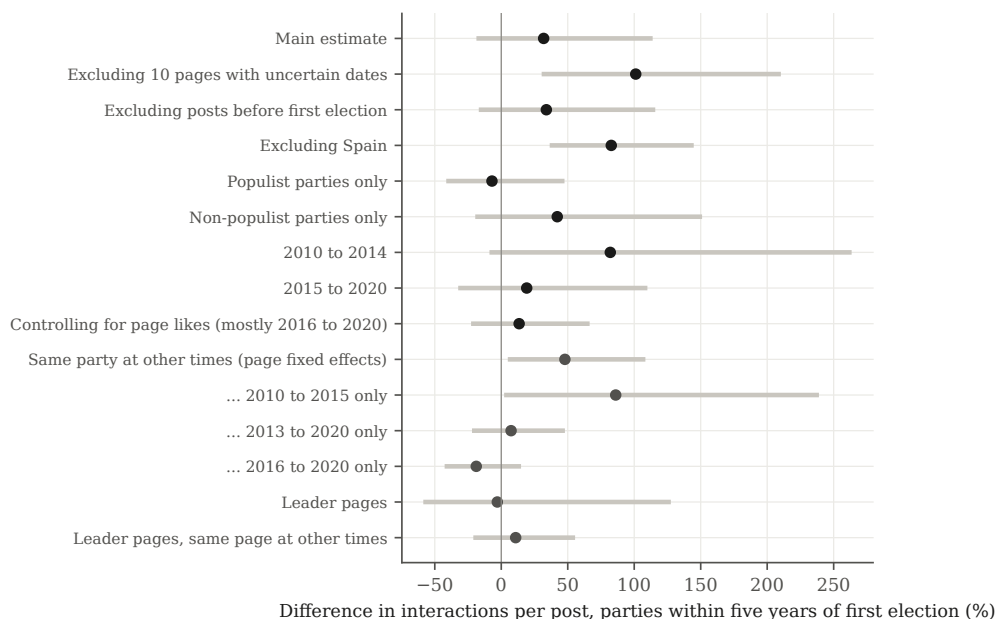


Figure 1. Difference in interactions per post between new parties and other parties, under different samples and specifications. Grey points compare a page with itself at other times, or refer to leaders' pages. Bars are 95% confidence intervals clustered by party.

Figure 2, left panel, shows the age profile. Parties in the year of their first election and the year after drew about twice as much per post as parties more than 40 years old, those two to three years from their first election about 60% more, and older parties about 20% more. Only the first of these is distinguishable from zero, and only just.

5.2 An early honeymoon

Comparing parties with themselves gives a clearer pattern. A party's posts in its first years drew about 48% more interactions than its later posts (0.39, SE 0.18; wild bootstrap $p = 0.05$), relative to other parties in the same country and month. The right panel of Figure 2 shows the premium falling: from more than double in the year of the first election and the year after to about 90% in years four and five and about 35% in years six to ten. With page and country-month effects, age, period and founding year cannot all be separated, and no page is observed both at ages 0 to 1 and at 11 to 20, so the shape of this profile should be read with caution.

The honeymoon comes from a particular group of parties and years. The pages that identify it are those of parties first elected between 2008 and 2014, among them UPyD, the Pirate Party in Germany, Jobbik, LMP, Podemos and Vox. For the six parties first elected in 2014, the later period is only 2020, a year

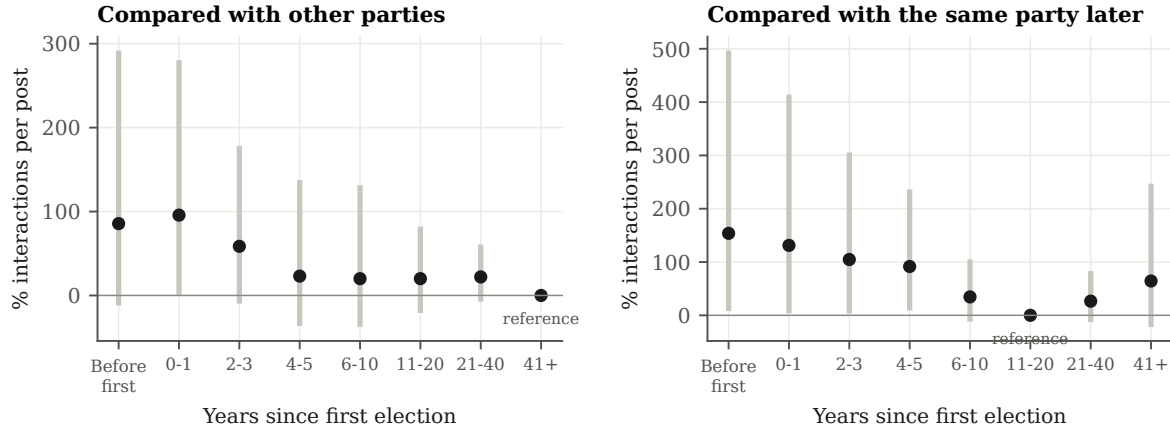


Figure 2. Interactions per post by years since the party’s first election. Left: compared with other parties in the same country-month, relative to parties more than 40 years old. Right: compared with the same party at other ages (page fixed effects), relative to ages 11 to 20. Bars are 95% confidence intervals clustered by party.

shaped by the pandemic; excluding 2020 makes the estimate larger (0.65, SE 0.22), so it rests mainly on the earlier cohort. Restricting the data to 2010 to 2015 gives 0.62 (SE 0.31), based mainly on the five pages that pass the five-year mark before 2016. In posts from 2013 onwards the estimate is 0.07 (SE 0.16), and from 2016 onwards -0.21 (SE 0.18). Several of the early cohort, such as UPyD, the German Pirates and LMP, declined at the polls during the decade, and vote share in the model changes only at elections, so the estimate may partly reflect electoral trajectories rather than age. It may also reflect a period in which both these parties and the platform were growing, though the data cannot show this.

A related concern is that the honeymoon reflects the novelty of a new page rather than a new party. I can test this only roughly. Among twelve pages of long-established parties whose Facebook pages were created in 2010 or later, posts in a page’s first five years drew about 15% more (0.14, SE 0.08), though for these pages a page’s first years are also the early part of the decade. Among the 42 party pages created from 2010, including both a new-party and a new-page indicator leaves neither distinguishable from zero (-0.43 , SE 0.35, and 0.00, SE 0.12), so the data cannot separate party novelty from page novelty.

6 Discussion

The idea that new parties enjoy an advantage on social media receives little support from these data. Compared with established parties at the same time and place, new parties’ posts did not reliably draw more engagement: the estimate is positive but uncertain, and it depends on how a few parties are dated and on whether Spain and France are included. Where new parties did draw more, it was in their first years, mostly among parties first elected around 2010 and in the early part of the decade, and partly reflecting the size of the audiences they had built. In posts from 2013 onwards, a party’s first years brought no detectable premium over its later ones.

This is consistent with the view that the appeal of newness is temporary (Sikk 2012), but the evidence cannot separate a fading appeal from electoral decline, page novelty or the changing platform. It is less consistent with a lasting structural advantage for new parties on Facebook. The lack of evidence for a premium among new populist parties is worth noting, though the comparison is only among populists in the same country and month, and my earlier work shows populist parties in general drew more engagement than others (Hotham 2026a).

The design has clear limits. There are only 34 new party pages, and the within-party comparison rests on 16, so the estimates are imprecise. ParlGov’s first-election year is a reasonable but imperfect measure of newness, and some parties are hard to date. The data cover parties that won seats or a meaningful share of the vote and had pages in 2020, so new parties that failed early are under-represented. Page likes are missing before 2015, which limits the comparison of engagement with audience size. The data record engagement, not reach or votes.

7 Conclusion

Across 20 European countries between 2010 and 2020, new parties’ Facebook posts did not reliably draw more engagement than those of comparable established parties. A honeymoon in a party’s first years appears among parties first elected around 2010 but not in the later part of the decade. Newness may help parties on social media, but these data give no sign that it brings a lasting or general advantage.

Data and code

The posts were exported from CrowdTangle in October 2020. CrowdTangle’s terms do not permit sharing the raw posts. Party ages come from ParlGov. The analysis code, the list of pages with their ParlGov identifiers and page-month aggregate data are available from the author.

Provenance and AI use

The data were exported from CrowdTangle in October 2020 for my doctoral research. This paper builds on my doctoral thesis ([Hotham 2021](#)). The analysis and writing were completed in 2026.

I designed the study and am responsible for the analysis and conclusions. I wrote the text, with drafting and editing assistance from Claude (Anthropic), which also helped prepare the analysis code. I reviewed and checked all text and results.

Ethics

Not applicable: the study involves no human participants. The data are public posts by the official Facebook pages of political parties and party leaders, analysed only as counts of interactions aggregated by post, page and month. No post content is quoted or reproduced, and no data on individual users are used.

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