

Pioneers for Problematic Populism: Investigating the Breakthrough of Anti-Immigrant Parties in Western Europe

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Abstract. There is a large body of research explaining the fortunes of anti-immigrant parties by factors such as individual attitudes, the electoral system, public opinion, electoral niches in the party system, and characteristics of the parties and leaders themselves. As a result, we know much about the kinds of voters who are most likely to support anti-immigrant parties, and the kinds of places in which we might encounter them. In contrast, we know less about the relevance of timing in determining these types of parties' success. Based on an investigation of 23 anti-immigrant parties in twelve Western European countries, this paper concludes that these parties tend to establish themselves with rare breakthrough elections rather than by incremental growth. Moreover, these breakthroughs seem more likely to occur when politicians with similar political platforms participated in earlier elections. These findings suggest that future research should seriously consider the possibility that the variables fostering the success of anti-immigrant parties might not be the same at each stage of such parties' life cycle. Moreover, it suggests that unsuccessful anti-immigrant politicians might pave the way for future like-minded politicians, in particular by increasing the salience of immigration issues and enhancing the electoral credibility of an anti-immigrant platform.

Key terms: anti-immigrant parties, electoral breakthrough, timing, supply-side explanations

The increasing success of anti-immigrant parties, especially in Western Europe, has attracted much attention from political scientists. As a result, we know much about the kinds of voters who are most likely to support anti-immigrant parties, and the kinds of places in which we might encounter them. In contrast, we know less about the temporal dimension of these parties' electoral performance. Most existing studies either lack a longitudinal perspective altogether or try to use the exact same explanations to account for an anti-immigrant party's performance at very different moments in its life cycle.

This paper encourages future research in this field to consider the relevance of timing more seriously, and aims to contribute in that direction itself. It investigates how anti-immigrant parties come to first establish themselves in the national party systems in which they compete. Building on existing insight in the literature on 'supply-side

explanations', and based on an investigation of 23 anti-immigrant parties that have achieved parliamentary representation in Western Europe, I reach three main findings. First, anti-immigrant parties do not usually grow incrementally, but instead reach a position of relevance through rare breakthrough elections, in which they make unusually large gains. Second, after such an electoral breakthrough most of these parties stay where they are, maintaining or expanding their share of support afterwards. Finally, because anti-immigrant parties benefit from electoral credibility and high salience of immigration issues, breakthroughs are more likely to occur when these parties have direct or indirect ties to the existing party system. This could be because the party's leader is a seasoned politician with considerable political experience and high visibility, or because similar parties have participated in the past and have therefore familiarized the electorate with their political style and policy proposals.

These findings demonstrate that we should rethink not only how we *investigate* but also how we *evaluate* the performance of anti-immigrant parties. Poor election results might give an anti-immigrant party little to celebrate in the short run, but they can very well make future successes for itself or like-minded politicians more likely.

The paper pursues this line of argumentation as follows. The next section reviews existing literature on the electoral success of anti-immigrant parties, after which I discuss what it might teach us about the way these types of parties establish themselves in a political system. After a short methodological section, I proceed to the heart of my analysis. The concluding section summarizes the findings and draws out its implications.

Existing literature on the success of anti-immigrant parties

The family of anti-immigrant parties (hereafter: AIPs) encapsulates a heterogeneous group of organizations, differing from each other in the coherence of their beliefs and policy suggestions, in their views on liberal representative democracy, and in their ties to extra-parliamentary movements (Fennema, 1997). There are, however, two key uniting characteristics (Art, 2007) (Betz, 2001) (Messina, 2007) (Mudde, 2010). First, they all promote an exclusive form of nationalism that allocates special privilege to native-born citizens, especially those of the historical ethnic majority. Second, they employ a populist style of politics, distancing themselves from existing 'elites' and glorifying the 'common sense of the common people'. In line with these two characteristics, all AIPs advocate sharp restrictions in immigration and integration policies and demonstrate explicit hostility towards immigrant groups and ethnic minorities.

Over the last three decades, these parties have steadily become more successful, especially in the Western European context. In the twelve countries under investigation in this paper (see below), AIPs obtained on average about 2 percent of the vote in the early 1980s, but this increased to roughly 10 percent around the turn of the century, and has gone up to as much as 15 percent in recent years. Unsurprisingly, political scientists have paid increasing attention to possible explanations for this popularity.

Most of the first investigations aimed to understand the success of these parties by investigating the reasons why people vote for them. By far the most dominant

explanation in this tradition points at the joint developments of globalization, post-industrialism, and electoral dealignment (Betz, 2001) (Dalton & Weldon, 2005) (Guibernau, 2010). In this account, rising inequality and structural unemployment, along with increased exposure to diversity, has generated both economic and cultural anxiety among the electorate. The simultaneous reduction in party identification, so the explanation continues, has led to a strong demand for new parties that respond to the anxieties and promise to do things differently. In keeping with this line of reasoning, many studies have tried to explain the success of AIPs by country-level variables such as economic growth, unemployment levels, openness to economic globalization, and immigration levels, as well as by individual-level variables such as socio-economic class, age, education level, prejudice, and dissatisfaction with the status quo (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006) (Jesuit, Paradowski, & Mahler, 2009) (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2016) (Lubbers, Gijsberts, & Scheepers, 2002) (Oesch, 2008) (Van Holsteyn & Irwin, 2003).

This type of scholarship certainly has taught us much. In particular, it has demonstrated why some people (in particular voters who are very young or very old, have low levels of education, are male, are low-skilled workers or small business owners, have high levels of prejudice, and are dissatisfied with representative democracy) are more likely to support AIPs than others. However, in recent years more and more researchers have pointed at the limitations of this type of research. In particular, they are not very helpful in explaining why AIPs have been so much more successful in some countries than in others. After all, even in countries where AIPs have had very limited success there are many people with the profile of the typical AIP voter (Dahlström & Esaiasson, 2013). In an often cited article, Cas Mudde (2010) therefore concludes that research should no longer approach the demand for AIPs as a puzzling phenomenon and take it as a given.

Many scholars, then, have turned their attention to supply-side explanations, emphasizing characteristics of both the political system in general and of the AIPs themselves. First, many have made the obvious observation that AIPs tend to obtain more seats in elections that rely on proportional representation than in those where a majoritarian electoral system is in place. A comparison of AIP performance in the most recent parliamentary elections in the Netherlands (which has the most proportional system in the world) and the United Kingdom (which uses single member district plurality) illustrates this point succinctly. While the PVV and the UKIP received roughly the same share of the electoral vote (about 13 percent), the former won the same percentage of seats, whereas the latter came to occupy only one of the 650 seats in the House of Commons. This comparison illustrates a more counterintuitive finding in the literature as well, namely that the electoral system appears to be of limited relevance in the share of the *votes* that AIPs receive (Carter, 2002).

Second, much evidence suggests that AIPs do well where the political salience of immigration is high, especially compared to the salience of economic issues. As Elisabeth Ivarsflaten (2005) has pointed out, the constituencies that AIPs tend to rely on are far from united in their views on state intervention in the market. For that reason, these parties do better in systems where voters are encouraged to think more about immigration than

about the economy when casting their vote. In a similar vein, Jens Rydgren (2002) explains the limited success of AIPs in Sweden (at least, at the time of his writing) by the preponderance of class voting in the country. A more recent contribution by Dennis Spies (2013) provides further evidence: he demonstrates that AIP support is larger in countries where economic issues are less contested.

A third characteristic of relevance is the party system. More specifically, many scholars maintain that AIPs do better when no other parties occupy the same position in the electoral space (Kitschelt & McGann, 1995) (De Lange, 2007). Especially because AIPs present themselves as very different from mainstream politics, so scholars in this tradition argue, they are more successful when they are indeed running on a very different platform than other parties. Several studies find support for this line of reasoning. For example, Karl Loxbo (2014) finds that people in Sweden who would like to see more differences between parties in their stance on immigration are more likely to vote for the anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats. Eoin O'Malley (2008) makes a convincing case that the absence of AIPs in Ireland is because the electoral space has been occupied by Sinn Féin, a protest party that attracts the same type of voters as AIPs but is generally supportive of immigrant rights. And Kai Arzheimer and Elisabeth Carter (2006) find that the formation of a coalition government between the largest right-wing and left-wing party tends to double the success of AIPs in the subsequent election.

As far as supply-side characteristics that are related to the AIPs themselves are concerned, the most commonly invoked explanations are threefold. First, some argue that the success of AIP depends crucially on charismatic leaders who are able to attract much media attention, because they will not only increase the visibility of the party but also enhance the salience of immigration as a political issue (Mudde & Van Holsteyn, 2000) (Van Holsteyn, Irwin, & Den Ridder, 2003) (Startin, 2014). Second, many have pointed to organizational strength as a key determinant of AIP success (Carter, 2005) (Lubbers et al., 2002). There is a long list of AIPs that have failed because of internal conflicts and incompetent leadership, leading some observers to argue that these parties are often their 'own worst enemy' (Husbands, 2002, pp. 71-72). The third and probably most often mentioned party characteristic to shape AIPs' electoral fortunes is their legitimacy and credibility. In this account, voters will only cast a vote for an AIP if they consider it a legitimate and credible alternative to other parties on the ballot (Van Kessel, 2013) (Van Holsteyn et al., 2003).¹

Overall, the recent turn to supply-side explanations has advanced our understanding of AIPs considerably.² While demand-side explanations provide a clear

¹ All three of these explanations are plausible and consistent with existing evidence. A major challenge, however, is the difficulty of operationalizing the crucial concepts (charisma, organizational strength, and legitimacy/credibility). As a result, in some studies they seem to appear more as definitional components of a successful AIP than as exogenous characteristics that help to predict electoral performance.

² This is not to say, however, that a widespread consensus characterizes this literature. A particularly divisive discussion regards the way that the behavior of mainstream parties affects the electoral performance of AIPs. Some argue that AIPs suffer when mainstream parties take them seriously, copy some of their policy suggestions or even decide to co-legislate with them. The underlying logic is that such accommodative behavior diminishes AIPs' electoral niche and reduces their credibility as an anti-

account of why some individuals are more inclined to vote for AIPs than others, supply-side explanations offer insight into why these parties are more likely to thrive in some countries than in others. Unfortunately, neither of these two bodies of literature has so far paid much attention to the *timing* of AIP success. Certainly, they both offer clues (some of which I will draw out more explicitly in the next section). The demand-side literature helps us understand why the rise of AIPs across Europe occurred broadly over the last three decades, and suggests that AIPs are at an advantage during times that immigration, unemployment, and dissatisfaction with the status quo are increasing. Similarly, we can take the insights from the supply-side literature that have mostly been used to make sense of cross-national variation and formulate expectations about the points in time we might most expect AIP success (and indeed, several of the studies emphasizing the relevance of electoral niches and issue salience do include a longitudinal component, Spies 2013; Meguid, 2005). But by and large, very few studies have so far placed the timing of AIP success at the forefront of their investigation. Especially rare are longitudinal investigations of specific AIPs over the course of their existence. This is all the more surprising considering that several scholars have explicitly identified the need for more research on this issue, making a plausible case that some of the variables might be of more relevance at some points in an AIP's life cycle than at others (Ellinas, 2007) (Art, 2007) (Rydgren, 2007, p. 521).

This paper aims to contribute to this research agenda by focusing on the early life stage of AIPs. Public commentaries and academic literature commonly refer to 'breakthrough' elections that mark the beginning of AIPs' relevance in national politics. While this term appears in almost all investigations of AIPs (see e.g. Minkenberg, 2013, p. 11; Van Kessel, 2013, p. 180; Mudde, 2010, p. 1180; Ellinas, 2007, p. 359), it is rarely subjected to conceptual or empirical scrutiny. To my knowledge, no existing study has tried to investigate whether the concept of a breakthrough offers an accurate depiction of the way AIPs tend to establish themselves, and if so, why that might be the case and which kinds of conditions foster such a breakthrough. The following section will discuss how we might answer these questions if we consider existing theories (especially those in the tradition of supply-side explanations), while taking the suggestion seriously that some factors might be more relevant at some moments in time than at others.

Three expectations on electoral breakthroughs

When considering the implicit assumptions that underlie the way most observers seem to use the concept of an 'electoral breakthrough', and reasoning through the theoretical

establishment organization (Downs, 2002) (Luther, 2011) (Fallend, 2004) (Heinisch, 2003). In sharp contrast, others offer the exact opposite prediction, reasoning that accommodative responses increase the salience of immigration issues and make these parties look like legitimate and credible political actors (Meguid, 2005) (Art, 2007) (Bale, 2003) (Minkenberg, 2013). In light of these countervailing effects, it is perhaps unsurprising that the most comprehensive investigation of the electoral consequences of mainstream parties' response to AIPs reaches very mixed conclusions, finding that political exclusion hurts AIP in some cases but benefits them in others (Van Spanje & Van der Brug, 2009).

implications of existing literature, three main expectations follow. First, we should expect that the electoral record of AIPs is not incremental. Rather than slowly gaining ground over time, the language of 'breaking through' suggests that these parties' wins (and losses) are much more stochastic, marked by much continuity most of the time and big changes on rare occasions. Second, the idea of a breakthrough suggests that a rare and big win marks AIPs' establishment in the party system. In other words, we should expect that after this win these parties continue to garner at least the same level of support. The connection to theories about the importance of credibility and legitimacy for AIP success is obvious: a big win is likely to enhance public perceptions of the party as a realistic player in future elections.

This leads us to a final expectation, regarding the conditions that might foster a breakthrough. On the one hand, it seems challenging to predict when exactly this will occur, considering it might depend on a rather contingent coincidence of several favorable conditions – for example, the sudden appearance of a media-savvy leader at the same time that a niche opens up in the electoral space and the economy is going through a slump (Koning, 2017). Nevertheless, if the arguments about party organization, electoral credibility, issue salience, and media attention have any merit, we should expect at any rate that breakthroughs are more likely to occur when AIPs already have direct or indirect ties to the existing party system. In more ironical terms, we should expect a breakthrough to be more likely when the anti-establishment party is embedded more firmly in the existing establishment.

For example, supply-side theories would lead us to expect that AIPs are more successful if they come about as a breakaway movement from an existing party with long-standing representation in national politics, or even more dramatically, when they used to be mainstream parties and adopted a populist anti-immigrant platform at a later point in time. Not only do such parties enjoy an electoral familiarity that likely fosters their credibility and enhances their ability to attract media attention, they are also more likely to possess the necessary experience for sound party organization. Damir Skenderovic explains the success of the Swiss People's Party, which before 1999 used to run on a rather middle-of-the-road platform, in exactly these terms:

Unlike ... other ... radical-right parties, the SVP did not have to go through the initial process of party formation as it already had organizational resources and a stable electorate... The SVP was in no way perceived as a pariah in the Swiss party system. (Skenderovic, 2007, p. 167)

For similar reasons, an electoral breakthrough seems more likely once an AIP has participated in elections for a longer period and already obtained a modest portion of seats in parliament. Such conditions seem likely to improve the party's internal organization, as well as its ability to draw attention to both immigration-related problems on the one hand and itself as the political force to do something about them on the other.

Finally, we can expect AIPs to be an advantage if they participate in a political system where AIPs have done well in the past. Even if internal struggles or political

miscalculations make some AIPs disappear after their initial breakthrough, we should expect new exponents of this party family to benefit from the electorate's familiarity with the content of their platform. The observation in previous research that the supporters of failing AIPs tend to seek out ideologically similar parties (rather than, say, become disenchanted with populism and turn to the political mainstream) offers indirect evidence for this expectation (Minkenberg, 2006) (Van der Meer, Lubbe, Van Elsas, Elff, & Van der Brug, 2012). Similarly, the notion that short-lived AIPs leave a vacuum for similar parties in the future is well in line with the literature that emphasizes the importance of electoral niches for AIP support (Pellikaan, De Lange, & Van der Meer, 2007).

Case selection

To investigate these expectations, this paper investigates the electoral fortunes of all AIPs that have acquired parliamentary representation in Western Europe. To avoid distorted comparisons due to variation in electoral systems, all empirical analyses in this paper measure AIPs' share of the votes rather than their share of seats in parliament.³ Table 1 summarizes the empirical domain of the analysis (see list of abbreviations at the end of the document for full party names and translations).

Table 1. *Empirical domain of investigation.*

Country	Parties	Time period
Austria	FPÖ; BZÖ	1986-2013
Belgium	VB, FN	1978-2014
Denmark	FRP, DF	1981-2015
Finland	PS	1999-2015
France	FN, MPF	1973-2012
Greece	ChA	2009-2015
Italy	MSI-AN, LN	1948-2013
Netherlands	CD, CP, LPF, PVV	1981-2017
Norway	FRP	1977-2013
Sweden	ND, SD	1988-2014
Switzerland	SD-NA, SVP, LdT	1967-2015
United Kingdom	UKIP	1997-2015

³ I have relied on official election websites in each country under study: www.bmi.gv.at/cms/BMI_wahlen/nationalrat/NRW_History.aspx, www.ibzdgp.fgov.be/result/nl/main.html, verkiezing.belgium.be, www.ft.dk/Folketinget/Oplysningen/Valg/~media/PDF/om_folketinget/Folketingets_Oplysning/Folketingsvalgene%201953-2015.pdf.ashx, www.vaalit.fi/en/index/onelections/parliamentaryelections.html, www.france-politique.fr/elections-legislatives.htm, ekloges.yves.gr/elezionistorico.interno.it, verkiezingsuitslagen.nl, www.stortinget.no/no/Stortinget-og-demokratiet/Valg-og-konstituering/Valgstatistikk/, www.val.se/val_och_folkomrostningar/, www.ch.ch/de, and www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

Some might object to this case selection, on at least three grounds. First, as in all comparative studies of these types of parties, we might wonder how comparable they are to each other. As mentioned above, AIPs differ from each other in their relations to extra-parliamentary movements, their positions on representative democracy, and the coherence of their constitutive ideology. Nevertheless, they all share the key characteristics of populism and exclusionary nationalism and indeed, are commonly included in comparative studies of AIPs (Albertazzi, 2009) (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006) (Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2016). Moreover, by focusing exclusively on AIPs in Western Europe, this study aims to avoid difficult comparisons with similar parties in Eastern Europe (such as *Jobbik* in Hungary or *Ataka* in Bulgaria), where both the development of the party system and the experience with immigration is considerably different (Minkenberg, 2013).

A related concern is that some of these parties have not run on an anti-immigrant platform for the full duration of their existence, and it is potentially contentious during which time periods they should be considered an AIP. For one thing, there are some parties that started as a fairly mainstream right-wing party and only became virulently anti-immigrant at a later time, typically as the result of a dramatic change of leadership. Similarly, some of these parties have moved in the opposite direction, starting as an AIP but later on abandoning their nativist and restrictive position on immigration. To account for these developments, I only investigate these parties in election years they clearly satisfy the definition of an AIP.⁴

Finally, some might take issue with the decision to exclude those AIPs that have been so unsuccessful that they have never achieved parliamentary representation, such as the German National Democratic Party, the British National Party, or the Portuguese National Renovator Party. It might certainly be worthwhile to include these parties in future research, but achieving at least a seat in parliament at one point in time seems a defensible minimal threshold for inclusion in this study, with obvious advantages for data collection.

My investigation of the three components of the ‘breakthrough thesis’ relies on a variety of techniques. I will explain the methodological details as I present my findings.

Findings

We start the investigation by considering whether the electoral fortunes of AIPs are incremental. If these parties indeed tend to find their place in the party system by means of breakthrough elections, we should not expect incrementalism but instead rare and dramatic changes interrupting periods of relative stability. A straightforward test of incrementalism, commonly used by scholars in the tradition of punctuated equilibrium theory (Jensen, 2009) (Jones, Baumgartner, & True, 1998), is assessing the extent to which changes are normally distributed. A normal distribution suggests incremental change,

⁴ More specifically, I am only including the FPÖ after 1986, the BZÖ up until 2009, the FRP in Denmark after 1981, the MSI-AN up until 1995, the FRP in Norway after 1977, and the SVP after 1999. For similar evaluations, see (Bale, 2003) (Skenderovic, 2007) (Green-Pedersen & Odman, 2008).

whereas a leptokurtic distribution (with a higher peak and fatter tails) suggests exactly the kind of change the breakthrough thesis seems to suggest (Jensen, 2009, p. 294). Figure 1 shows the distribution of election-to-election changes in the electoral vote for all AIPs that are included in the analysis, as well as a curve indicating what perfect normality would look like.⁵

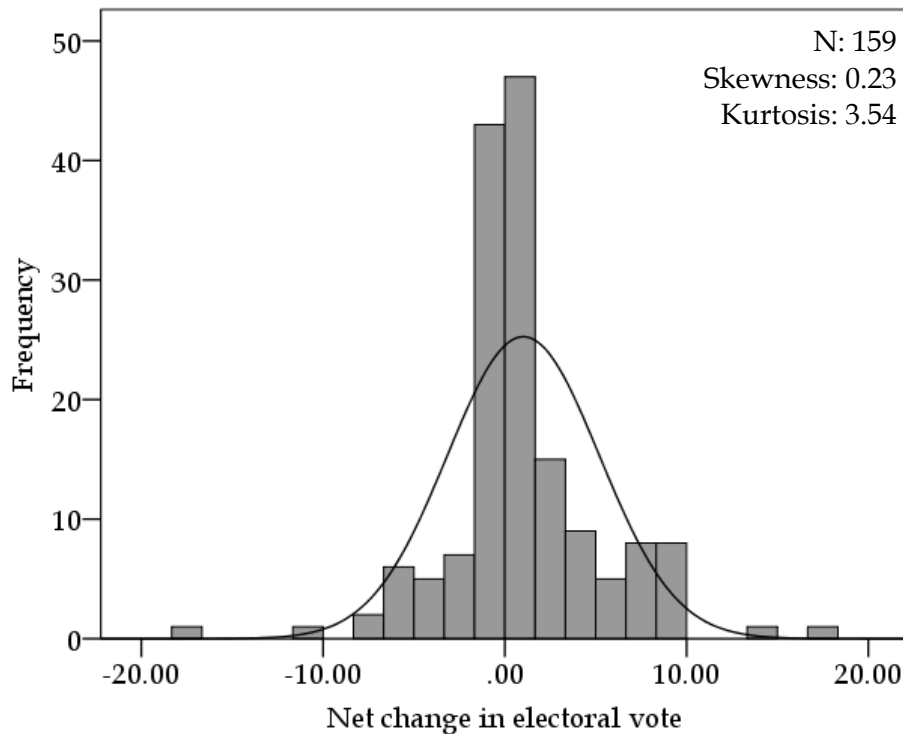


Figure 1. *Distribution of changes in changes in electoral vote, 23 AIPs, 1948-2017.*

Clearly, the distribution is far from normal and highly leptokurtic. Both the peak and the tails of the distribution are higher than we see in the normal curve, and the kurtosis value of 3.54 indicates a very large deviation (of more than 9 times its standard error) from the value of 0 that a normal distribution exhibits. The first expectation, therefore, is confirmed: the electoral fortunes of AIPs are indeed characterized by much continuity and rare dramatic change.

This finding, of course, raises the question which election exactly saw the breakthrough of each party under study. As mentioned above, existing literature offers little insight into how we should operationalize this concept. Two types of operational definitions seem reasonable. For one thing, we might think of the breakthrough as the election in which the party achieved its largest ever gain. Alternatively, and perhaps more in line with most commentators' understandings, we might consider a breakthrough to occur when a party for the first time in its history makes a non-trivial gain. In the

⁵ To avoid skewing the distribution to the right artificially, Figure 1 includes the results of defunct parties in the first election in which they no longer participated.

literature on AIPs, some scholars suggest a ‘threshold of relevance’ of 3 or 5 percent (Carter, 2005) (Norris, 2005) that we might use as a benchmark for such a definition. Table 2 follows these two types of definitions and lists for each party under investigation the biggest gain it ever achieved in an election, as well as the first election in which the party obtained a larger gain than 4 percent.⁶

Table 2. *Breakthrough elections for 23 AIPs according to two definitions.*

Party	Country	Biggest win		First > 4% increase	
FPÖ	Austria	1990	(+6.90%)	1986	(+4.75%)
BZÖ	Austria	2008	(+6.59%)	2006	(+4.11%)
VB	Belgium	1991	(+4.68%)	1991	(+4.68%)
FN	Belgium	1995	(+1.23%)	-	-
DF	Denmark	2015	(+8.76%)	1998	(+7.41%)
FRP	Denmark	1988	(+4.19%)	1988	(+4.19%)
PS	Finland	2011	(+14.99%)	2011	(+14.99%)
FN	France	1986	(+9.47%)	1986	(+9.47%)
MPF	France	1997	(+2.44%)	-	-
ChA	Greece	2012-I	(+6.68%)	2012-I	(+6.68%)
MSI-AN	Italy	1994	(+8.10%)	1972	(+4.22%)
LN	Italy	1992	(+8.65%)	1992	(+8.65%)
CP	Netherlands	1982	(+0.69%)	-	-
CD	Netherlands	1994	(+1.54%)	-	-
LPF	Netherlands	2002	(+17.00%)	2002	(+17.00%)
PVV	Netherlands	2010	(+9.56%)	2006	(+5.89%)
FRP	Norway	1989	(+9.32%)	1989	(+9.32%)
ND	Sweden	1991	(+6.73%)	1991	(+6.73%)
SD	Sweden	2014	(+7.16%)	2014	(+7.16%)
SD/NA	Switzerland	1971	(+2.57%)	-	-
SVP	Switzerland	1999	(+7.66%)	1999	(+7.66%)
LdT	Switzerland	1991	(+1.38%)	-	-
UKIP	UK	2015	(+9.55%)	2015	(+9.55%)

Table 2 offers further support for the suggestion that AIPs that become large have a tendency to ‘break through’. For twelve of the 23 parties, both definitions of a breakthrough election point to the same year, which means that the first time these parties increased by more than 4 percentage points they also achieved their biggest gain ever. For another four, the difference between the last two columns is either small (DF) or points to consecutive elections (FPÖ, BZÖ, PVV). Six of the parties have never experienced a breakthrough according to the second definition and have remained in the margins of their respective party systems throughout their existence (indeed, none of

⁶ This cut-off of 4 percent does not only constitute the average of what Norris and Carter consider a threshold of relevance, but it also seems reasonable on purely empirical grounds, considering that it approximates the standard deviation of the distribution in net changes in the electoral vote illustrated in Figure 1 (which is 4.1 percent).

these parties ever obtained more than 3.5 percent of the vote or more than 2.5 percent of seats in parliament). The only party that does not fit any of these categories is the MSI-AN in Italy, which obtained its largest gain more than two decades after it first saw a net increase in support of more than 4 percent. In sum, it seems fair to conclude that if AIPs become successful, they do so in breakthrough elections rather than through a slow process of incremental growth.

These findings already suggest support for our second expectation, namely that a breakthrough marks AIPs' entrenchment in the party system. A closer investigation mostly confirms that suggestion. Of the seventeen parties that experienced a breakthrough, nine have captured a larger portion of the vote in their most recent election than when they first broke through, and for one party the difference is very small.⁷ For two parties (SD and UKIP) we are currently unable to make this assessment considering they experienced their breakthrough in the most recent elections.

Five of the parties (or one third of the relevant cases), however, seem to resist this pattern. The Flemish Block/Flemish Interest in Belgium and the Northern League in Italy have dwindled since their breakthrough election (both obtaining about half of the vote in the most recent election compared to their breakthrough), while the Progress Party in Denmark, the List Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands, and New Democracy in Sweden have disappeared altogether. It is worth pointing out that the parties that have disappeared have by now all been replaced by other successful AIPs, and that the two parties that are losing support are facing considerable electoral competition from populist parties that do not explicitly run on an anti-immigrant agenda.⁸

So far, we have seen considerable support for the first two expectations: AIPs do indeed make their definite appearance through unusually large victories, and they tend to remain equally or more popular after they do so. I will now turn to the third expectation, namely that AIP breakthroughs are more likely to occur when such parties already enjoy some status in the jurisdiction under investigation. Four different pieces of evidence suggest this is indeed the case.

First, an analysis of the context of each breakthrough election (as identified in the last column of Table 2) reveals that breakthroughs rarely occur for entirely new parties. The treemap in Figure 2 summarizes this analysis. As we can see, of the seventeen parties that did experience a breakthrough, eleven did so when they were already represented in parliament in one way or another. Six parties had successfully obtained parliamentary representation in earlier elections, and five were either breakaway parties spearheaded by elected politicians (BZÖ, DF, PVV) or parties that already existed as more mainstream right-wing parties (FPÖ, SVP). Three parties broke through after having participated unsuccessfully in elections before, and two of those were already important players in

⁷ PS broke through in Finland in 2011 capturing 19.0 percent of the vote, yet it won only 17.7 percent in the most recent election of 2015.

⁸ In Denmark the DF has replaced the FRP, in the Netherlands the PVV has replaced the LPF, and in Sweden SD has replaced ND. In Belgium, the New Flemish Alliance has been able to capture the vote of previous VB voters (Pauwels, 2011), whereas in Italy both the Five Star Movement and Go Italy! compete with the LN for the populist vote (Albertazzi, 2009).

elections for the European Parliament before they achieved similar prominence in national elections.⁹ The only genuinely new parties experiencing a breakthrough, then, were the Italian Northern League in 1992, the Dutch List Pim Fortuyn in 2002, and the Swedish New Democracy in 1991. And even for this category of cases, we can qualify the novelty of two of them by pointing at the longer history of AIPs that found representation in parliament in both Italy and the Netherlands. In sum, then, AIPs seem more likely to experience a breakthrough when they have already established themselves directly or indirectly.

<p>Already established (11)</p> <p><i>VB * FRP (Denmark) * PS * MSI-AN * FRP (Norway) * SD</i></p> <p>In parliament (6)</p>	<p>New (6)</p> <p><i>FN (France) * ChA * UKIP</i></p> <p>Participated before (3)</p>	
<p><i>FPÖ * BZÖ * DF * PVV * SVP</i></p> <p>Breakaway/previous mainstream (5)</p>	<p><i>LN * LPF * ND</i></p> <p>First election (3)</p>	<p><i>FN (Belgium) * CP * CD * SD/NA * LdT</i></p> <p>No breakthrough (6)</p>

Figure 2. *Context of breakthrough elections, 23 AIPs.*

A second and related observation is that large electoral victories for AIPs are more common in later elections. The treemap in Figure 3 shows all elections in which one of the AIPs under study increased its electoral vote by more than 4 percent compared to the previous election. Among these 30 cases, the six breakthrough elections for new parties (FN, ChA, UKIP, LN, LPF, ND) discussed above stand out as even more uncommon, making up only one fifth of the grand total.

Similar conclusions emerge from an investigation of the percentage of the electoral vote the 23 AIPs under study obtained when they first participated in national elections. Table 3 shows these results separately for parties that broke with or existed as a mainstream party beforehand (first column), parties that participated in a country in which AIPs had already achieved parliamentary representation (second column), and

⁹ Indeed, both the French FN and UKIP had gained much visibility for their strong performance in the elections for the European Parliament immediately preceding their breakthrough in 1986 and 2015, respectively (Startin, 2014).

parties for which neither condition applies (third column). Again, we see that AIPs with some direct or indirect embeddedness in national politics did much better in their first election. Such parties obtained on average more than 7 percent of the vote, while their counterparts that were genuinely novel obtained barely 1 percent.

Already established (24)		New (6)
		FN (France) '86 * ChA '12 * UKIP '15
		Participated before (3)
FPÖ '90 * FPÖ '94 * FPÖ '99 * FPÖ '08 * BZÖ '08 * VB '91 * FRP (Denmark) '88 * DF '01 * DF '15 * PS '11 * FN '12 * MSI-AN '72 * MSI-AN '94 * PVV '10 * FRP (Norway) '89 * FRP (Norway) '97 * FRP (Norway) '05 * SD '14 * SVP '03	FPÖ '86 * BZÖ '06 * DF '98 * PVV '06 * SVP '99	LN '92 * LPF '02 * ND '91
In parliament (19)	Breakaway/ previous mainstream (5)	First election (3)

Figure 3. Context of 'big win' elections (increases in AIPs' electoral vote of more than 4 points).

Table 3. Electoral vote in first participation in national elections, 23 AIPs.

Breakaway/ prev. mainstr.	% vote	Earlier AIP success	% vote	Neither	% vote
FPÖ '86	9.73	BZÖ '06	4.11	VB '78	1.37
BZÖ '06	4.11	DF '98	7.41	FN-bel '85	0.06
DF '98	7.41	MPF '97	2.44	PS '99	0.99
FRP '81	8.91	LN '92	8.65	FN-fra '73	0.52
MPF '97	2.44	CD '86	0.13	ChA '09	0.29
CD '86	0.13	LPF '02	17.00	MSI '48	2.01
PVV '06	5.89	PVV '06	5.89	CP '81	0.14
FRP '77	1.88	SVP '99	22.56	ND '91	6.73
SVP '99	22.56	LdT '91	1.38	SD '88	0.02
				SD/NA '67	0.63
				UKIP '97	0.34
Mean:	7.01	Mean:	7.73	Mean:	1.19

The final evidence comes from a regression analysis based on all national elections in which the AIPs under study participated. The unit of analysis is the election, and the

analysis models the total electoral vote of all AIPs running in that election¹⁰ based on (1) how many years have passed since the participating AIPs were first represented in parliament;¹¹ and (2) how long it has been since any AIP made it into the parliament that is being elected. Control variables include the electoral vote of the AIP in the previous election (thus measuring change in electoral vote and reducing the risk of reverse causality, see Dahlström & Sundell, 2012), country dummies (thus avoiding the problem of correlated errors), and a number of control variables that much of the available literature considers of relevance to the success of AIPs. More specifically, I use World Bank data on GDP growth, the unemployment rate, and the growth in the migrant population in the year before the election. I also include a dummy variable measuring whether the government at the time of the election is composed of a grand coalition that includes both the main right-of-center party and the main left-of-center party. Since the analysis is based on actual election results instead of self-reported voting behavior in surveys as is the case in most other studies (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006) (Dahlström & Sundell, 2012) (Van Spanje & Van der Brug, 2009), it is impossible to introduce individual-level control variables. A clear advantage, however, is that this analysis avoids the notorious underrepresentation of AIP support in survey data. As in all the analyses presented so far, some caution is in order in the interpretation of the results considering the relatively small number of independent cases.

Table 4. OLS regression modelling electoral vote for AIPs, 12 countries, 1948-2017.

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
<i>Party history</i>	0.142		0.065	0.156		0.091
<i>AIP history</i>		0.258 *	0.244 *		0.447 *	0.432 *
<i>GDP growth</i>				-0.056	-0.063	-0.062
<i>Unemployment</i>				-0.077	-0.025	-0.018
<i>Migrant growth</i>				-0.085	-0.115	-0.128
<i>Grand coalition</i>				0.071	0.149 *	0.131
<i>N</i>	117	117	117	110	110	110
<i>R²</i>	0.642	0.660	0.661	0.649	0.688	0.690
<i>SEE</i>	0.565	0.551	0.552	0.582	0.548	0.549
Entries show beta coefficients. * p<0.05. Coefficients for the electoral vote in the previous election, as well as for all country dummies (included in all models) have been omitted for presentation purposes.						

Table 4 reports the results from the analysis. Model I estimates the effect of party history on electoral success, including only the necessary control variables (electoral vote in the

¹⁰ Since multiple AIPs are running in some of the elections under investigation, including separate cases for each AIP would violate the requirement of independence of cases. For that reason, the regression model sums up the vote that all AIPs obtained in total. For the purpose of satisfying the requirements of linear regression, I transformed the total electoral vote following Tukey's ladder of powers (Scott, n.d.) with formula $Y=x^{0.4}$.

¹¹ In elections in which multiple AIPs were participating, I averaged the number of all parties.

previous election and country dummies). Model II is similarly parsimonious, but estimates the effect of a history of AIPs instead. Model III includes both independent variables. Models IV to VI repeat these analyses while including the four additional control variables. Since I transformed the values of the dependent variable (see footnote 10), unstandardized coefficients would be impossible to interpret. Therefore, the table only reports standardized beta-coefficients.

The results once again suggest that AIPs benefit from embeddedness in the party system. All coefficients for the two key independent variables are positive, and the number of years that any AIP has been represented in parliament consistently appears as the best predictor of electoral success.¹² To give a more specific estimate of the magnitude of this effect, let us take a closer look at Model V, which according to the standard error of the estimate has the best fit of the six models in Table 4. If we move along the quartile range on the variable of AIP history (from 4 to 25 years) and set all other variables to their means, model V predicts the vote for AIPs to increase from 4.5 percent to 8.2 percent. This covers about 20 percent of the full range of the electoral vote captured by AIPs in the elections under study. Clearly, AIPs do better in party systems where AIPs have been around for a longer time.

All in all, the investigations in this section have revealed two main conclusions. First, the fortunes of AIPs are marked by much continuity most of the time and breakthrough elections with which they establish their place in the party system on rare occasions. Second, these parties tend to do better when they are more firmly embedded within the party system. We have seen that breakthroughs rarely occur for entirely new parties, that big victories tend to occur after a longer period of parliamentary representation, that AIPs do much better in their first election if they already have direct or indirect ties to the political system, and that AIPs do better in party systems in which AIPs have been represented for a longer period of time.

Conclusions

This paper has investigated how anti-immigrant parties in Western Europe have come to establish themselves in national party systems. This investigation points to three main conclusions. First, the electoral fortunes of these parties are not incremental but instead their support tends to remain relatively stable most of the time and change dramatically on rare occasions. Second, after these parties achieve a big win for the first time, they tend to stay where they are, either maintaining the same level of support or gaining even more

¹² The results for the four control variables are largely in line with previous research. As other researchers, I find modest evidence that economic growth and unemployment levels decrease AIPs success, and that the presence of a grand coalition increases their support (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006) (Jesuit et al., 2009) (Rydgren, 2007). The only surprising finding is the coefficient for changes in the size of the migrant population. Models IV-VI all suggest that the larger the increase in migrant population, the worse AIPs perform in elections. I reran the analysis by replacing the growth in the migrant population in the year before the election by the actual size of the migrant population, and I again found negative (albeit smaller) effects in all models. These results are not shown, but can be made available upon request.

in subsequent elections. Third, anti-immigrant parties do better when they have clear ties to the existing party system, either directly because they are led by politicians who already made a career in a mainstream party or indirectly because parties with a similar platform achieved parliamentary representation in the past and as such carved out a niche for this party family.

These findings have important implications for both the study of anti-immigrant parties and our evaluation of their electoral performance. For one thing, since these parties tend to stay in place after they have experienced a breakthrough, a better understanding of the specific elections in which they did would improve our explanations of cross-national variation in their political prominence considerably. Existing studies that include a longitudinal dimension tend to rely on models that treat all elections as equal, assuming a constant effect of the independent variables under study on the votes or seats these parties receive. This paper suggests that these efforts are potentially misleading, because performance in later elections might have to do more with forces of institutionalization than with the kinds of unique conditions that can foster a breakthrough in the first place.

Second, the paper contributes to the growing literature on supply-side explanations for anti-immigrant parties' success. It demonstrates that its insights (in particular those related to electoral credibility, party organization, and issue salience) do not only help to understand cross-national variation as most authors in this tradition have demonstrated, but are also useful to make sense of the fortunes of AIPs at different moments in their existence. In doing so, it provides further (indirect) evidence that characteristics of the anti-immigrant party itself are indeed important, despite the methodological difficulties of demonstrating this (see footnote 1).

Third, the present analysis suggests fruitful venues for future research. For example, it suggests that some elections are perhaps more important than previously thought. My analysis suggests the 1991 election in Sweden featured the most surprising electoral breakthrough of an anti-immigrant party in Western Europe, and yet existing studies tend to treat this election as relatively insignificant or at any rate as comparable to other European elections in which anti-immigrant parties did well (Rydgren, 2002) (Andersen & Bjørklund, 2000). Similarly, this paper identifies a number of other developments that are more unusual than commonly thought and therefore worthy of more investigation, such as the recent woes of the Italian Northern League, or the failure of the Belgian National Front to ever break through despite favorable conditions.

Besides making theoretical contributions, this paper also has implications that are of relevance outside academia. In particular, my findings suggest that those who are worried about the rise of anti-immigrant parties should by no means feel complacent about the limited success such parties have had in countries that are not included in this analysis, such as Germany, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, and Spain. In each of these countries, these types of parties have already participated in national elections, and their failure to make it into parliament so far by no means offers guarantees that anti-immigrant politics will not become important in the future. Indeed, the past and current struggles of the German National Democratic Party, the Luxembourgish Citizens' List,

the Maltese Patriot Movement, the Portuguese National Renovator Party, and the Spanish National Democracy might very well turn out to be the pioneering work that paves the way for future success of anti-immigrant politicians in these countries.

List of abbreviations

AIP	Anti-immigrant party
BZÖ	<i>Bündnis Zukunft Österreich</i> (Alliance for the Future of Austria)
CD	<i>Centrumdemocraten</i> (Center Democrats, Netherlands)
ChA	<i>Chrysi Avgi</i> (Golden Dawn, Greece)
CP	<i>Centrumpartij</i> (Center Party, Netherlands)
DF	<i>Dansk Folkeparti</i> (Danish People's Party)
FN (Bel)	<i>Front National</i> (National Front, Belgium)
FN (Fra)	<i>Front National</i> (National Front, France)
FPÖ	<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i> (Freedom Party of Austria)
FRP (Den)	<i>Fremskridtspartiet</i> (Progress Party, Denmark)
FRP (Nor)	<i>Fremskrittspartiet</i> (Progress Party, Norway)
LdT	<i>Lega dei Ticinesi</i> (League of Ticinians, Switzerland)
LN	<i>Lega Nord</i> (Northern League, Italy)
LPF	<i>Lijst Pim Fortuyn</i> (List Pim Fortuyn, Netherlands)
MPF	<i>Mouvement pour la France</i> (Movement for France)
MSI-AN	<i>Movimento Sociale Italiano-Alleanza Nazionale</i> (Italian Social Movement-National Alliance)
ND	<i>Ny Demokrati</i> (New Democracy, Sweden)
PS	<i>Perussuomalaiset</i> (True Finns)
PVV	<i>Partij voor de Vrijheid</i> (Freedom Party, Netherlands)
SD	<i>Sverigedemokraterna</i> (Sweden Democrats)
SD-NA	<i>Schweizer Demokraten-Nationale Aktion</i> (Swiss Democrats-National Action)
SVP	<i>Schweizerische Volkspartei</i> (Swiss People's Party)
VB	<i>Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang</i> (Flemish Bloc/Flemish Interest, Belgium)
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party

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