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# Corrective Parties and Conveyor Coalitions: Explaining the Rise of Third Parties in European Politics

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## Abstract

*Third parties have grown increasingly relevant in European politics in recent years, with the rise of status-quo changing parties such as Podemos in Spain, Syriza in Greece, UKIP in Britain and the Front National in France. This article aims to bridge the gap in the comparative politics literature by introducing two new types of third parties in European politics through their bargaining and mediation, crisis behavior and electoral appeal. In doing so, this study proposes that leadership cult, localization of support and rigidity of ideology varies across third parties, due to the existence of two types of third parties; conveyor coalitions and corrective parties. The article uses the case studies of Syriza and Podemos as 'conveyor coalitions' and of the Front National and UKIP as 'corrective parties'. By introducing these two new concepts, the article attempts to bestow future scholarly studies with better tools for predicting and studying rapidly rising populist parties.*

## Key Words

Party Politics, Third Parties, European Politics, Electoral Behavior, Corrective Parties, Conveyor Coalitions.

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## Introduction

Since the onset of the Syrian Civil War and the subsequent emergence of the refugee crisis, many European countries have been witnessing electoral gains for far-right and/or populist parties. These parties have either been newcomers to politics (or their leaders- such as Syriza in Greece, or Podemos in Spain), or have been stagnant parties that were unable to increase their votes despite existing within their respective political spectrums for a long time (such as the Front National in France). In Austria for example, the far-right Freedom Party had to wait for more than half a century to break the political consensus away from far- right parties, which had prevailed in the country since

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the end of World War II. This owed largely to growing anti-immigration sentiments after the Syrian civil war and their subsequent appeal for the far-right – a momentum that has been brewing since the EU Enlargement in 2004 and 2007, and intensifying since 2011 with the refugees arriving in Europe from the Syrian civil war. In the Greek Cypriot Administration, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Slovakia and Switzerland too, anti-immigration parties have made substantial electoral gains, much to the dismay of the proponents of the post-World War II European order.

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However, not all rising parties in Europe are far-right, or assert an anti-immigration agenda. Spanish Podemos and Greek Syriza for example, are left-wing populist parties that address inequality, unemployment and economic stagnation from a perspective of renegotiating austerity measures with the EU. Essentially a

backlash against neoliberalism and a growing aloofness of the European elites towards the Greek and Spanish financial crises, both parties built rapid support through their Eurosceptic agendas.

This article aims to conduct an inquiry into the nature of the newly emerging and/or rising parties in Europe. These parties either assume the third position in their political systems for an extended period of time, or rise into prominence after serving brief periods as third parties. While mainstream political science is mostly concerned with party systems or governmental coalitions, patterns, changes and shifts of the first two parties in political systems, a literature gap exists in terms of how these processes work outside of the first two parties. This has been an analytical oversight, as lack of interest in third parties has obscured our ability to forecast the emergence of the rising populist and revisionist parties in Europe and detect political grievances they best respond to. Within the limited attention they have received in the literature, third parties have been conceptualized based on how their rise can be explained theoretically; through increasing voter independence,<sup>1</sup> spatial voting theory,<sup>2</sup> within strong majoritarian systems<sup>3</sup> and within median-voter theorem.<sup>4</sup> In addition, more practical case studies have been applied with regard to third

parties (or lack thereof) in the United States,<sup>5</sup> appeal and mobilization in Britain,<sup>6</sup> competition and resilience in Germany<sup>7</sup> and regional versus national voter patterns in France.<sup>8</sup> However, a conceptualization of third parties as a theoretical and cross-country phenomenon has been unforthcoming. This is what this article intends to do.

This study is based on the assumption that there is a gap in the literature on comparative politics, which has largely shied away from focusing on party patterns outside of the first two parties. In turn, the study is also structured upon the view that it is this disregard that has prevented a proper agenda and ideological counter-discourse to emerge in Europe to mitigate the effects of anti-immigration politics, as well as the appeal towards far-right parties. Therefore, the article aims to address this gap and focuses exclusively on third parties in European politics. Here, the article proposes two ways of defining a 'third party'. The first definition is that of the party that gets the third largest share of the votes in an election, significant enough to render it as a balancer in coalition talks or parliamentary bargaining sessions. In that, a politically significant third party ought to be ready to form a coalition with the second party so as to sideline, or balance against the first party. To that end, third parties become important

when the sum of second and third party votes are equal to, or greater than the first party (numerical significance). Alternatively, third parties can also be significant in parliamentary voting sessions that require consensus larger than the seats won by the first party, such as constitutional changes, declaration of war, or ratification of international treaties. In such cases, third parties become disproportionately significant, mainly for first parties that need to bypass the main opposition party, or muster a bigger parliamentary majority to pass key policies. Still however, third parties must have enough seats in the parliament to make contextual alliances work. If the first two parties have an overwhelming dominance in a parliament, then third parties that have a politically or contextually insignificant number of seats will not be useful in either context. Furthermore, if the first and second parties agree to form a majority coalition government, third parties grow even more important as the main opposition party, provided-again- that they have enough seats in the parliament to make minority opposition work. Third parties that have a tiny fraction of seats are not significant in any context.

The second type of third party, as per the focus of this article, is a parliamentary group, which is composed of two or more parties that can form frequent and standing alliances that manifest

into a unified voting bloc in the parliament. Although such parties may have competing interests, agendas and ideologies, the need to balance the First Party or exert political weight in key policy issues may force smaller parties into a third party voting bloc. However, this is not the only way smaller parties (whether Third or Fourth) make an impact in legislatures; they may engage in issue alliances with the first two parties as well (such as first and fourth party block versus second and third party block). In that sense, if the vote difference between third, fourth (or even fifth) parties is marginal and their competition is tight, then any of such competing parties may be studied as a 'third party'. The best example is Germany, where the dominance of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) has been challenged by the Greens since 1983, and the Greens replaced the FDP as the third party from 1994-2005. In this context, both the FDP and the Greens can be evaluated as third parties as their competition remained strong over an extended period of time and each party managed to replace the other more than once. While our first-type conceptualization of third parties is an arithmetic measurement, where the third party is numerically a third party, our second-type conceptualization denotes a political influence, where numerical third, fourth or even fifth parties – if they have tight competition

– may be characterized as third parties.

## Characteristics of Third Parties in Europe

A historical survey of third parties in Europe yields several patterns that can be observed through multiple political systems. First, the strength and weakness (including the rise and demise) of third parties reflect confidence in the existing political system. When either the hegemonic party, or the competition between the first two parties has a high level of legitimacy and large popular support, third parties tend to be less relevant and lose support. In Britain for example, there has long been a two-party competition between the Conservatives and Labour. Up until the early 1900s, when the Liberal Party (originally founded in 1859) began to rise, the two-party dominance continued. The emergence of the Liberal Party is owed to a fundamentally structural question in British politics: how to manage the powers of the Crown and expand the political significance of the Parliament.<sup>9</sup> The Liberal Democrats have slowly, but consistently gained ground since 1955, reaching their highest vote percentage in 1983 when they won 25.4 % of the vote. Seyd<sup>10</sup> argues that it was the Liberals' reform oriented agenda that led to their increasing public support, whereas Gauja argues

that it was charismatic leadership and resultant voter engagement that brought the Liberals success.<sup>11</sup> Barnes on the other hand, points to candidate selection methods as a way of gaining popularity in British third party politics.<sup>12</sup> However, as of late 2012, UK Independence Party (UKIP) began to emerge as the third party, largely at the expense of Labour. Furthermore, in 2014, the Scottish National Party (SNP) made a rapid rise, becoming the third party in the May 2015 general elections, increasing its parliamentary seats from 6 to 56. The rise of any third party can be interpreted as the failure of the first two parties. The Scottish National Party as well, is a product of the Labour and Conservative failures in Scotland, which rendered the SNP a very viable alternative.<sup>13</sup> With austerity policies, healthcare funding, and serious military budget cuts on the line, the failure of the first two parties to address such systemic crises have led to the emergence of the SNP as the third party. In Germany too, the structural nature of the competition between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)/Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) rendered the prospects of the SPD as a third party relatively obscure.<sup>14</sup> It was only after 2005 that the SPD's inability to balance against the CDU/CSU briefly led to the rise of the FDP as a third party, though it was soon replaced

by the rise of the Alternative for Germany party (AfD) after 2013.<sup>15</sup> In that regard, the rise and demise of third parties are closely connected either to the popularity of the hegemonic party, or to hegemonic competition between the two dominant parties. The AfD has indeed formulated its rhetoric within anti-immigration, rising in relevance mainly due to the inability of the first two parties to address what the nation's dissidents felt as a failure to 'protect Germany against outsiders'.<sup>16</sup> A similar trend can be observed in Hungary (Jobbik), France (Front National), Greece (Golden Dawn) and Slovakia (People's Party), as their respective systems grew unable to cope with a serious, common challenge.

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Second, certain third parties might be regional parties, with localized support. This localization can be ethnic, religious, or connected to a particular political agenda. In the UK, localization of the Liberal Democrats (and the Scottish National Party in 2015) in the

north is a case in point. According to Walt (et. al.)<sup>17</sup> this trend owes largely to the Conservatives' inability to reach a political settlement with Scotland and their subsequent fall from grace regionally. German politics have long had a strong two-party competition between Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in the north and a persistent Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), whereby the third party, the Free Democratic Party (FDP), did not have significant weight up until the 2009 federal elections. Even then, the FDP's credential as a third party was already challenged by The Greens and the Left, before the FDP took a big fall in 2013.<sup>18</sup> The far-right AfD made a rapid entry into German politics after its foundation in 2013, becoming the third party in November 2015 elections, and securing 10.5% of the votes. The AfD's vote dominance is also regionalized, with the majority of its support coming from Saxony, Thuringia and Baden-Württemberg.<sup>19</sup> In France on the other hand, there is not a structured two-party political system, although voter behavior has clustered around either the Socialist Party on the left, or *Les Républicains* on the right. In the 1960s and 1970s, *L'Union Centriste* was a dominant third party, largely dominating the agenda on education, healthcare and social services.<sup>20</sup> However,

in recent cantonal elections, the Front National (FN) has risen rapidly, from 4.5% in 2008 to 15% in 2011, and in the 2012 presidential elections, they scored their highest ever (17.9%) vote share. In the 2014 municipal elections, the FN won in 12 cities, which was a historic triumph. The rise of Front National in France, which has a strong leftist tradition, was explained in Hollifield, Martin and Orrenius<sup>21</sup> as revealing resistance against refugee and immigration policy, whereas Hainsworth and Mitchell<sup>22</sup> forecast the Front National's rise based on the popularity of anti-egalitarian policies in immigrant-dominated provinces of France. To that end, the FN is indeed a regional party, with Lille and Amiens in the north and Marseille and Nice dominating in the south. Similar examples can be mentioned in Belgium (New Flemish Alliance – Regional), Finland (Finns Party- Ethnic), Sweden (Sweden Democrats - Ethnic) and Italy (Lega Nord – Padanian separatist). The degree to which such regional parties become more or less relevant depends on how disenfranchised their main ideology becomes within the larger national political system. If the degree of disenfranchisement is high, then regional parties become more popular; if accommodation within the political system is achieved, then regional party voters choose more mainstream parties.



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Third, certain third parties revolve around a leadership cult; either alive or dead. Membership to and support of such parties then become closely linked to leadership personality and ideology, whereby candidacy and promotions are often linked to personal or professional connections to the leader in question. Gaullism in France is one example, although exact party affiliation usually transcends existing ideological entrenchments. From 1947- 1958, Gaullism was shouldered by the RPF- *Rassemblement du Peuple Français*, and from 1958-1976, it was the UNR - *Union pour la nouvelle république* and the *Union pour la défense de la République* or UDR. After 1976, Gaullism was entrenched within the *Rassemblement pour la République* or RPR.<sup>23</sup> In Poland, the Polish Socialist Party (*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*) became heavily influenced by the personality cult of Józef Piłsudski, which continued to affect party politics after his death in 1935.<sup>24</sup> Another case

would be Thatcherism, which defines a broad range of political, economic and social priorities introduced by Margaret Thatcher between 1975 and 1990, which left a mark in British politics transcending beyond the John Major, Tony Blair and David Cameron governments. It is important to underline that Thatcherism is not a third party ideology; rather its influence became systemic and became a first-party ideology.<sup>25</sup> In today's European politics, a return to leadership cult (or at least symbolism) can be observed. While Angela Merkel has been the longest lasting of such leaders, it is hard to talk about a 'cult' in her case, given the political culture in Germany.<sup>26</sup> Also, mere length of office is not a sufficient mark of cult on its own, given how long Tarja Halonen in Finland, Bertie Ahern in Ireland, Gören Persson in Sweden and Franz Vranitzky in Austria have ruled, but have failed (or have been unwilling) to establish personality cults. It is also hard to argue for a leadership cult in the Scottish National Party as a regional third party, but the Front National's Marine Le Pen is a candidate as a case point, largely owing to her relationship to longtime FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen.<sup>27</sup> Hereditary continuity of legitimacy and leadership cult in third parties renders membership and promotions to be closely connected to the relationship to the founding family. Whether similar leadership cults exist,

or will take shape in Podemos or Syriza is still up for debate. While Pablo Iglesias Turrion of Podemos cannot be characterized as a cult-based leader,<sup>28</sup> Alexis Tsipras of Syriza demonstrates a more up-front leadership as the face of the party – in what may be defined as a member of a long tradition of ‘rock star party leaders’.<sup>29</sup>

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Fourth, certain third parties or third party ideologies are chronic, in the sense that they remain third for extended periods. The Liberals in Britain or the FDP in Germany have been structural third parties, retaining their third-ranking popularity status across a long streak of elections. This chronic status renders similar third parties comfortable in the sense that they both know that it is unlikely for them to be the first party, and also for them to lose substantial votes and lose their third party status. This comfort allows third

parties to voice concerns and objections about the mainstream political system that have not been, or cannot be (due to populist reasons) presented by the two dominant parties. This in turn, renders third parties disproportionately significant in times of breaking two-party deadlocks, both in political discourse and in parliamentary voting sessions. Two dominant parties in turn, may rely on the vote support of the third parties to pass a certain legislation or reach the required number of majority for a particular parliamentary decision. In major political deadlocks, the disagreement between first and second parties therefore, are often resolved by third parties, according, or close to the ideological stance of the third party. This is perhaps the most significant role of third parties. Inelastic demand for most of the third parties render them immune to vote loss as a result of politically incorrect, or unfavored statements. Depending on their ideology, third parties may either use this unique position in politics to steer a political system away from crisis, or generate such crises. In Britain for example, the current deadlock between the Labor and the Conservatives over Brexit – whether Britain should leave the EU or not – is being corrected by the Scottish National Party.<sup>30</sup> In the words of SNP member Alyn Smith, ‘A Brexit would reopen the question of Scottish independence’,<sup>31</sup> which effectively



means that the party would correct the deadlock between the first two parties over Brexit, in favor of staying within the union. Similarly in Germany, the deadlock over refugee policy between the CDU/CSU, SPD, *Die Linke* and *Bündis 90/Die Grünen* has persisted, with the AfD growing increasingly and disproportionately more influential in bringing about an anti-immigration resolution to the deadlock.<sup>32</sup> Angela Merkel's attempts to bridge this gap by spearheading a refugee return and repatriation deal with Turkey is a direct result of the growing AfD influence. In France, it is the Front National's third party pressure that has also corrected the deadlock over immigration and forced the French government to back the refugee deal with Turkey.<sup>33</sup>

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Finally, third parties become more relevant in times of crises – be it security, financial or social – and depending on the extent to which they can

successfully voice popular discontent over these crises, may substantially increase their popularity. If the existing political status quo is risk averse and free of such crises, then third parties retain their existing popularity, without significant impact on their popularity. This has specifically been the case with the AfD, the Front National, Syriza and Podemos, as mentioned earlier. The Greek and Spanish third parties; Syriza and Podemos, can be analyzed in close relevance, due to similar contexts that brought about their rise. Both Greece and Spain have been two-party dominant systems. The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and New Democracy (ND) competition dominated in Greece, whereas the Social-Democratic, Social Liberals (PSOE) and Liberal – Christian-democratic – Conservatives (PP) rivalry dominated in Spain. In Greece, following sustained disenfranchisement within the systemic two-party rule and the two dominant parties' inability to tackle the growing economic crisis, voters tried a new formula: supporting a formerly obscure party – Syriza.<sup>34</sup> Although Syriza has been active in Greek politics since 2004, it was not until the 2012 elections that it made its mark by increasing its vote share substantially to 27%, which laid the ground for its emergence as a first party in the January 2015 elections. The feeling of abandonment and neglect,

along with an insurmountable crisis, forced the Greeks to leave the traditional two-party entrenchment and try the obscure third party. In Spain, an almost identical rise of a third party took place, as Podemos, channeling the Spaniards' disdain with the main two parties, became the first party. Although the United Left (IU) has been the integral third party in Spanish politics in recent years, the rapid rise of Podemos after February 2014 owed largely to the electorate's view that the existing main parties, just like in Greece, were too close to big business interests and thus, could not move in favor of choices that would alleviate the Spanish financial crisis.<sup>35</sup> In other words, both Greek and Spanish third parties have emerged as a reaction to the financial crisis, and the inability of the existing status quo to address the looming economic and social problems.

The emergence of third parties as serious contenders and rising into first party status indeed has a transnational dimension, as such parties share certain similarities. First, financial disillusionment and debt restructuring unite Syriza and Podemos. With Greek government debt at 180% of its GDP and Spain's 100% debt-to-GDP ratio, both parties aim to restructure debt and distance their respective countries from international creditors.<sup>36</sup> Second, both parties reflect a growing disdain towards the European Union – not

by pulling their countries out of the EU, but by reconfiguring their relationship with the Union. In Syriza's case, distancing from the EU took on the form of threatening to ally with Russia, although this did not happen.<sup>37</sup> In Podemos' case on the other hand, the party suggested that it might leave the monetary union if austerity measures become too burdensome on the Spanish people.<sup>38</sup> This new push for other alliances also take in the form of distancing both countries from Germany (for financial reasons), as well as the United States (for Common Foreign and Security Policy considerations) citing growing dependence on and steering by external actors.

## Conceptualizing Corrective Parties and Conveyor Coalitions

One of the central aims of this article is to introduce two new conceptualizations for the study of third parties: 'corrective parties' and 'conveyor coalitions'. These two new conceptualizations are aimed at better studying parties that are outside the first two slots in popularity rankings and also predicting which types of third parties benefit from crises and which ones thrive during stable periods.

Third parties that fit into the ‘corrective party’ conceptualization of this study have to fulfill five main criteria. First, a corrective party has to have a rigid ideology. This ideology can be ethno-nationalist, religious, sectarian or regional, but the main currency of the party is its unbendable commitment to its ideology. Concessions or backtracking politically for populist or parliamentary alliance purposes, that are easier carried out by first and second parties, are considered threats to party identity and *raison d’être*. To that end, it is much harder for corrective parties to enter into coalition arrangements with first or second parties and quite often, such parties may choose to protect their rigid ideological purity, instead of becoming a part of the governing coalition. The term ‘corrective’ however, comes directly from these parties’ behavior in dealing with competition and disagreement between hegemonic parties. When the first and second parties need to form a coalition, either for government or legislation purposes, then they turn to smaller parties for extra numbers. Corrective parties aim to resolve such deadlocks through offering their numbers in exchange for ideological ‘correction’ of the disagreement based on their red lines. This is currently one of the biggest structural problems in Europe (and perhaps beyond) that ideologically rigid third parties are using their corrective

status to steer the debate on the refugee and immigration policy. Certainly the FN, AfD and Golden Dawn are strong cases to this point.

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Second, corrective parties tend to have localized support and have a traditional political hinterland; either ethno-nationalist, or sectarian. When corrective parties are localized, they reflect regional disenfranchisement (geographical concentration of discontent – such as in the AfD’s case) that is *outside* the mainstream political identity of that nation. Identity-based parties that pursue the agenda of an identity not shared by the political mainstream, tend to be geographically confined. On the other hand, if corrective party support is well-distributed across the nation, it reflects disenfranchisement *within* the hegemonic identity and usually reflects the degree and intensity of how that identity is practiced within the political system. A better case to this is how the

FN in France has expanded beyond its northern and southern strongholds and became a nation-wide party.

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Third, corrective parties tend to have a strong leadership cult. Corrective parties that have such a strong leadership cult choose their members, appointments and promotions based on candidates' proximity or relationship to the leader in question. Relatives, friends and personal connections of the leader play significant importance in building the party's organization and regional structure, as well as in how these parties 'correct' dominant parties. In contrast, those corrective parties that have no or weak leadership cults tend to negotiate their organization and structure based on candidates' demonstrated loyalty to the ideology or cause. Some corrective parties are also hybrids, where moderate levels of leadership / cause loyalty have similar effects on how the party structures and organizes itself. The introverted nature of such

party organization inevitably leads to existential crises between the party core and its grassroots organizations after the death or political demise of the leader in question. If the party cannot craft a new post-leader contract between its core and base, it will either splinter or dissolve.

Fourth, corrective parties are usually comfortable with their chronic third party status; that is as long as corrective parties retain their 'third most popular' or 'close fourth' status, not coming first or second does not cause a drop in morale, force resignations or cause an ideological reformulation. As mentioned in the first condition, corrective parties rather cling to their rigid ideological positions, rather than taking populist risks to dilute their ideology to become first or second parties. Corrective parties that retain their chronic third party status prefer to bet on the first party's inability to muster enough votes to gain single-party majority and plan ways in which they can steer coalition talks into an outcome that best fits into the corrective party's ideological stance. Such ideological corrections of deadlocks, according to corrective party rationality, are more important than being the first party, since first parties have to pursue a more comprehensive pragmatism that prevents them from asserting their ideological priorities into the system. Such ideological

correction reaches its maximum effect in times of crises, which is our *fifth* condition, such as wars, conflicts or ratification of key international treaties. Especially if corrective parties are already in a coalition government, or are negotiating with hegemonic parties to form a coalition, their power to amend, steer or influence crisis policies become optimal and significantly disproportionate to their electoral support.

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The second new conceptualization this study offers, through an analysis of third party patterns in Europe, is that of the 'conveyor coalition'. Conveyor coalitions differ from a corrective party in almost every criterion. It refers to a third party type that unifies most or a substantial portion of disenfranchised ideologies and agendas within its political stance, stretching its initial ideological position to reach out to unrepresented portions of

the electorate. Successful conveyor coalitions substantially increase their votes and become first parties over time. Such parties have all self-defined as being a political outlet of all unrepresented groups in their initial formation, successfully carrying these groups into hegemony. In doing so, they have usually evolved from a former third party.

As a third party, conveyor coalitions do not have a rigid ideology; rather, they aim to unite a wide array of disenfranchised social and political groups that do not have a coherent political outlet. Conveyor coalitions are either 'new' parties, or emerge out of older parties that substantially revamp their organization, ideology and structure, aiming to make a greater impact on politics. This is the case with Syriza and Podemos. Their novelty usually follows an existing systemic problem, or the inability of the hegemonic parties to represent a significant portion of a fragmented electorate, providing conveyor coalitions with an opportunity to make substantial gains. However, conveyor coalitions do not aim to 'correct' the system, nor do they seek to resolve political deadlocks through the exercise of a particular ideology. Instead, conveyor coalitions seek to maximize their popular support by appealing to as many left out groups that have no political voice, and 'convey' them to hegemonic status. While, the

conveyor coalition parties may sound liberal or centrist, that is certainly not the rule, as if a liberal / left-wing system disenfranchises a large segment of the conservative / right-wing voting blocs, they may be united by a conservative – right-wing conveyor coalition party.

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Second, successful conveyor coalitions tend not to have localized support. Even if the initial support base of a conveyor coalition party is local, they will immediately organize to expand beyond this support base, aiming to have nation-wide appeal. What differentiates a conveyor coalition party’s non-local base to that of a corrective party is that conveyor coalitions will always seek to expand their support base, whereas corrective parties will settle (and often take great pride) within their local or identity-based power base. In other words, corrective parties have no interest in bending their rigid ideology in favor of more votes, whereas this is specifically what conveyor coalitions do: play into ideological gray areas in order to appeal

to as many disenfranchised voters as possible. To that end, both conveyor coalitions and corrective parties seek to instrumentalize discontent within or without the hegemonic political identity, but the former will always seek to bring together these pockets of discontent actively, whereas corrective parties are usually passive in that regard.

Third, leadership cults tend to be less emphasized in conveyor coalitions, compared to corrective parties. Even when conveyor coalition parties have a popular and charismatic leader, they cannot afford to structure the party or its regional networks based on proximity to the leader or loyalty to his understanding of ideology. Conveyor coalitions are less likely to establish and rely on a leadership cult as a basis for party operation and structuring. Since conveyor coalitions seek to play into political gray areas and maximize votes, they need to attract both quality and quantity into their party ranks. This means that they need to detach promotions, appointments and candidate listings both from the leader and the political ideology, effectively steering clear of the establishment of a leadership cult. This in turn, forces conveyor coalition parties to be more merit-based, either in terms of experience and expertise, or with regard to work rate and performance.



Fourth, conveyor coalitions do not settle for their third party (or close fourth/fifth party) status, as such parties bring together ideologically diluted ranks with the promise of an electoral victory, whichever way it may be defined (either winning hegemonic party status, or increasing vote percentages by a particular amount). Not meeting the set criteria in elections will cause a significant morale drop in the party and lead to resignations and restructuring. In more extreme cases, conveyor coalitions may also self-disband following failure in elections. For conveyor coalitions, it is more rational to take big concessions in party ideology, often obscuring and blurring the party's main ideological line, in favor of gaining more popularity among voters. In contrast to corrective parties, conveyor coalitions do not seek to leverage their third party status to force an ideological outcome into a political deadlock. Rather, conveyor coalitions seek to resolve political deadlocks through consensus and ideological backtracking. Conveyor coalitions do not emphasize this role however, as their primary goal is always carrying different disenfranchised groups into hegemonic status, rather than enjoying their chronic third party status that employs an ideological agenda.

Conveyor coalitions also thrive during stable periods with low-intensity crises or absence thereof. In a low-

risk, low-polarization environment, conveyor coalitions can afford to obscure their ideology and offer a coherent ideological agenda in order to perform their 'conveyor' function. In contrast, corrective parties thrive during crisis periods within high-risk, high-polarization environments, where the political gray area that benefits conveyor coalitions disappear. In such periods, conveyor coalitions only succeed when the existing discontent with the hegemonic political discourse is high enough and neither the first two parties, nor a corrective party can offer a credible counter-hegemonic discourse. If, however, the hegemonic party (or parties) have large popular support during crisis periods, then conveyor coalitions lose support again, along with corrective parties. That's why the current refugee crisis in Europe significantly empowers corrective parties, rather than conveyor coalitions. However, single-issue parties like the AfD or FN are also dependent on the persistence of the structural crisis. Once the refugee problem is resolved, their impact will be less.

## Corrective Party Case Study: The Front National and the UK Independence Party

Although the rise of the populist far-right is a Europe-wide phenomenon,

this article will now focus on two political parties to illustrate the case of corrective parties. Both the Front National (FN) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP) are what this study conceptualizes as ‘corrective parties’ due to their ideological rigidity, type of popular appeal, and the role of their leadership.

The FN has utilized the divisions within the French right and the lethargy of the left.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the party sought to create a strong and sharp political position for the disenfranchised voters that were growing increasingly alienated towards a politically disconnected political elite. Disdain towards political elites both at the national and at the European level has led both parties to grow a Eurosceptic character and favor non-intervention in what they call as ‘foreign adventures’, such as Syria.<sup>40</sup> UKIP – and the Brexit referendum it created – on the other hand, are not only the results of a few months of political campaigning, but the culmination of four decades of latent Euroscepticism<sup>41</sup> – Labour never wanted to join the common market in 1973 and Conservatives also had an uneasy relationship with the union.<sup>42</sup> UKIP too, is a response to elite politics, which is seen as synonymous with the EU and unwanted political and financial burdens.<sup>43</sup> These dormant sentiments in the UK, as well as in France, emerged with the scale of

migration after the intensification of the Syrian Civil War – although anti-immigration politics had already been on the rise since 2004, following the EU’s eastern expansion.

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The FN existed in French politics for a long time despite having not assumed governmental position. In fact, the FN did not control a substantial portion of the *départements* and it was fine with not doing so – it was a protest party<sup>44</sup> – as all corrective parties are. Its strength was concentrated in the northeast and coastal southeastern parts of France, where the post-industrial labor market had generated sustained frictions not only between the ‘old French’ and the immigrant population, but also within these immigrant groups as well.<sup>45</sup> It was only after the take-over of Marine

Le Pen (daughter of FN legend Jean-Marie Le Pen) as the leader of the party in 2011 that the FN expanded its ambitions. Like a typical corrective party, the FN was revolving around a leadership cult, in which the proximity to the founding/iconic leader served as the basis of intra-party legitimacy.<sup>46</sup> In order to assume government, the FN had to grow out of a corrective party – which was comfortable with its fringe status for the sake of its ideological purity – and expand its voter base. Marine Le Pen chose to do this through appealing to younger voters who, according to polls, were concerned about the future of their jobs, the ideological purity of *la République* and secularism (*laïcité*).<sup>47</sup> Just like a typical corrective party, the FN thrived in a crisis period (migration and intra-immigrant tensions) and expanded its voter base by capitalizing on ideological purity and disenfranchised voters. The party broke its historic record in March 2015 by winning by 25% in French local elections. Marine Le Pen summarized her strategy as follows: ‘We are growing roots. French roots’<sup>48</sup>.

UKIP on the other hand is a relative newcomer to British politics (founded in 1993, compared to the FN, which was founded in 1972). Yet, its electoral performance was very close to that of the FN, as UKIP was unable to muster more than 4% of the votes up until the 2015 elections,

when it witnessed a drastic increase, marking 12.6% popularity.<sup>49</sup> UKIP is not a far-right party like the FN, but its anti-immigration, isolationist and Eurosceptic stance brings it closer to the scope of corrective party conceptualization, instead of a conveyor coalition. It is a single-issue party – like most corrective parties are – namely, to have Britain leave the EU. UKIP thus campaigned extensively, under the leadership since 2006 of Nigel Farage, who built popular support in favor of exit from the EU through a number of sub-issues such as immigration, defense spending and fiscal policy independence.<sup>50</sup> In doing so, Farage also rendered UKIP increasingly associated with his persona, establishing a strong leadership cult, which became synonymous with UKIP’s position. Farage distanced UKIP from the detached and aloof elite politics and pursued a policy of re-rooting UKIP as a ‘truly representative party’ – very similar to what Marine Le Pen did with the FN after 2011. Like the FN and many other corrective parties, UKIP has risen from obscurity and thrived within the crisis of the European system, as well as increased migration from Syria. As a result, it has capitalized on voters whose main concerns were the protection of ‘Englishness’, being ‘left behind’ by the elites, and jobs.<sup>51</sup> It was indeed a telling lesson for the designation of corrective parties that

UKIP's popularity map in the 2015 elections converged substantially with areas that voted the most in favor of the Brexit referendum in June 2016.

Both the FN and UKIP conform best to this study's conceptualization of corrective parties – they have rigid ideologies and are largely single-issue enterprises. The FN and UKIP are essentially culturally and ethnically protectionist movements that aim to protect 'Frenchness' or 'Englishness' against a perceived threat to the purity of identity. Both parties seek to protect their respective ideological purity against a perceived cosmopolitan encroachment and are disdainful of the political elites and the existing status quo as ineffectual, disconnected and aloof. Both parties have a political hinterland where their votes have remained inelastic in the past, and new political expansion areas where their renewed and modified message is being received well. While the FN support zones are places where intra-communal tensions between and within immigrant communities are higher, UKIP thrives in predominantly 'English' areas that are away from cosmopolitan areas. Both parties have a strong leadership cult as Le Pen in the FN and Farage in UKIP have created a unity of party, ideology and leader synonymy. This cult effect is stronger in the FN as Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, the party deputy from Vaucluse is both Marine

Le Pen's niece and Jean-Marie Le Pen's grand-daughter, rendering the FN one of the best examples of a cult-based corrective party, perhaps more so than the Gaullist parties in France.<sup>52</sup> Finally, both the FN and UKIP have long been happy with their fringe status and never substantially modified their ideological positions in favor of votes, up until structural factors produced a context within which both parties' protectionist messages started resonating with their disenfranchised voters.

### Conveyor Coalition Case Study: Podemos and Syriza

Although they are substantially different from one another, the one similarity between Podemos-Syria on the one hand, and parties like the FN-UKIP on the other, is that they all reflect long-accumulated disdain towards Europe and political elites. But these parties have different reasons to be Euro- and elite-skeptic. Syriza and Podemos express a different type of anti-establishment politics, which is less concerned with immigration and nationalist purity (like the FN and UKIP) and more focused on the adverse effects of the 2008 financial crisis on Greece and Spain respectively.<sup>53</sup> As Greece and Spain fell victim to the burden of austerity and bailouts, unelected EU oversight over these countries' financial systems

led to increased public reaction against the European project, generating a left-wing backlash.

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Syriza is a text-book case conveyor coalition, with a diverse range of membership of atheists, Catholics, Greens and Eurosceptics. Ultimately, Syriza – as a left-wing party – ended up assuming a coalition government with the Independent Greeks – a right-wing party. The structural problem Greece faces as a whole, enabled all parties and disenfranchised groups to come together and establish a political alliance. As an ideologically fluid, vote-getting party, Syriza was the best suited party among alternatives due to its ability to remain disconnected to any ideological baggage, becoming the political outlet that could host these diverse groups within itself.<sup>54</sup> Syriza's rise went hand-in-hand with the demise of the establishment party

of PASOK – which lost more than 150 seats in the parliament within a span of five years.<sup>55</sup> Just like a true conveyor coalition, Syriza neither had localized support nor ideologically confined popularity, and it expanded its voter base rapidly across Greece and across competing political ideologies. Syriza had successfully adopted a conveyor role, which collected fringe, disenfranchised groups and carried them into hegemonic status. Although Syriza had a popular leader – Alexis Tsipras – it was not the kind of leadership cult enjoyed by the Front National in France, which orbited strongly around the Le Pen family – neither was Tsipras a kind of Farage, who had adopted a long-term campaign strategy around one leader, one issue and one party.<sup>56</sup> In addition, up until his self-ejection, Yannis Varoufakis was also an important face of the party, hinting at the fact that the party is far from revolving around a single leader.

The rise of Podemos has been equally fast, mainly due to the similar structural constraints Spain was operating under, compared to Greece. Podemos too, is a Eurosceptic and anti-austerity movement, one which is a reaction to the perceived maltreatment by the EU's financial institutions. The rapid decline in the Spanish education, healthcare and higher education systems revealed the EU's inability to contain and resolve the crisis in Spain, leading to

successive protests and disenchantment with the Spanish political elite.<sup>57</sup> As a result, Spain and Greece ended up sharing two of the highest levels of youth unemployment (24% and 51% respectively)<sup>58</sup> leading to the emergence of Partido X – a political group evolved from a hacktivist enterprise – and Movimiento-15, which became two of the youth groups that pioneered the anti-austerity and anti-EU sentiments in the Spanish society.<sup>59</sup> It was on the shoulders of these two movements that Podemos emerged and became the main political outlet for their grievances. The Madrid Mass March of January 2015 reflected the conveyor coalition aspect of Podemos – even though the event was organized by a radical-leftist interest, it attracted most of the Spanish political spectrum that was against austerity and advocated greater independence from the EU’s financial institutions. Although Podemos is ideologically more committed than Syriza, its ability to refine its discourse and appeal enabled it to become a ‘catch-all’ party, expanding way beyond its natural ideological support threshold. Having been established in January 2014, Podemos gained 20.68% support in the 2015 Cortes Generales vote, winning 69 of the Congressional seats and 16 of the Senate positions.<sup>60</sup> This rapid rise – like that of Syriza – contrasts starkly with corrective parties that spend long years in the fringe opposition.

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Both parties have popular leaders, but their role is different than that of Le Pen or Farage – instead of creating a unification of a personality cult with a policy issue and anchor party ideology around the leader, Syriza and Podemos use their leaders as an interface connecting the party to the voters.

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Both Syriza and Podemos are ideal cases of conveyor coalitions: they are unattached to a strong ideological position and their agenda-issue designations are fluid and varied. Syriza and Podemos are ‘bridge’ movements that aim to bring together disenfranchised voters around a policy, rather than an ideology. Rather than protecting an identity (‘Spanish-ness’ or ‘Greek-ness’) or immigration or cultural-identity concerns, these parties are instead focused on protecting their countries’ financial and labor systems from technocratic and elitist encroachments. These parties do not have a natural geographic support hinterland as they aim to unite as many regions and ideologies as possible to carry them into hegemony. Both parties have popular leaders, but their role is different than that of Le Pen or Farage – instead of creating a unification of a personality cult with a policy issue



and anchor party ideology around the leader, Syriza and Podemos use their leaders as an interface connecting the party to the voters. Finally, neither Podemos, nor Syriza has been happy with their fringe status, as both parties expanded their support base rapidly after their establishment, quickly rising to prominence.

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The rise of new third parties in Europe is certainly a reaction against the failure of the existing political system to address new economic, social and demographic challenges that the continent faces.

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## Conclusion

The rise of third parties in Europe reflects growing anti-establishment and anti-status quo sentiments. In that, the rise of new third parties in Europe is certainly a reaction against the failure of the existing political system to address new economic, social and demographic challenges that the continent faces. Anti-immigration sentiment is perhaps the most critical of these factors as a diverse group of third parties, whose nationalist rhetoric found little electoral

appeal before, have gradually increased their popularity by resisting the influx of refugees. A second fundamental disdain that brought about the rise of third parties is the economic decline and the inability of the political elites to find a way out of the European recession; this is particularly true with Spain and Greece.

This article started with a critique that the general lack of interest in the comparative politics literature over the study of parties that are neither government (first party), nor the main opposition (second party) obscured our understanding of third party dynamics in Europe. This in turn, prevented our ability to forecast the emergence and life cycles of third parties, rendering European political systems unable to address the growing appeal of populism. In order to address this literature gap, this article focused specifically on the political behavior of third parties and contributed to the literature by introducing two new concepts: ‘corrective’ and ‘conveyor coalition’ party conceptualizations. Crisis periods and fundamental disdain towards the political system bring about two different types of responses. ‘Corrective parties’ monopolize a rigid ideological stance and thrive during periods when the political middle ground moves towards that stance. Conveyor coalitions, on the other hand, do not have a rigid ideological position,

and seek to move their ideology towards the existing political middle ground. Corrective parties also tend to be more localized in their support, whereas conveyor coalitions aim to break that localization and seek greater national appeal. Corrective parties in turn, are happy to remain as a third party for extended periods of time and cling onto their ideology, whereas conveyor coalitions seek popularity that will enable them to gain first party status.

Third parties have not attracted the scholarly attention they deserve, largely owing to their inability to shake the existing status quo. However, now, with the intensifying disdain towards

the establishment, a renewed focus on third parties is necessary in order to understand their respective party systems and electoral behavior. This in turn, will yield important evidence on countries' foreign policy decisions and shifts over the long term.

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