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Portrait of a Crisis: The Crucial Role of News Media Coverage and Perceived Effectiveness of a New Party

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For new parties, it is arguably crucial to receive news media attention. News media help shape a new party's image. What aspects such an image is made of is not clear from the literature. Some scholars have argued that a new party's perceived effectiveness is key. But is it really? Ideally, we would test this in the "clean" context of a new party that clearly falls to an abysmal state, of which increasing numbers of voters become aware. In 2014, the Dutch party 50Plus experienced exactly that. The present study examines this case, using a mixed-methods approach, involving a voter panel survey, an automated media content analysis, and a quasiexperiment. The findings show the dominant role of perceived effectiveness mediating the effect of visibility and tone of 50Plus coverage on propensity to vote for that party. Implications are discussed in light of the role of news media in democratic societies.

Keywords: new parties, seniors' parties, elections, news media, perceived party effectiveness, quasiexperimental setting, media content analysis, panel survey

In June 2018, Movimento Cinque Stelle (Five Star Movement) formed a government coalition in Italy. Nine months earlier, Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany) shocked the world by entering the Bundestag (Germany federal parliament). Less than two years before that, Podemos (Spanish political party) obtained 21% of the vote in its first general election in Spain. The spectacular success of these and other new parties throughout Europe is truly impressive.

Yet, such success stories are only the (successful) tip of the (largely unsuccessful) new party iceberg. For instance, in the Netherlands since 1948 new parties that failed to obtain national parliamentary representation have outnumbered new parties that succeeded 10 to one (Krouwel & Lucardie, 2008). What allows new parties to survive the onslaught of electoral competition, and what causes them to die?

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This is an important question. New party entry may, on the one hand, be healthy for a democratic system: New parties often carry new political ideas and bring new voices, and openness to new ideas and voices is a necessary condition for democracy. On the other, it may be problematic to have too many new parties. This is because frequent new party entry may reduce the quality of representation, preventing voters from having meaningful ties with parties (cf. Tavits, 2006).

Political scientists seem unable to offer a clear answer to this question. Obviously, news media should be part of any such answer. However, studies of new parties pay little attention to news media. As well, studies of news media pay little attention to new parties. As a result, the many assertions that news media matter for new party success (e.g., Bolleyer, 2013, p. 8; Lucardie, 2000, p. 182) have not translated into clear ideas of how exactly news media matter.

In the present study, we take a modest step beyond the relevant literature in four ways. First, we propose a theoretical mechanism through which news media affect voting for new parties. Building on literature on anti-immigration parties, we argue that a particular factor plays a role: perceived party effectiveness. Second, we construct a scale to measure perceived effectiveness. This scale turns out to be highly reliable in the context of our study. Third, we use a novel theoretical model of media effects, applying it to electoral behavior. Fourth, we employ a mixed-methods approach, combining observational and quasi-experimental data, to empirically test media effects on voting for a new party.

To test the mechanism, we would need variation in news media attention and in perceived effectiveness. Ideally, we would study a clear worst case scenario for a new party, in which that party is split in two, both halves engaging in a relentless fight played out in the media. The case of the Dutch seniors' party 50Plus in 2014 offers precisely this. Studying this case allows us to draw valid inferences on effects of exposure to news media coverage of a new party on its perceived effectiveness and of propensity to vote for that party. This way, we significantly further our understanding of electoral success and failure of new parties in mature democracies.

New Parties

The new party literature dates back about 40 years. Having started off in a U.S. context (Rosenstone, Behr, & Lazarus, 1984; Sundquist, 1983), it soon crossed the borders and ventured into, most notably, Western Europe. Some studies focused on just one country (Lago & Martinez, 2011), and others focused on nine or more (e.g., Hauss & Rayside, 1978).

In terms of time period, Rochon (1985) goes back as far as 1918 and Rosenstone and colleagues (1984) as far as 1840, whereas most studies start either in the wake of WWII (Hino, 2006; van de Wardt, Berkhout, & Vermeulen, 2017) or in 1960 (Bolin, 2014; Zons, 2015).

The literature also varies in its scope in other ways. Some studies focus on one particular new party (e.g., the German Green Party in Schmitt-Beck, 1994), and others focus on one new party type (e.g., anti-immigrant parties in van der Brug, Fennema, & Tillie, 2000). Relatively few studies concern new parties more generally, and from a comparative perspective.

New Parties and News Media

A key element missing from the new party literature is the role of news media. Although news media are doubtlessly crucial for new parties, work on news media coverage of new parties is relatively scarce. Hardly any study has even mentioned the possibility that news media would have an impact on new parties' electoral performance.

Exceptions include Lucardie (2000) and Bolleyer (2013). However, they mention media only in passing. Lucardie claims that "mass media may nip a new party in the bud by ignoring or ridiculing it when it tries to enter the political arena" (p. 180). Bolleyer remarks that "increased media attention following national breakthrough is as much an opportunity to showcase achievements as to expose incompetence" (p. 8). Although both scholars should be commended for bringing in the media, neither tells us under which circumstances or how news media affect the electoral performance of new parties, or what it is in the media image that might scare away voters. All in all, this leaves us with little knowledge about the electoral effects of the coverage of new parties.

Perhaps most of the work that actually acknowledges the importance of news media is about new parties on the right side of the political spectrum (Birenbaum & Villa, 2003; Ellinas, 2010; Mazzoleni, 2003; Plasser & Ulram, 2003; Schafraad, d'Haenens, Scheepers, & Wester, 2012). Coverage of new parties more generally has not often been mapped; the reasons for the considerable variation in new party coverage have remained largely unexplored.

New Parties, News Media, and the Vote

In his study of a newspaper's newsroom, White (1950) found that 90% of the wire copy was rejected. Similarly, an enormous amount of news about new parties is "killed" every campaign day, and an enormous number of new parties is "killed" every election day: Even in the permissive Dutch context, 90% of the parties fail to obtain representation in their first general election (Krouwel & Lucardie, 2008). Does the one cause the other, and if so, how and to what extent?

The literature on news media coverage tends to focus on established parties (Baumgartner & Chaqués-Bonafont, 2015). Established parties receive attention from news media and benefit electorally from such attention in various ways (Hopmann, Vliegenthart, de Vreese, & Albaek, 2010; Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof, Oegema, & de Ridder, 2007). New parties are a different matter. For them, it is both more difficult and more important to receive news media attention (cf. Art, 2006; Bennett, 1990).

However, little empirical knowledge exists on election outcomes regarding new parties in general. In fact, there is even lack of consensus on what to measure in this respect. Rosenstone et al. (1984) studied both the emergence of new parties and their performance, and Hug (2000) followed them in this. However, some colleagues studied only their emergence (Bolin, 2014; Lago & Martinez, 2011), and others focused on their performance (Bolleyer & Bytzek, 2017; Willey, 1998). Others studied their durability (e.g., Bolleyer, 2013) or their sheer number in combination with performance (Harmel & Robertson, 1985) or emergence (Zons, 2015). In any case, rigorous studies on why some new parties succeed and (most) others fail do not exist.

Again, quite some research exists about media effects on support for right wing new parties (Burscher, van Spanje, & de Vreese, 2015; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & van Spanje, 2012; van Spanje & Azrout, 2019b). Research explicitly linking news media attention to electoral performance starts from the finding that support for "right wing populist leaders" is motivated by the same types of ideological and pragmatic considerations as support for established leaders (cf. van der Brug et al., 2000). Those studies tested whether there are differences between right wing populist leaders and other leaders in terms of the effect of news coverage on their electoral performance. They found no such differences (Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2010, 2011).

To investigate this, Bos and colleagues (2010, 2011) looked at news media coverage of right wing populist leaders, on the one hand, and perception of these politicians, on the other. Relevant ways to cover them include "prominence" and "authoritativeness." They assert that prominence signals that a new party is

> one of the parties that may get to power, or they are at least in sight of a number of seats in parliament. Hence, if voters want to influence the political game, voting for these parties is rational and will not lead to a lost vote. (Bos et al., 2011, p. 197)

Authoritativeness "refers to how knowledgeable a politician appears to be" (Bos et al., 2011, p. 183). Relevant voter perceptions include "effectiveness" (Bos & van der Brug, 2010; Bos et al., 2010, 2011). These leaders should strike a balance between ensuring prominence by being provocative and ensuring perceived effectiveness. "Right-wing populists who are able to reach that balance . . . will be most successful" (Bos et al., 2010, p. 143).

Hypotheses

In the present article, we measure evaluative tone instead of authoritativeness. We build on the concepts of prominence and tone in news media coverage and the concept of perceived effectiveness in the eyes of news consumers. Consistent with the relevant literature (Bos et al., 2011; Hopmann et al., 2010), we expected that the volume of exposure to the new party in the news media would increase voters' propensity to vote for it (H1). At the same time, in accordance with the literature (Bos et al., 2011; Hopmann et al., 2010), we expected that tone would matter for the propensity to vote in such a way that a more positive (or negative) tone of the coverage of a new political party would increase (or decrease) the propensity to vote for that party (H2). Except for a main effect of tone, we also expected tone to moderate the effect of the volume of exposure in such a way that when the tone is more positive, the marginal effect of the volume of exposure would have a positive effect on the propensity to vote (H3a), and when the tone is more negative, the marginal effect of the volume of exposure would have a negative effect on the propensity to vote (H3b). Extending the argument made by Bos and colleagues (2010, 2011), we hypothesized that these effects of news media coverage on vote propensity would be mediated by the perceived effectiveness of that new party (H4).

The Case of 50Plus in 2014

Seniors' parties have emerged all across Europe. In Western Europe, they have surged in all countries except France, Iceland, and Ireland (Hanley, 2010). In Eastern Europe, they have sprung up in every country except Albania, Latvia, Lithuania, and Moldova (Hanley, 2010). In 2012, 50Plus contested its first Dutch general election. It is one of 18 parties that gained representation in the national parliament at its first attempt out of 183 new parties since 1948. Of 15 seniors' parties, 50Plus was the third success case in that respect. The vote for the party is mainly related to age in combination with education and subjective income: The party tends to attract older voters who are not highly educated and who consider themselves poor, almost regardless of their ideological and policy orientations, institutional trust, and government satisfaction (van Spanje & Azrout, 2019a). Led by Jan Nagel (then 73 years old) and Henk Krol (age 62), the party received 1.9% of the vote, which translated into two parliamentary seats. These seats were held by Martine Baay-Timmerman (age 55) and Norbert Klein (age 56) when a major crisis struck the party two years later.

On May 28, 2014, both 50Plus/Baay-Timmerman and 50Plus/Klein were created. Both of them were parliamentary groups in the Lower House of the Dutch Parliament. These groups were created as a result of a dispute between the two MPs. Baay-Timmerman was ousted from the party by Norbert Klein, after which the 50Plus board in turn forced out Klein. Both groups claimed the name "50Plus," and the infighting dragged on for weeks.

To make matters worse, all this did not go unnoticed by the news media. In the country's nine main news outlets combined, no fewer than 282 news items mentioned 50Plus between December 2013 and June 2014, about 60% of the paragraphs having a clear negative tone compared with only 7% having a positive tone. Thus, Dutch news consumers were all but bombarded with bad news about 50Plus around that time. The news coverage of 50Plus is likely to have been particularly low on authoritativeness and negative in terms of tone.

As a clear example of a party split, such escalating internal conflict is arguably the worst that can happen to a new party. No matter how convinced about the policy issue positions the new party advocates, voters will be reluctant to support that party in such circumstances. Not only does the conflict scare off voters, it will also leave them confused about the party, eating away its perceived effectiveness. Thus, this creates the perfect opportunity to address the questions we ask in our article. Although we could also make this point by examining a different case, it would be a problem that another case would be less clear-cut.

Method

To test our hypotheses, we made use of data from a six-wave panel survey from the Netherlands (see de Vreese, Azrout, & Möller, 2014). The first four waves were collected in the context of the 2014 European Parliament Election Campaign study (Wave 1: December 13–26, 2013; Wave 2: March 20–30, 2014; Wave 3: April 17–28, 2014; Wave 4: May 26–June 2, 2014); Wave 5 (June 20–26, 2014) was collected specifically to follow the public's response to issues playing in the seniors' party; the sixth wave

(March 1–9, 2016) was collected in the context of a national referendum.[1] Fieldwork was administered by TNS NIPO Netherlands, which maintains a panel of 200,000 adults recruited through multiple strategies (e.g., telephone, face-to-face, and online). Membership in the panel is by invitation only to ensure sample quality and representativeness. For this study, a random sample was drawn from the database, with quotas set on age, gender, and education (N_{Wave1} = 2,189, American Association for Public Opinion Research response rate 1 = 78.1%; N_{Wave2} = 1,819, recontact rate = 83.1%; N_{Wave3} = 1,537, recontact rate = 84.5%; N_{Wave4} = 1,379, recontact rate = 89.7%; N_{Wave5} = 1,174, recontact rate = 85.1%; N_{Wave6} = 1,019, recontact rate = 86.8%). The survey was done using computer-assisted Web interviewing.

To account for the content respondents were exposed to, we combined the survey data with data from an automated content analysis of the eight most-read newspapers in the Netherlands (*de Telegraaf*, *Algemeen Dagblad*, *de Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *NRC Next*, *Trouw*, *Metro*, and *Sp!ts*). This mix offers ideological variation, and includes both free and paid newspapers and both tabloids and quality newspapers. We also added data from the most widely used online-only news source nu.nl, which has an audience of more than 2 million unique news consumers per day.

The newspaper articles were collected through the database of Nexis Uni; the articles from nu.nl were collected through their online archive. We collected all articles that mentioned 50Plus or one of its main politicians[2] that were published between November 13, 2013 (two weeks prior to the fieldwork of Wave 1 of the panel survey), and June 26, 2014 (the last day of the fieldwork of Wave 5), and between February 17 and March 9, 2016 (two weeks prior to the first day of the fieldwork of Wave 6 until the last day). The total number of articles was 428. The corpus of the material was analyzed at the paragraph level (N = 6,810).[3]

This six-wave panel survey was linked to content data from news media, so that we had repeated measures of the dependent variable, the independent variables, and the mediator, which allowed an over-time analysis. In addition to this, we had a quasiexperimental setting. This was because the split of 50Plus occurred during the fieldwork of the fourth wave. We used this quasiexperimental setting to test our hypotheses, considering every respondent interviewed before the event was "not assigned treatment" and every respondent interviewed after was "assigned treatment." For the "treated" respondents, we also used the additional information of the extent to which they had been exposed to news about 50Plus after the event, so as to be surer of the respondents having received treatment.

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[1] The sixth wave is two years apart from the other waves, and as such some may comment that the long time period in between threatens the validity of our findings. However, we also ran our models excluding the sixth wave, and the results directly parallel the findings reported in this article (results available from the authors).

[2] Search string used in both Nexis Uni and nu.nl: (50PLUS) OR (Jan Nagel) OR (Henk Krol) OR (Norbert Klein) OR (Martine Baay) OR (Toine Manders).

[3] Because we linked the media data to each individual by using the media data two weeks prior to each interview, data of a total number of 290 articles and 4,448 paragraphs were actually linked to the voter data.

Operationalization

Propensity to Vote 50Plus

Our dependent variable was measured in a block of questions asking for the propensity to vote for all 11 parties represented in the national parliament. The question was worded as follows: "We have a number of parties in our country, each of which would like to get your vote. How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties? Please specify your views on a 10-point scale where 1 means *not at all probable* and 10 means *very probable*." The answering options also included a "don't know" option (proportion responding "don't know": Wave 1 = 6.9%; Wave 2 = 5.8%; Wave 3 = 5.6%; Wave 4 = 5.3%; Wave 5 = 3.5%; Wave 6 = 7.1%). As we were interested in the propensity to vote for 50Plus, we used only the answer given for that party (M_{Wave1} = 2.95, SD_{Wave1} = 2.55; M_{Wave2} = 3.07, SD_{Wave2} = 2.54; M_{Wave3} = 2.95, SD_{Wave3} = 2.59; M_{Wave4} = 2.95, SD_{Wave4} = 2.59; M_{Wave5} = 2.60, SD_{Wave5} = 2.26; M_{Wave6} = 2.93, SD_{Wave6} = 2.43).

Volume of Exposure

To assess the volume of exposure (i.e., mere exposure to 50Plus in the consumed news media), we first turned to the content analysis. We counted the number of paragraphs that mentioned either the party or one of its main politicians. This led to a daily count of the number of paragraphs for each news outlet. We linked these data to the survey by means of a self-reported news exposure measure. We asked the respondents how many days in a typical week they read each of the eight newspapers and the online news website.[4] In a next step, comparable studies typically measure the coverage before the survey wave and link every respondent to this coverage before that wave. In the present study, however, in the fourth wave a relevant event took place during the fieldwork. Thus, we chose to link each respondent to news media content data at the daily level. For this, we used the following formula:

$$50PlusExposure_{r,w} = \sum_{i=1}^{9}\left(outletExposure_{i,r,w} * \sum_{d=-13}^{0} paragraphs_{i,d}\right).$$

This formula calculates the exposure to 50Plus in wave *w* of respondent *r* by first taking the sum of the paragraphs in newspaper *i* of the 14 days *d* prior to the interview, multiplying this by the number of days respondent *r* reported reading outlet *i* in wave *w*, and summing this for all nine outlets. The value of the variable increases as a respondent more often uses a particular news outlet (that reports on 50Plus) and as the news outlet (that the respondent uses) increases its coverage of 50Plus (M_{Wave1} = 22.56, SD_{Wave1} = 25.57; M_{Wave2} = 36.62, SD_{Wave2} = 38.14; M_{Wave3} = 57.59, SD_{Wave3} = 77.80; M_{Wave4} = 100.43, SD_{Wave4} = 120.57; M_{Wave5} = 370.82, SD_{Wave5} = 351.35; M_{Wave6} = 13.46, SD_{Wave6} = 15.07). Because of the large range of volume of exposure (and as a result very small unstandardized coefficients indistinguishable from zero with two decimals), we rescaled the variable by dividing the scores by 1,000.

[4] This question was not asked in Wave 5, so we used the responses in Wave 4 as proxies.

Tone of Exposure

To assess the tone of exposure, we first needed to assess the tone of the news coverage. For this, we relied on an automated content analysis using the SentiStrength algorithm (Thelwall, Buckley, Paltoglou, Cai, & Kappas, 2010). The algorithm assigns a sentiment score to short texts by comparing them with a language-specific word list. In the list, words are assigned a score from very negative to very positive. In addition to searching for individual words, the algorithm also looks at particular combinations of words, such as negation words that reverse the sign of the sentiment (e.g., "not good") and booster words that increase the absolute sentiment (e.g., "very good"). The algorithm has been validated by comparing algorithm results with manual coding (Thelwall, Buckley, & Paltoglou, 2012), also specifically in Dutch (Wojcieszak & Azrout, 2016). Using the algorithm, we counted the number of paragraphs with a positive tone and the number of paragraphs with a negative tone. We used this as input for creating an exposure measure to both positive paragraphs and negative paragraphs, and created the tone measure using the following formula:

$$toneExposure_{r,w} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{9}\left(outletExposure_{i,r,w} * \sum_{d=-13}^{0} positiveParagraphs_{i,d}\right) - \sum_{i=1}^{9}\left(outletExposure_{i,r,w} * \sum_{d=-13}^{0} negativeParagraphs_{i,d}\right)}{\sum_{i=1}^{9}\left(outletExposure_{i,r,w} * \sum_{d=-13}^{0} positiveParagraphs_{i,d}\right) + \sum_{i=1}^{9}\left(outletExposure_{i,r,w} * \sum_{d=-13}^{0} negativeParagraphs_{i,d}\right)}.$$

By subtracting the negative paragraph exposure (based on the number of negative paragraphs in the last 14 days in each outlet, weighted by the number of days the respondent used each outlet) from the positive paragraph exposure, and dividing this by the sum of the two, we created a tone measure in which −1 implies that the respondent was exposed to only negative paragraphs (but independent of whether this was just 1 or 1,000), +1 implies only exposure to positive paragraphs, and 0 implies positive and negative paragraphs were equally present or both absent (M_{Wave1} = −0.64, SD_{Wave1} = 0.43; M_{Wave2} = −0.71, SD_{Wave2} = 0.43; M_{Wave3} = −0.66, SD_{Wave3} = 0.44; M_{Wave4} = −0.56, SD_{Wave4} = 0.35; M_{Wave5} = −0.60, SD_{Wave5} = 0.35; M_{Wave6} = −0.55, SD_{Wave6} = 0.48).

Perceived Effectiveness

The degree to which a respondent perceived the party as effective in achieving its goals was measured only in the third, fourth, and fifth waves. The measurement consisted of four items: (1) To which degree is the organization of 50Plus stable, according to you? (2) To what extent do you think 50Plus can get things done for its voters? (3) To which degree is 50Plus an efficient organization, according to you? (4) To what extent do you expect 50Plus to achieve its goals? The respondents answered on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*to a very high degree*). In each wave, the items loaded on one factor ($eigenvalue_{Wave3}$ = 3.11; $eigenvalue_{Wave4}$ = 3.10; $eigenvalue_{Wave5}$ = 3.33) and formed a reliable scale (Cronbach's $alpha_{Wave3}$ = .90; Cronbach's $alpha_{Wave4}$ = .90; Cronbach's $alpha_{Wave5}$ = .93). We calculated the perceived effectiveness scale by taking the average of the four items (M_{Wave3} = 3.34, SD_{Wave3} = 1.24; M_{Wave4} = 3.44, SD_{Wave4} = 1.25; M_{Wave5} = 2.64, SD_{Wave5} = 1.32).

Data Analysis

Our analysis consisted of three parts. First, to test the over-time main effects of volume of exposure and tone of exposure,[5] as well as the interaction between the two, on the propensity to vote, we made use of fixed-effects regression analysis, modeling the within-person change over all six waves rather than the between-persons variation, which is typical in observational studies. In doing so, individuals served as their own controls because each person was compared with him- or herself at an earlier point in time. As a result, fixed-effects regression controls for all time-invariant variables, whether measured or unmeasured, as if they had been included in the model, offering the most stringent causal test in nonexperimental settings (Allison, 2009). As this method of analysis requires at least two observations per respondent at different time points (to be able to assess change), and because we allowed the respondents to answer "don't know" on our propensity to vote for 50Plus question, the sample consisted of respondents giving a valid answer in at least two waves: *N* = 1,713, giving rise to 8,550 observations.

Second, we analyzed the mediation by perceived effectiveness of the effects of volume of exposure and tone of exposure, and their interaction, again using fixed-effect regression analysis. As perceived effectiveness was measured only in Waves 3, 4, and 5, we used the variation over these three waves with a sample size of *N* = 1,451, resulting in 3,890 observations. We tested the mediation by following the method of Baron and Kenny (1986), first assessing the total effect of exposure on the propensity to vote score without controlling for perceived effectiveness (c-path), second assessing the effect of exposure on the mediator perceived effectiveness (a-path), and finally assessing the effect of perceived effectiveness (b-path) and exposure (c′-path) on the propensity to vote score simultaneously. A mediation existed if the a-path and the b-path yielded significant effects[6] and if the effect of the c′-path was significantly smaller than that of the c-path.

Third, turning to the quasiexperimental part of the analysis, an event during the fourth wave was used as a quasiexperimental factor. With the high visibility of the event and the clear negative tone, we tested whether respondents who filled out the questionnaire after the event showed a significantly lower propensity to vote score compared with those who responded before the event took place. In this model, we controlled for the propensity to vote score from the previous wave so as to avoid selection bias. Adding perceived effectiveness and media exposure to the model allowed for testing a moderated mediation.

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[5] We modeled the effects of volume of exposure and tone of exposure separately and simultaneously. As both measures are based on the self-reported media exposure measure, one might expect problems with multicollinearity. The correlations between volume and tone of exposure were of moderate size (ranging between −.30 in Wave 4 and −.66 in Wave 6) and values of tolerance in the models were well within acceptable levels (minimum tolerance was .55).

[6] We used the Sobel test to evaluate the significance level of the mediated effect. The mediated effect was calculated as the product of the a-path and b-path. The standard error was calculated by $SE_{ab} = \sqrt{b^2 SE_a{}^2 + a^2 SE_b{}^2 + SE_a{}^2 SE_b{}^2}$ (see also Baron & Kenny, 1986).

Results

We start off with descriptive statistics of our news media content data. Figure 1 shows the visibility and tone of coverage of 50Plus and its politicians in all nine media outlets under study. Concerning visibility, note the clear increase during the party's deep crisis at the time Waves 4 and 5 were fielded. Regarding tone, across all outlets 50Plus was portrayed in a consistent negative way. The slightly less negative tone during Wave 4 was mainly due to its good showing at the 2014 European Parliamentary elections, the party crisis occurring only in the last part of that wave's fieldwork.

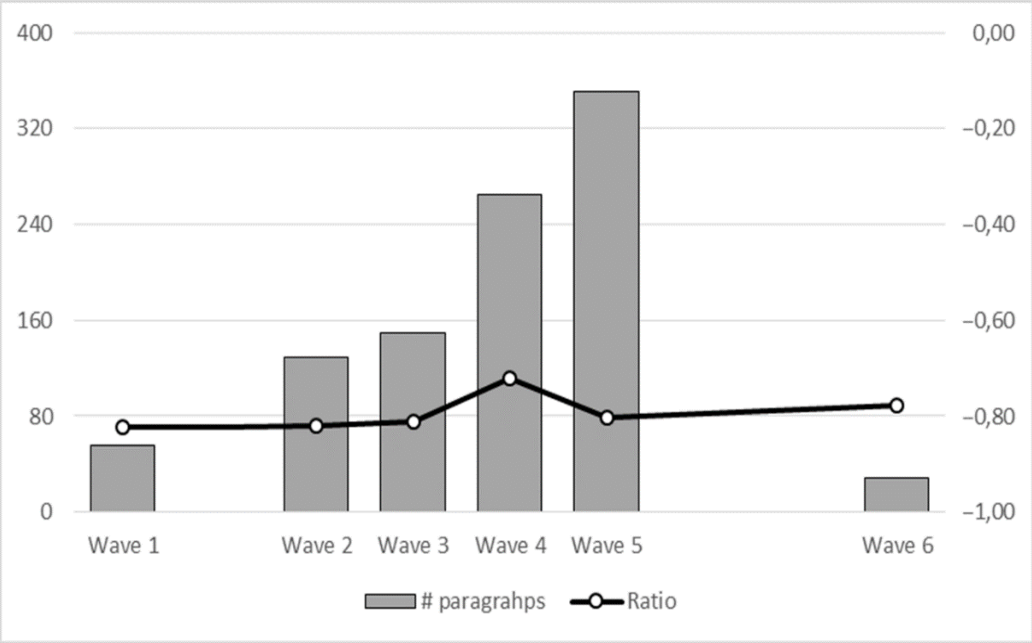

Figure 1. Visibility and tone of coverage of 50Plus at six time points in 2013–2016.

The results of our first set of fixed effects regression analyses can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Predicting Propensity to Vote for 50Plus.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Wave 2	0.09* (0.04)	0.09* (0.04)	0.09* (0.04)	0.09* (0.04)
Wave 3	−0.03 (0.05)	−0.03 (0.05)	−0.03 (0.05)	−0.02 (0.05)
Wave 4	0.00 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)
Wave 5	−0.39*** (0.05)	−0.31*** (0.06)	−0.31*** (0.06)	−0.30*** (0.06)
Wave 6	−0.13* (0.05)	−0.13* (0.05)	−0.13* (0.05)	−0.13* (0.05)
Volume of exposure		−0.25* (0.13)	−0.25* (0.13)	−0.30* (0.13)
Tone of exposure			−0.00 (0.05)	0.03 (0.06)
Volume × Tone of Exposure				1.10* (0.52)
R^2	.01	.01	.01	.01
F	19.71	17.11	14.66	13.41
F change	19.71***	4.08*	0.01	4.59*
$N_{respondents}$	1,713	1,713	1,713	1,713
$N_{observations}$	8,550	8,550	8,550	8,550

Note. Entries are unstandardized fixed-effects regression coefficients with standard errors within parentheses. Significance of the F change is compared with the previous model.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. +$p < .1$ (two-tailed).

Model 1 shows changes in propensity to vote for 50Plus compared with the first wave. Thus, we report a relative increase in Wave 2, a decrease in Wave 5, and increases again between Wave 5 and 6, although the level in Wave 6 did not reach that of Wave 1.[7]

In Model 2, we tested the fixed effects of volume of exposure (visibility). The negative coefficient implies that a within-subject increase in exposure leads to a within-subject decrease of propensity to vote for 50Plus ($b = -0.25$, $SE = 0.13$, $p = .043$). This does not bode well for Hypothesis 1, which claims that prominence increases vote propensity.

In Model 3, we added tone of exposure, which had no main effect ($b = -0.00$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .941$). We thus found no support for Hypothesis 2. We did observe that, while controlling for the tone of exposure, the negative effect of the volume of exposure persisted.

In the next model, Model 4, we added the interaction between volume of exposure and tone of exposure. This interaction yielded a significant positive effect ($b = 1.10$, $SE = 0.52$, $p = .032$). This implies that the more negative the tone of exposure, the stronger the effect of volume of exposure, that is, the effect of exposure becomes more negative. As well, as the tone turns more positive, an increase in volume exposure implies an increase in propensity to vote for 50Plus. This is consistent with Hypotheses 3a and 3b, but to further examine the hypotheses, we plot the interaction in Figure 2. The solid line in the figure

[7] As the coefficients in Model 1 were based on merely the 8,550 observations that allow for comparison between waves, they do not perfectly reflect the differences of the means we reported in the Method section, as these were based on all available data.

illustrates the estimated marginal fixed effect of volume of exposure, depending on the value of the tone of exposure. As tone of exposure is negative, the marginal effect of volume of exposure is also negative (e.g., when tone is −0.5, the marginal effect of volume of exposure is b = −0.86, SE = 0.31, p = .005, 95% CI = [−1.46, −0.25]. And the more negative the tone of exposure, the more negative the marginal effect of volume of exposure is estimated. This supports Hypothesis 3b. However, the figure also shows that when tone of exposure turns more positive, the marginal effect of volume of exposure also turns positive, but fails to reach conventional levels of significance. For instance, a positive tone of exposure of 0.5 leads to a marginal effect of volume of exposure of b = 0.24, SE = 0.27, p = .349, 95% CI = [−0.27, 0.77]. And in Figure 2, across the positive values of tone, we observe that the 95% confidence interval always contains zero. Although the lack of significant marginal effects is not in accordance with Hypothesis 3a, the marginal effect is in the expected direction. And given the small numbers of respondents that are (on average) exposed to a positive tone, the lack of a significant result may be due to a lack of power at this end of the scale. Also, because most respondents were exposed to a negative tone regarding 50Plus and given our support for Hypothesis 3b, we can understand the negative effect of volume of exposure: If the tone is primarily negative, an increase in volume of exposure is likely to reduce the propensity to vote.

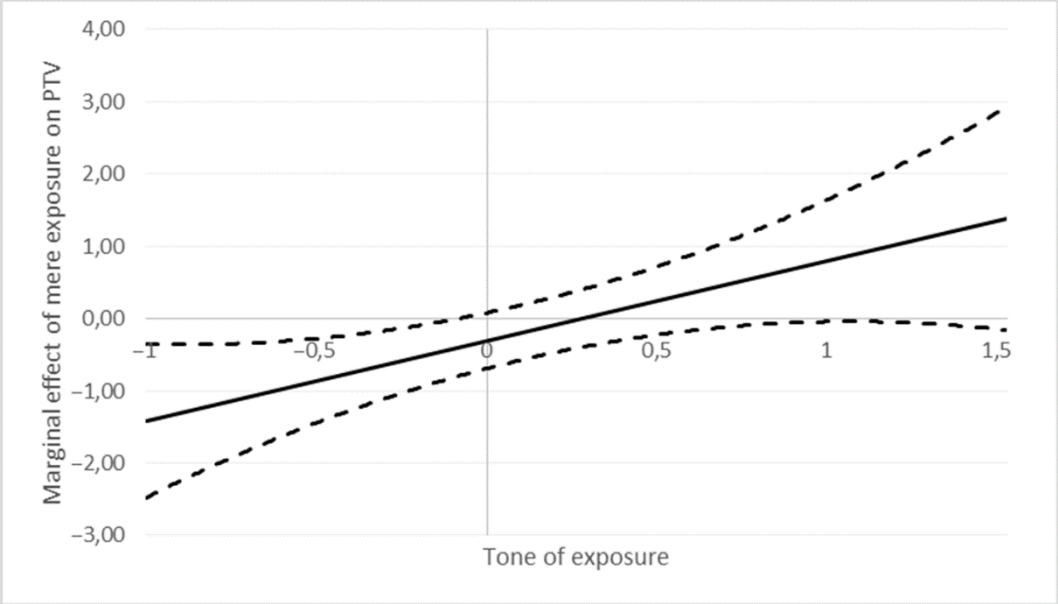

Figure 2. Marginal effect of volume of exposure on propensity to vote (PTV) for 50Plus for different values of tone of exposure. The dashed lines denote a 95% confidence interval.

Turning to the last hypothesis, Hypothesis 4, we added perceived effectiveness to the models. Because perceived effectiveness was measured only in Waves 3, 4, and 5, the following analyses also only apply to these three waves. We first note that both the main effect of tone of exposure (b = 0.09, SE = 0.10, p = .175) and the interaction between volume and tone of exposure (b = 0.20, SE = 0.66, p = .378) were not significant (we discuss the reason for not finding a significant interaction with only these three

waves in the Discussion section). We thus tested the mediation hypothesis only with volume of exposure as the independent variable. Following the steps of Baron and Kenny (1986), we first observe a significant total effect of volume of exposure on the propensity to vote for 50Plus: $b = -0.27$, $SE = 0.13$, $p = .021$. Second, we observe a significant direct effect of volume of exposure on perceived effectiveness ($b = -0.35$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < .001$) and a significant direct effect of perceived effectiveness on the propensity to vote for 50Plus ($b = 0.36$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$). With a significant indirect effect estimated at $b = -0.13$, (Sobel test: $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$) and a remaining direct effect of volume of exposure on the propensity to vote for 50Plus of $b = -0.14$ ($SE = 0.13$, $p = .135$), we found partial mediation, which supports our Hypothesis 4. The results of this mediation analysis are summarized in Figure 3.

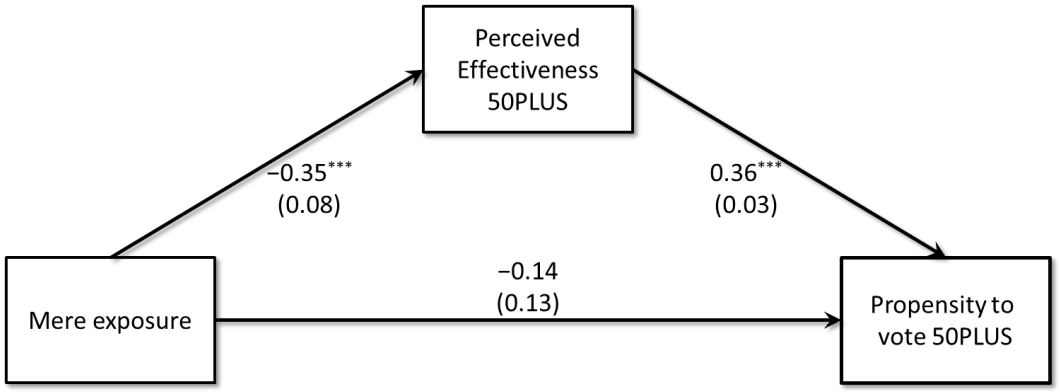

Figure 3. Model explaining propensity to vote from volume of exposure mediated by perceived effectiveness, based on observational data from Waves 3, 4, and 5. Entries are the unstandardized fixed-effects coefficients with standard errors within parentheses. The full models behind the graph are available from the authors. The total effect of volume of exposure on propensity to vote was estimated at* b = −0.27, SE = *0.13,* p = *.021 (one-tailed). The indirect path was estimated at* b = −0*.13, and a Sobel test showed this was significant (*SE = *0.03,* p < *.001).* *p < *.05.* **p < *.01.* ***p < *.001.* +p < *.1 (one-tailed).

We now turn to the quasiexperimental setting. We began by comparing the experimental group with the control group on their average scores of propensity to vote for 50Plus in Wave 3 as a randomization check. The group that later on filled out the questionnaire in Wave 4 before the crisis scored higher in Wave 3 ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 2.59$) than the group that filled out the questionnaire in Wave 4 after the crisis ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 2.52$), but this difference was not significant ($M_{diff} = 0.30$, $SE = 0.20$, $p = .131$). Comparing the groups in Wave 4, we see that the precrisis group scored a little higher compared with those in Wave 3 ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 2.64$), and the postcrisis group scored lower in Wave 4 compared with those in Wave 3 ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 2.23$); more importantly in Wave 4, the difference between the precrisis and postcrisis groups was significant ($M_{diff} = 0.94$, $SE = 0.17$, $p < .001$). This is supportive of the idea that the valence of a particular event influences the propensity to vote.

However, if we want to test whether this was indeed a media effect, we would expect the effect of the quasiexperimental treatment (i.e., whether the respondents filling in the questionnaire before and after the crisis differ) to be most pronounced among individuals who consume news. We thus tested whether the

quasiexperimental test was moderated by individuals' self-reported exposure to television news (b = −0.03, SE = 0.02, p = .028), newspapers (b = −0.01, SE = 0.03, p = .334), and online news (b = 0.02, SE = 0.02, p = .127).[8] Only the moderation by television exposure reached a conventional level of statistical significance. The moderation was as expected, as the effect of the crisis was larger (more negative) when an individual was more likely to watch the news. With a remaining marginally significant conditional effect for individuals not watching the news (b = −0.41, SE = 0.28, p = .074), we cannot rule out the existence of an effect among those individuals who do not use media, which may of course be likely because of "manipulation contamination" through other sources such as interpersonal communication. These findings are in line with Hypothesis 3b that a certain volume of exposure is required for a negative valenced event regarding a political party to negatively affect the propensity to vote for that party.

The quasiexperimental setting also allowed us to test Hypothesis 4. We started with assessing the effect of the quasiexperimental conditions on the mediator, perceived effectiveness. Checking randomization again, we found no significant difference in perceived effectiveness in Wave 3 (M_{diff} = 0.07, SE = 0.09, p = .440) between the precrisis group (M = 3.31, SD = 1.25) and the postcrisis group (M = 3.39, SD = 1.29). In Wave 4, the postcrisis group (M = 3.11, SD = 1.29) scored lower than the precrisis group (M = 3.49, SD = 1.20), and this difference was significant (M_{diff} = 0.38, SE = 0.09, p < .001). Thus, we conclude that perceived effectiveness is negatively influenced by the crisis, just as propensity to vote is.

To test whether perceived effectiveness mediated the effect of the crisis on the propensity to vote, we ran a mediation analysis. This was an analysis similar to the one conducted above, still according to the method outlined in Baron and Kenny (1986). In Figure 4, we show the results of this mediation analysis and found a significant total effect of the quasiexperimental factor on propensity to vote (the c-path: b = −0.72, SE = 0.15, p < .001), a significant effect of the quasiexperimental factor on the mediator perceived effectiveness (the a-path: b = −0.64, SE = 0.08, p < .001), a significant effect of the mediator on the propensity to vote (the b-path: b = 0.51, SE = 0.05, p < .001), and a substantial decrease of the direct effect from the quasiexperimental factor on propensity to vote when controlling for the mediator (the c′-path: b = −0.39, SE = 0.14, p = .004). With the indirect effect estimated at b = −0.32 (SE = 0.05, p < .001), we found partial mediation, in line with Hypothesis 4.

[8] The day after the crisis, Ascension Day, no newspapers were issued. Given that the crisis started when newspapers had already been printed, newspapers reported about the crisis two days later. By then, most readers had probably already heard of the crisis through other means. This may explain the lack of a moderated effect in our analysis based on exposure to newspapers.

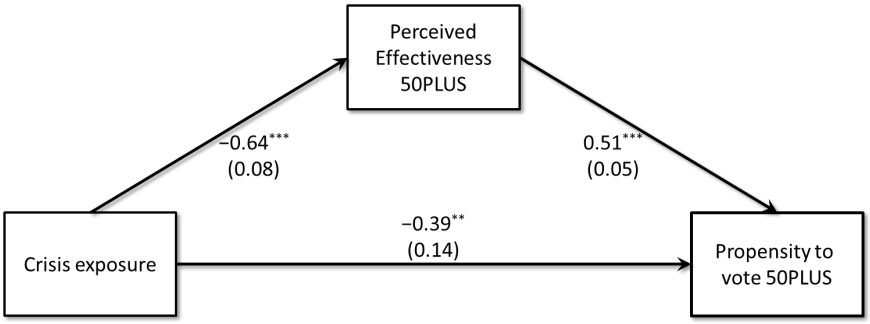

Figure 4. Model explaining propensity to vote from volume of exposure mediated by perceived effectiveness, based on quasiexperimental data from Wave 4. Entries are the unstandardized ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors within parentheses. In the models leading to these results, we also controlled for the propensity to vote in the preceding wave to capture any differences between the two quasiexperimental groups. The total effect of volume of exposure on propensity to vote was estimated at **b = −0.72,** ***SE = 0.15,*** **p < .001 (one-tailed). The indirect path was estimated at b = −0.32, and a Sobel test showed this was significant (SE = 0.05, p < .001). *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. +p < .1 (one-tailed).**

Finally, we tested whether this was a media effect by analyzing whether the indirect path was moderated by exposure to news. Given the nonsignificant moderations by exposure to newspapers and online news, we focused again on exposure to television news. The results are summarized in Figure 5.

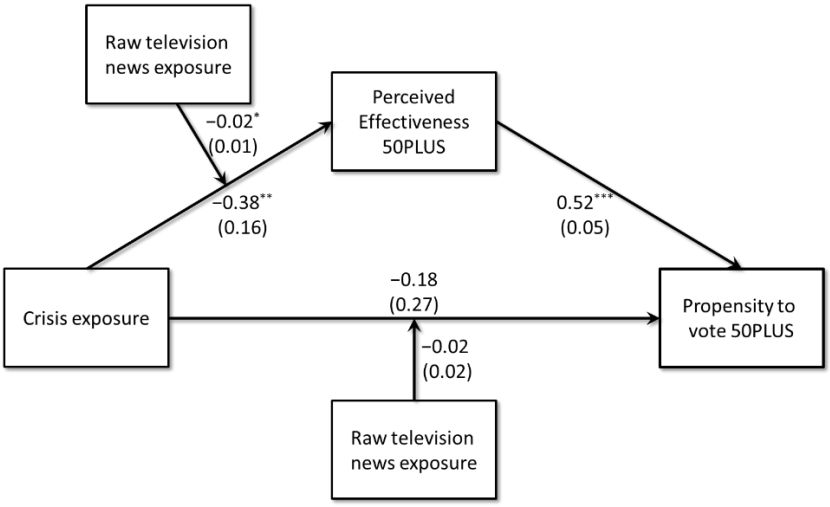

Figure 5. Model explaining propensity to vote from volume of exposure mediated by perceived effectiveness and moderated by television news exposure, based on quasiexperimental data from Wave 4. Entries are the unstandardized ordinary least squares regression coefficients with standard errors within parentheses. The coefficients shown in the mediation part are conditional effects when raw television news exposure is at zero (no exposure). For main effects, we refer to Figure 4. **p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. +p < .1 (one-tailed).**

We found that the path from the quasiexperimental factor on the mediator was indeed moderated by television exposure ($b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .029$). The negative coefficient of the interaction implies that the more individuals used television news (i.e., are likely to be exposed), the lower the perceived effectiveness was for the postcrisis group compared with the precrisis group (i.e., the larger the effect). However, just as for the main effect, we observed a significant conditional effect among individuals who did not consume television news ($b = -0.38$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = .014$). Thus, again we found that individuals who did not use television news were also affected, likely through other news sources such as personal communication. Finally, we noticed that the direct effect of the experimental condition on propensity to vote for 50Plus decreased and the interaction between the experimental condition and television exposure turned insignificant. This means that there was moderated mediation.

Discussion

In this article, we have touched on media portrayals of new parties. Much is still unknown about what aspects of new parties' images are important for their success or failure. We have addressed the question of whether a particular aspect, perceived effectiveness, mediates the effect of news media coverage of a new party on voters' propensity to vote for that party. We found that it partially does. In the process, we have corroborated earlier findings that visibility in news media coverage and tone of that coverage matter for a party's electoral performance in rather intuitive ways.

Apart from arguing and demonstrating that perceived effectiveness plays this major role in new party success, we have gone beyond the relevant literature in at least four other ways. First, we integrated existing political science concepts into a communication science model, which we applied to an electoral study. Second, we compiled and tested a scale of perceived effectiveness of a political party in voters' eyes, which proved to be reliable in this context. Third, we applied a novel theoretical model of media effects to electoral behavior. And fourth, we employed three parts of a study in a complementary way. Furthermore, the sixth wave showed us a (partial) recovery of the consequences of the party split and internal war after a year. This indicates that the effects we found were relatively short term. Only a few previous studies have estimated the duration of such effects. But although the effects may not be permanent, even short-term effects may be consequential if, for instance, a crisis emerges shortly before the elections.

As the results of each study pointed in the same direction on most points, this makes us confident about our findings. However, although we established that visibility matters for the electoral performance of new parties, the direction was opposite of what one would expect. A party would need a certain level of visibility because a nonvisible party does virtually not exist and would not attract any voters. This would imply a positive effect of visibility, whereas our analyses showed a negative coefficient. It turns out that it is not just visibility that drives the effect: The tone of the coverage is also important. This is illustrated by our interaction, for which visibility has a positive effect if the tone of the coverage is positive, but there is a negative effect if the tone is negative. The negative main effect of visibility was thus the result of a mainly negative tone toward the party. The lack of a significant interaction between visibility and tone in our three-wave design, we expect, was due to not only a mainly negative tone, but also to a high correlation between

visibility and tone (the more visible the party in this period, the more negative the tone). These findings disavow the well-known saying that "any publicity is good publicity."

One could argue, however, that our findings do not necessarily constitute a media effect but rather an effect of real-life events. Indeed, a party fighting among itself is a real-world event, and knowledge of such an event would drive changes in both perceived effectiveness and the propensity to vote for that party. Yet, as Norris (2000) found that media effects are most likely when citizens rely on news media as their main source of information, and following Page and Shapiro (1992), most citizens do not experience political events first-hand and thus need to rely on the news media to learn about politics. Our findings in the longitudinal analyses show that visibility and tone matter but at the same time visibility and tone differ among news outlets, which means that it is not just events that cause shifts in perceptions, but also the way the media portray these events. This was corroborated in our experimental analysis, as the effect was moderated by media use.

Limitations of our study include studying just one party during one particular (albeit relatively long) time period. Furthermore, we cannot be entirely sure about the content of the news media beyond its tone. More specifically, the concept of "authoritativeness" used by Bos and colleagues (Bos & van der Brug, 2010; Bos et al., 2010, 2011)—and, to the extent applicable, "populism"—were not adequately measured. Future research should take relevant content characteristics into account.

Another limitation to our study is that in our analysis we implicitly controlled for all time-invariant variables, but not for attitudes that may change over time. Thus, we cannot rule out that the relations were spurious. But as explained by Wojcieszak and Azrout (2016), most variation in content-weighted self-reported media exposure measures comes from change in the content and not from changes in media consumption. We thus argue that other attitudes were not likely causal prior to weighted exposure measures.

Finally, one could argue that the effects and mechanisms we are interested in may not be unique to new parties. Indeed, an established party for which the perceived effectiveness is reduced is also likely to see its electoral performance decrease. And real-life events (be it internal struggles or perhaps successful or unsuccessful participation in government) are likely to influence both. Yet, important here is that established parties have established reputations. And although reputations may change, new information from the media needs to compete with existing beliefs. Contrary to established parties, new parties are still in the process of establishing a reputation. Thus, with citizens still learning about the new party, information from the media is much more likely to affect citizens' perceptions of the new party. We thus expect that this mechanism is especially important for new parties. Thus, to be successful, new parties need not only make sure they are seen, but also guard their reputation.

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