

Book Review: New Challenger Parties in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis

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*Systematically comparing 229 elections since 1950 across 15 European democracies, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, the Benelux and Scandinavian countries, this book questions why new challenger parties are more successful in some countries than others, and analyses the conditions that determine their emergence and subsequent success or failure. Reviewed by **Elisabeth Carter**.*

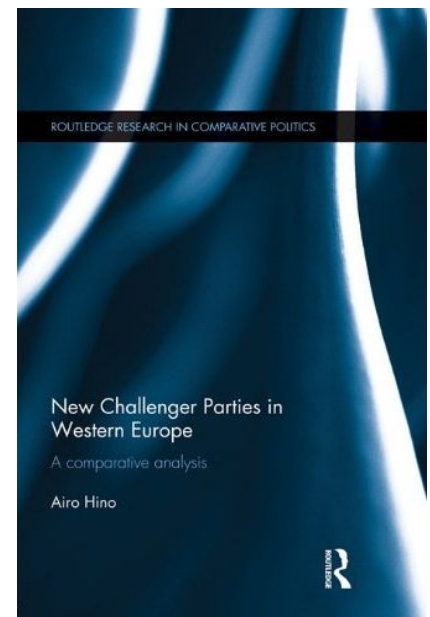


New Challenger Parties in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis. Airo Hino. Routledge. January 2012. 304 pages.

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The recent elections in Greece reflect the widespread support that new challenger parties are enjoying across Europe, as well as the threat that the more traditional political forces are facing. Indeed, since the 1970s in particular, established political parties have had to contend with the birth and rise of new competitors that seek to challenge the status quo and that aim to address issues neglected by the mainstream elite. But how do these upstarts appear? And why do only some of them then go on to experience substantial success at the polls?

It is these questions that Airo Hino, Associate Professor at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan addresses in his book *New Challenger Parties in Western Europe*. Focussing on parties that explicitly concern themselves with environmental issues, immigration, or regional problems, and that have contested national elections in the post-1950 period, Hino investigates the impact of socio-economic, political and institutional factors on new party emergence and success in 15 West European countries.



The key argument that underlies this book's investigations is that we should not, assume that the conditions that facilitate (or hinder) a new party's emergence also assist (or hamper) its subsequent electoral success. Rather, these two stages of a party's life are quite distinct and therefore should be examined separately. This argument itself is not new. But what is new in this book, and indeed what constitutes the study's greatest strength, is that, through the construction of a 'double-hurdle' model, Hino investigates the argument empirically and systematically. This represents an important contribution to the literature on new, extremist and challenger parties.





Hino examines the impact of the socio-economic, political and institutional environment on all new challenger parties, but he also explores the influence of these factors on different types of new challenger parties. Using data from the Comparative Manifesto Project, he identifies New Politics Parties (a diverse bunch of parties that embrace ecologism and environmentalism, libertarianism, multiculturalism, pacifism, and left radicalism), Extreme Right Parties (whose profiles include Fascism, neo-conservatism, racism, nationalism, neo-liberalism, populism and anti-system sentiments), and Ethno-Regionalist Parties (that stand for greater decentralization and the protection of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity and minority groups).

Even though the typologies that Hino constructs and the terms he adopts for each type of party are open to debate, the decision to disaggregate new challenger parties by type is useful as it allows for a more nuanced

understanding of the impact of the different facilitating factors. So, while the study reaches the general conclusion that features of the socio-economic, political [and] institutional environment do matter to the emergence and success of new challenger parties, it also emphasizes that these factors 'matter in different ways for different types of new challenger parties'.

Another strength of this book is that, even if Hino himself does not make the case perhaps strongly enough, the conclusions reached in the book really do matter. This is because established parties, and governmental parties in particular, can, to some extent, shape the environment in which they and the new competitors exist. They can alter levels of public expenditure, they can influence how open their economy is to international trade, they can decide to what extent they will address the issues that new challengers embrace, and they can adjust the rules of the game by reforming electoral systems or party funding regimes. Having a better understanding of how socio-economic, political and institutional factors (and any changes in these) influence the emergence and the success of new challengers is therefore of real use, be it for competitive reasons (i.e. for winning elections) or for wider democratic ones (e.g. to quash extremist parties).

To be able to test the theoretical arguments and reach the conclusions he does, Hino engages in some very detailed and advanced quantitative data analysis. This is undertaken with great care, competence and thoroughness, and is reported in full. This analysis does, however, sometimes make for rather heavy reading. This is not a criticism. After all, it is only by making use of the innovative 'double-hurdle' model that the research questions can be examined. Moreover, this model does require complex analysis. But readers should be warned and should be prepared to persevere through some rather 'stats-tastic' passages.

This book then is a very welcome addition to the literature on new, niche, extremist, and challenger parties because it explores a question that was raised three decades or so ago but that was never really answered. Ever since the late 1970s we have been reminded of the crucial distinction between party formation and party success and we have been warned that different conditions affect each phase of a party's life in different ways. But the empirical evidence as to what conditions mattered when was very much lacking. Hino's study puts paid to that, and through his careful and thorough empirical analysis, we now know much more about the factors that facilitate a party's emergence and those that encourage its subsequent success. Quantitatively-minded scholars of comparative and party politics will very much welcome this contribution. Whether a wider audience can be tempted to engage with this analysis is perhaps less certain.

Elisabeth Carter is Senior Lecturer in Politics at Keele University. Her main research interests centre on political parties, electoral institutions and electoral behaviour, and right-wing extremism. She is author of *The Extreme Right in Western Europe: Success or Failure?* (Manchester University Press, 2005 and 2010) and has published articles on party and electoral politics in the *European Journal of Political Research*, *Representation* and *West European Politics*. Read more reviews by Elisabeth.

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