

Springing up like mushrooms after the rain: „New“ parties in Montenegro's institutionalised party system

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Abstract: *Recent years have seen the formation of new parties across Europe that challenge established patterns of party competition and coalition-building during elections. While a similar trend of party creation has occurred in Montenegro, these new parties have failed to „deinstitutionalise“ the party system. This article tracks the development process for new parties. At the same time, it looks at factors and settings that have enabled (or impeded) the institutionalisation of these parties and their relative success in parliamentary elections. Two peculiar findings arise from my analysis. First, it appears that the fragmentation of the traditional party system has only happened among opposition parties (with the notable exception of a split among social democrats). This raises questions about the reasons for this process and its effect on party competition. It also leads to a second finding: though more than five effective political parties have been created since 2012, they have failed to change established party competition. To a limited degree, these parties have shifted the focus of public debate from identity politics to the economy, but the party system remains highly entrenched. In other words, coalition-building is as predictable as ever.*

Keywords: *Montenegro, new parties, fragmentation, party system institutionalisation*

Introduction

Montenegro, the smallest of the former Yugoslav republics, regained its independence and established a sovereign state following an independence referendum in May 2006. Although the country's relatively small population of 600,000 means it has not attracted much scholarly attention, what it lacks in size, it makes up for with its vibrant political scene. Here the critical feature is the hegemonic power of the Democratic Party of Socialists (*Demokratska partija socijalista*; DPS), the successor of the League of Communists of Montenegro (*Savez komunista Crne Gore*), which has decisively won all free elections since the introduction of a pluralistic system in 1990. This dominance has significantly affected electoral competition as well as the potential for coalition-building and the emergence of new parties. Even so, over the last few years, Montenegro has seen the emergence of a number of new political parties starting with Positive Montenegro (*Pozitivna*) in 2012. Despite their novelty value, these parties have not substantially changed the national electoral landscape. This article aims to answer several questions about these developments: What conditions have fostered the emergence of new parties? What are the organisational features and identities of these parties, and have they succeeded in electoral terms? What is their effect on the institutionalised party system?

This study builds on the seminal work of Cox (1997) and applies a theory of strategic entry to evaluate the favourability of conditions in Montenegro for those planning to enter the electoral arena. At the same time, I outline some of the peculiarities of the Montenegrin case and sketch the development path of important new political actors. Finally, I look at the effects (or lack thereof) of these new actors on the political scene in Montenegro.

This study makes two significant contributions. First, it identifies the political strategy that has enabled DPS to completely neutralise the impact of new parties on the institutionalised party system. Here I argue that DPS has managed to structure the party contest around an ethnic divisions, thereby limiting the potential of new parties to reduce predictable party politics and coalition-building. Second, I outline the development path of new parties in Montenegro, a topic that has entirely escaped scholarly attention.

How do new parties emerge?

In order to assess the process of new party creation, we need first to consider the concept of a new party and decide what such an entity actually consists of. Although this might seem to be a straightforward and easy task, some care is required since how this concept is defined will guide our evaluation of the party system, that is, whether it is seen as frozen and stable or volatile and in the midst of change (Barnea – Rahat 2011). Clearly delineating what a new party

is, is, thus, fundamental. Applying a restrictive definition, Bartolini and Mair (1990) regard all parties that have been created from splits and mergers as the continuation of old parties. Others differ and argue that smaller split-offs from bigger parties may be seen as new parties (Mainwaring – Scully 1995) or that a mere label change is enough to render a party a new political actor (Dalton 2008). Evidently, the choice of concept will limit or expand the pool of possible cases for analysis.

While the concepts described above are useful, I do not agree with any of them entirely. Nevertheless, they do drive the idea of new parties employed in this study. Evaluating a party's newness requires a more nuanced approach than the ones that have been listed so far. A focus on how a specific party was created (by a merger or split, etc.), while informative, does not provide sufficient information to classify a party as new or old. On the other hand, factors such as internal organisation, a party's „label“ (including its overall image and identity) and formal status do. Here I build partially on the analytic framework of Barnea and Rahat (2011) to evaluate party newness. These scholars outline eight criteria for assessing new parties: party label, ideology, voters, formal status, institutions, activists, representatives and policies. While extensive, this list does not exhaust all potential criteria. Furthermore, Barnea and Rahat (2011) provide these criteria in order to evaluate the *degree of party newness*, which implies that none of these conditions is essential though it may be sufficient. In this study, I focus primarily on three of these criteria – party label, official status and institutions – to assess whether a given entity is a new party. The choice of these conditions is guided by their relative importance as signs of newness and sources of symbolic meaning for a new party (Barnea – Rahat 2011). Since, however, these factors alone cannot determine whether a party is sufficiently new, this analysis is complemented by some additional considerations.

In applying the model to specific cases, I consider several possible scenarios. First, there is the clear-cut case of a grassroots movement that transforms into a political party. This party's label, formal status and institutions are created from scratch and cannot be associated with another political entity. In contrast, the situation is often far more complicated when a split or merger gives rise to a potential new party. In such a case, the new entity does not automatically reflect either the continuation of the old party or the emergence of a new one. In the case of split-offs, some of these parties will not be successors of the old party or retain its infrastructure, ideology, ownership structure and so on. Similarly, some of these parties do not retain the old party name, and indeed these splits usually occur because one faction wishes to distinguish itself from the traditions (positive or negative) of the mother party. A new party may, thus, emerge from a split if significant effort is put into creating a new party identity, brand, institutions and – possibly though not necessarily – ideology. In the case of mergers, to qualify as a new party, an entity will need to develop new party

infrastructure and be registered as a new political player. It will also require a new party label and identity. Moreover, the old (now merged) parties must fully embrace that new identity.

In the empirical part of this study, I first analyse the name of each affected party and then assess whether it was created from a split or a merger, how different it is from its mother party and what the different label symbolises. Second, I look at the party's formal status and whether it is registered and has acquired legal status. This is the most clear-cut indicator of a party's newness since it produces a binary „yes“ or „no“ response. Third, I analyse the internal organisation of the party and the presence of institutions separate from those of the mother party (in the cases of a split or merger). Here I focus on the existence of local committees, executive bodies, rules about the inclusion of women and the organisation of young people. To recapitulate: to be classified as new, a party must have developed its own infrastructure, been legally registered and acquired a separate party label (identity).

With this idea of political parties in mind, I turn next to conditions that foster the emergence of new parties. Early research focused on conditions that were specific to the emergence of left or right parties. More recently, however, the literature has suggested that a common underlying logic informs the emergence of new parties regardless of the ideological family they belong to (Hug 2001). This logic is usually understood through the lens of game theory. Here the game takes place in the structured environment of a political system between players who are established parties or groups considering forming a party. Along the same lines, the critical work of Cox (1997) provides a starting point for any analysis of party creation. According to Cox's analysis and the theory of strategic entry, new parties are formed based on the decision of an elite to enter the political arena when the probability of success is high. The specific conditions that determine the likelihood of success may be evaluated differently. As a very general principle, Tavits (2008) suggests that electoral systems with more proportional seat allocation are more favourable to the emergence of new parties. Hug (2001) points out that the chance of new parties forming is higher when there is no significant threshold for entering the election contest. More specific rules that favour new parties' emergence include low financial costs of party registration, a low number of signatures being required for registration and greater availability of party funding.

As for the institutional costs of creating a party, party funding regulations are a key concern of this study. It is almost a truism that the availability of funds enables new parties to emerge. Nevertheless, this relationship is also affected by the duration of the democracy in question, with new parties more likely to emerge in young democracies (Tavits 2008). Booth and Robbins (2010) propose an even more complex qualification, highlighting the connections between public funding rules and private funding and donation provisions. On

the other hand, some scholars have argued that funding thresholds have no effect on the stability of the party system and, more specifically, the formation of new parties (Van Biezen – Rashkova 2014). Still, even if party formation *per se* is not affected, it is clear that funding thresholds do limit a party's potential electoral success (Van Biezen – Rashkova 2014). As Katz and Mair (1995) point out, what makes the issue of party regulations and funding so significant is that it is parties themselves that guide and determine these rules. In their work on party cartelisation, Katz and Mair (1995) discuss the nature of party funding regulations and argue that some kind of reinforcement is taking place. Since parties are in charge of creating the rules of the game, they are also in a position to strengthen their own standing and impede the establishment and success of new challenger parties. As such, they use their positions to stay in power.

In addition to the low institutional costs of creating a party, several other criteria are crucial when strategically calculating a potential party's success, as Tavits (2006) points out. These factors include the weakness of corporatist arrangements in the system and the probability of attracting voters. Lago and Martinez (2011) provide a framework for evaluating this second criterion. Drawing on the case of Spain, they argue that new parties can attract voters when the failure of the electoral market (i.e. the failure of existing parties to satisfy voters' ideological demands) combines with a high degree of voter flexibility. Voter flexibility is higher in young democracies since neither the electoral base nor voter-party links are strongly defined (Golder 2003). Even in older established democracies, however, these associations are not set in stone. Flexibility can also be induced by external shocks that open up the space for voter-party realignment (Golder 2003).

On a slightly different note, Bartolini and Mair (1990) argue that voter flexibility is linked to the heterogeneity of parties in the political system. While this heterogeneity may lead to the establishment of many parties especially if dominant splits are ethnically based, once minority parties are established, their supporters may be less likely to change their vote than voters in a more homogenous system (Bartolini – Mair 1990). Furthermore, even when voters are flexible and there is a high degree of volatility, this does not automatically mean that new parties will succeed in attracting voters. Looking at the significant volatility in eastern Europe, Sikk (2005) argues that this has not translated into support and success for new parties. Instead, volatility had merely led to the transferring of votes between *existing* parties. Similarly, Tavits (2008) points out that volatility is a consequence of the success of a new party and not the primary driver of its emergence and success.

As well as considering the favourability of conditions, several scholars have taken a more functionalist approach to new parties. In this vein, Lucardie (2000) argues that new parties may develop by marketing themselves as the saviours of the ideology of established political actors (thereby assuming the roles of

„prophets, purifiers and prolocutors“). This stress on ideological division comes from a cleavage-based notion of party competition (Sikk 2012). Not all new parties, however, market themselves as ideologically pure or different from established parties. Instead they may simply pursue an image of *newness* (Sikk 2012). The latter is not an ideological feature but refers rather to the fact that the party leadership is new on the political scene. In certain conditions, this newness is powerful enough to ensure electoral success (Sikk 2012).

Building on the theory of strategic entry (Cox 1997), my analysis gives nuance to the enabling factors that lower the costs of strategic entry for a given party. The surveyed scholarship suggests that the calculus for strategic entry is highly context-specific and that different factors contribute to making a specific party viable. While none of the identified enabling factors is essential, each of them may be sufficient to prompt the emergence of a new party. Each of these factors is therefore empirically evaluated to determine its importance in the context of Montenegro.

Aside from conditions that foster the emergence and success of new parties, it is important to consider the consequences of that success. Here the primary question is, what effect do new parties have on the institutionalisation of the party system? In the first instance, a high degree of institutionalisation may deter the emergence of new parties (Mainwaring – Torcal 2006). A highly institutionalised party system is one where the main parties are stable and exhibit predictable patterns of behaviour and party competition. At the same time, voter attachments are stable and the parties are seen as legitimate political actors that are not subject to the whims of their leadership (Mainwaring – Torcal 2006). Traditionally, party system institutionalisation was measured through voter volatility. A high degree of institutionalisation meant a low level of voter volatility, and thus, little chance of electoral success for new parties. If increased institutionalisation limits the emergence of viable new parties, then the reverse scenario is also worth exploring. How do new parties affect the institutionalisation of the political system? The key issue is, thus, whether new parties alter the predictability of party competition. Does the potential for coalition-building change because of the entry of these new political actors, or does the situation stay predictable as ever? Furthermore, can these new parties introduce new issues and alter the most salient concerns of the day? Does the emergence of new parties serve to weaken voters' attachments to traditional parties? If new parties can change the degree of institutionalisation, we should expect to see greater volatility in the electorate and a realignment of coalition-building. After introducing the Montenegrin situation, I therefore explore the impact of new parties on these two specific issues.

Montenegro: Fertile ground for new parties?

On paper, Montenegro has a short political history that starts with the national independence referendum in 2006.¹ Nevertheless, though it spent most of the 20th century as part of federalist variations of Yugoslavia, the specificities of Montenegrin culture and politics remained prominent. Having gone almost unchallenged by the people under communist rule (Bieber 2008), new party elites managed to transform the League of Communists of Montenegro into the Democratic Party of Socialists (*Demokratska partija socijalista*; DPS) and win significant and long-lasting public support. It is precisely this phenomenon, i.e. the predominance of one party, DPS and its ability to control political life entirely (Komar – Živković 2016; Fink Hafner 2008), which makes Montenegro such an interesting case study. Apart from a short period from 1998 to 2002 when the Socialist People's Party threatened to establish a two (bloc) party system (Bieber 2013),² DPS's rule has remained relatively uncontested. This period of dominance has been characterised by several trends. First, especially in the wake of independence in 2006, Montenegro saw an abundance of new parties, most of which did not achieve any lasting presence in the political system. This trend may be seen as an extension of the party fragmentation that Bieber (2013) has identified in the early years of Montenegrin parliamentary life. Second, despite this fragmentation, these parties failed to seriously challenge the rule of DPS, change the nature of the party system or alter the salient issues of the day. In what follows, I explore the conditions that fostered and enabled the emergence of these new parties.

It is worth beginning with the conditions favourable to the emergence of new parties that were identified in the previous section. Montenegro represents a favourable context on many of these counts. The use of a proportional electoral system in local and national parliamentary elections, the relatively low election threshold (3% voter support) and the short duration of democratic practices in the country are all features of the Montenegrin political system which should favour the emergence of new parties according to the literature (see Tavits 2008). Furthermore, each electoral cycle would seem to provide a chance for new parties to attract voters, particularly from those segments of the population that are undecided and traditionally abstain from voting. Depending on the election,

1 Before this referendum, party competition was inevitably influenced by Montenegro's role in the federal structures of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992–2003) and the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (2003–2006).

2 In 1997, a split occurred within DPS based on different factions' positions on Belgrade and the policies of Slobodan Milošević. As Vuković (2015) points out, the initial clash between Belgrade and Podgorica arose from the economic consequences of international sanctions and later intensified amidst growing debate over Montenegrin independence. The DPS faction that supported the regime in Belgrade lost an internal power struggle and created the Socialist People's Party (SNP). [Again: Please let me know if I've misunderstood the intended meaning]

a base of between 10 and 15% of the electorate abstains from voting because of dissatisfaction with the country's political scene. In this sense, Montenegro would seem to be a good example of electoral market failure (Lago – Martinez 2011) since no existing political parties match the political preferences of these voters or can drive them to the polls. Since traditional political parties fail to reflect these voters' political preferences, the *newness* (Sikk 2012) of alternative parties is what marks them as worthy of support. New parties appear, then, to have a strong chance of attracting voters. As such, the strategic entry calculation suggests that party elites should have no trouble in deciding to enter the election competition.

All these favourable factors are, however, outweighed by a number of unfavourable conditions. To begin with, party funding regulations play a major role in determining the success of new parties (Tavits 2008; Booth – Robbins 2010). On this count, though registering a party in Montenegro is relatively easy and requires only 200 signatures and no fee payment, party financing laws are less supportive of the emergence and establishment of new parties. Non-parliamentary parties are entitled to some funding from the state or local budget, albeit only during and specifically for a given election campaign. On this basis, 20% of total election campaign funding should be equally distributed across all officially competing parties, while the remaining 80% should be proportionally distributed based on the election results of parties entering (local or national) parliament. This approach to funding seems to favour established parties, especially those that have been successful, while still providing some sort of security for new parties wishing to enter the political fray. To access funding for normal operations between election cycles, parties need to fulfil the funding threshold by gaining one seat at the national or local level depending on the elections in question.

Second, there is a high degree of party heterogeneity in the Montenegrin political system. In young democracies, such heterogeneity may be a factor that enables new parties to succeed, but in Montenegro, the competition is frozen along ethnic lines (Džankić 2013), making voter volatility across ethnic groups highly unlikely. In other words, the fact that the established parties of ethnic groups (that is, Montenegrin, Serbian, Bosniak, Albanian and Croatian parties) dominate the system means voters are less likely to switch allegiances (Bartolini – Mair 1990). Furthermore, the party system is highly institutionalised, a situation that deters the emergence of new parties (Mainwaring – Torcal 2006). It is precisely because ethnicity is the primary driver of political mobilisation that party competition remains highly predictable. Traditional DPS coalition partners including Albanian, Croat and Bosniak parties cannot realistically be expected to collaborate with Serbian parties, which seldom support Montenegrin nationalism. In this situation, new parties can hardly be expected to change established patterns of party competition since they are forced to position them-

selves along ethnic lines. In consequence, the space for political manoeuvring is greatly reduced and limited to parties from „proper“ ethnic blocs.

On the whole, then, there would seem to be more deterrents than factors enabling the emergence of new parties in Montenegro. Still, there have been numerous instances of new parties emerging in the last nine years. In this regard, the Montenegrin case is of particular interest to wider audiences since at a glance, it disproves the main predictions in the literature. Crucially, we find that factors that increase the costs of strategic entry interact with a system in which one party (DPD) predominates and plays a critical role. Faced with the seeming invincibility of DPS (Komar – Živković 2016), and even though the strategic calculation might be unfavourable, opposition forces realign themselves every electoral cycle through new parties or party lists. This is their main strategy to attract as many voters as possible.

New parties in Montenegro

The following sections outline the developmental paths of the major political parties that have appeared since the independence referendum in 2006.³ Here I draw on the model of party newness outlined above, with an emphasis on three factors: party label, formal registration and institutions. A summary of the results for all these parties can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Degree of newness of political parties in Montenegro

	Political parties						
	Positive Montenegro	SD	URA	DF	Demos	UCG	Democratic Montenegro
Distinctive party label	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Formal status	+	+	+	–	+	+	+
Distinctive institutions	+	–	+	–	+	–	+
Party newness	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Positive Montenegro (*Pozitivna Crna Gora*)

The first major new party to appear on the Montenegrin political scene was Positive Montenegro (*Pozitivna Crna Gora*). The party was founded on 26 May 2012

³ As of January 2018, there were 54 political parties legally registered with the Montenegrin Ministry of Public Administration. Taking into account the population size, this amounted to one party for around every 12,000 people.

and had a very successful first election campaign, winning 8.4% of the vote in the national parliamentary elections later that year. Positive Montenegro was a clear-cut case of a new party, with party leadership that had not previously engaged in politics,⁴ a distinctive party identity, a new label (including logo) and ideology (focusing on economic policy) and an internal party organisation built from scratch.

The initial election success of Positive Montenegro can be ascribed to factors identified in the previous sections. By highlighting its Montenegrin identity, the party was able to attract dissatisfied and undecided voters who had supported the former Liberal Alliance. This combination of party identity and voter dissatisfaction made for a strong case for strategic entry. The party's success was, however, due above all to its cultivation of an image of *newness* (Sikk 2012). Before the 2012 election, Positive Montenegro's leadership had insisted that it was a party of „new people, new ideas and new energy“ (Pozitivna Crna Gora 2018). This was, they argued, an alternative political force unwilling to cooperate with either the government or opposition parties (Koprivica 2012). The party's electoral viability was tied to its status as a new political entity untainted by affiliations with established parties and their clientelistic and corrupt strategies.⁵ The newness was expressed not only in rhetoric but through the development of a different internal organisation system. In its bylaws, Positive Montenegro stressed the importance of its forums for young people and women and demanded gender equality across all party structures. At the same time, its election campaign was filled with programmes for young people, indicating a strategy quite different from those of established parties. The party's vice-president, Azra Jasavić also had a prominent place in the campaign, serving as a symbol of the commitment to gender equality. In sum, Positive Montenegro met many of the requirements of the analytic model I have outlined above: it was a new party with a distinctive label and institutions, and it was legally registered.

Despite its initial success, Positive Montenegro was soon shown to be lacking in the organisational capability needed to operate amidst fierce political competition. Though the party's newness had brought electoral success, its appeal quickly faded after it failed to establish strong infrastructure across all Montenegrin municipalities. At the time of writing, the party has only 12 local offices across 24 municipalities. Not only has it failed to establish strong party infrastructure in all parts of the country but it has not been able to control its

4 At the time when the party was founded, its president, Darko Pajović was an in vitro fertilisation specialist while its vice-president, Azra Jasavić was a lawyer.

5 The popular wisdom expressed in the Montenegrin media and advanced by opposition leaders was that DPS's election success and ongoing power were primarily due to widespread clientelism based on state patronage and vote-buying. For more details about clientelism in Montenegro, see Džankić and Kiel (2018).

own officials in the cities where it is organised. Two cases highlight this situation. First, in the 2012 local elections in Budva, Positive Montenegro gained 10.8% of votes, earning it three seats in local parliament. The first blow to its integrity and prospects came immediately after this victory. Ignoring the party's instructions, two of the three Positive Montenegro MPs voted to appoint DPS candidate Lazar Rađenović as city mayor. Soon after, the MPs in question, Časlav Perović (the local party head listed first on the ballot) and Milan Balević, left the party and formed an independent group in parliament without surrendering their seats to Positive Montenegro.⁶ In the days that followed, the two entered into a coalition with DPS. Eventually, two years after the elections, the third Positive Montenegro MP also left the party, opting to remain an independent local MP and so capping off the Budva fiasco. This was only one example of Positive Montenegro's inability to control its members' adherence to its primary political message – that it would not cooperate and enter coalitions with the ruling party DPS.⁷

In fact, a very similar situation played out after the local elections in Nikšić. Positive Montenegro won one seat in local parliament having gained 6.6% of the vote, only to suffer the same fate it had met in Budva. Soon after the party's local MP, Drago Đurović, defected, choosing to support DPS's candidate for mayor despite the fact that opposition parties had a parliamentary majority. Once again DPS was able to dismantle Positive Montenegro's election success based on the weakness of the party's internal organisation. This was a major blow to the party's public image, with the prevailing view being that voters had been cheated and duped by Positive Montenegro, which was clearly incompetent in dealing with DPS's party machinery.

The final straw for the party came with the 2016 parliamentary elections. Months before, DPS's traditional coalition partner, the Social Democratic Party, had left the ruling coalition, forcing a political realignment. Without parliamentary support from Positive Montenegro, DPS would have been hit hard politically and fallen from government. Under these circumstances, Positive Montenegro's president, Darko Pajović agreed to support DPS's minority government, a move that resulted in a split in the party and the creation of the United Reform Action Party (*Ujedinjena reformska akcija*; URA). Over subsequent months, Positive Montenegro formed a coalition with DPS on the pretext of creating a caretaker government.⁸ In the process, Pajović rose to the

6 Both national- and local-level elections in Montenegro are based on a closed list proportional representation system using the D'Honts formula.

7 In a speech at a party rally in Žabljak on 1 October 2012, party president Darko Pajović vowed that Positive Montenegro would not cooperate with either government or coalition parties.

8 This was a singular state of affairs with traditional opponents of DPS and its policies agreeing to join the government in order to secure a fair playing field for the 2016 parliamentary elections. This crisis led to several splits within both the governing and opposition parties.

position of national parliament president⁹ while Azra Jasavić became the government's vice-president. After so many dramas, the party failed, however, to meet the parliamentary threshold in the 2016 elections and its short political life may now be considered over.

How does Positive Montenegro's fate relate to the theoretical models outlined in the preceding sections? Certainly, the party's initial success was proof that parties could use their newness to establish themselves as viable options and mobilise voters. Once Positive Montenegro formed a coalition with DPS, however, the image of newness was completely shattered, and this contributed to the party's demise. To be clear, the party's longevity could not be predicted based on the simple fact of its newness. Or, to put this another way, its specific identity, formal structure and institutions shed little light on why it dissolved. On the other hand, understanding how the party's newness steered the decision to enter politics was more helpful. Once the appeal of newness had faded and the party's lack of control over its internal organisation became clear, Positive Montenegro also dissolved.

Social Democrats (*Socijaldemokrate*; SD)

In the previous section we encountered the biggest crisis to affect DPS's hold on political power in the last decade: the installation of a caretaker government in the lead-up to the 2016 elections. Since 1998, DPS had formed national governments with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) as well as various Albanian, Bosniak and Croat parties. The new crisis of power began when SDP's leader raised objections to the government's economic policy and several privatisation plans. This opposition was, however, far from unanimous within SDP itself. On the one hand, it had the support of the party's president, Ranko Krivokapić, who had also served as the president of national parliament for the last 13 years. Krivokapić openly criticised and opposed the government's economic plans in a stance that foreshadowed the biggest shake-up of Montenegro's institutionalised party system to date: the end of SDP's position as a potential coalition partner for DPS after the 2016 parliamentary elections.

At the same time, Ivan Brajović, Montenegro's transport and maritime affairs minister, led a pro-DPS faction within SDP. These internal tensions in the party remained unresolved at its eighth congress in March 2015 where Krivokapić and Brajović competed for the party leadership. Ultimately Brajović decided to break away from the party, creating the Social Democrats (SD) in July 2015. This new entity barely managed to meet the 3% threshold in the 2016 parliamentary elections, gaining two seats in national parliament with just 3.26% of the vote.

9 Pajović would ultimately be rewarded for his role in saving the DPS government. After the debacle of the 2016 elections, he was named Montenegrin ambassador to the People's Republic of China starting from May 2018.

Despite this low level of electoral support, Brajović is now president of national parliament and SD was rewarded with two ministries in the government of current prime minister Duško Marković.

Unlike Positive Montenegro, SD was not a clear-cut case of a new political party. From the standpoint of our model, the main grounds for such a classification would be its official registration as a new political entity and the small (albeit almost negligible) difference between its name (label) and that of its mother party. On the other hand, SD cultivated an image of itself as a „purifier“ party (Lucardie 2000) whose ideology and political alliances were consistent with the traditions of a mother party that had lost its political compass. This reliance on the mother party's established electoral base likely reduced the costs of strategic entry and increased the chances of electoral success. In other words, SD's viability was contingent on its appeal to voters of the mother party. To this end, its slogan for the 2016 parliamentary elections, „Ivan Brajović – Consistently“ had a twofold aim: to highlight the potential for a traditional coalition with DPS and paint the remainder of the mother party SDP as traitors to political alliances and party ideology.¹⁰

Returning to our theoretical model, SD's institutions, infrastructure and internal organisation remain the same as those of the mother party. Articles 16 and 17 of SD's bylaws, which prescribe rules for internal organisation and operations, are identical to Article 17 of SDP's bylaws. Regarding internal organisation, SD established local committees in all Montenegrin municipalities in the short period after its foundation. This step was possible because it could utilise SDP's infrastructure across the country. Furthermore, all prominent members of SD, including its president and both its vice-presidents, are former members of the mother party. In view of all these factors as well as SD's assumption of the mother party's ideology, SD may be understood as the continuation of the mother party rather than a new political entity. Not only are its activists and policies the same, but its leadership is part of the old leadership of the mother party and its internal organisation is basically identical.

United Reform Action (*Ujedinjena reformska akcija*; URA)

United Reform Action (URA) was established in March 2015 as a new political entity with a distinctive label and official party status. The party brought together untested new politicians such as its first president businessman Žarko Rakčević, and members of Positive Montenegro – most notably current URA president

¹⁰ Speaking at an election rally in Nikšić on 29 September 2016, SD's leader, Ivan Brajović stressed the party's important role in shaping Montenegrin politics, arguing that it was carrying on the traditions of an independent, euro-oriented, multi-ethnic and secular state. In contrast, he noted that SD's most troubling political opponents were its friends of yesterday, who would stop at nothing to regain power and cooperate with literally anyone including Serbian anti-independence parties.

Dritan Abazović – who had opposed the minority government of Milo Đukanović in February 2015. Strategic entry costs were low for URA for two main reasons. First, the party was partly the creation of national parliamentary representatives with prominent personal profiles. These individuals remained committed to the founding principles of Positive Montenegro including not cooperating with the government. As such, they sought to reinvigorate the part of Positive Montenegro's electoral base that felt betrayed by the support for Đukanović. Second, the election threshold (3%) was not higher for coalitions than it was for single party lists. URA took advantage of this rule and has succeeded in every major election since its foundation by forming coalitions. The rules on thresholds for coalitions have, thus, lowered the cost of strategic entry so long as the party can create political alliances.

Referring again to the party newness model, we find that URA managed to introduce enough new elements to prevent it from being a mere reconfiguration of Positive Montenegro. First, the party's brand clearly differed from that of any other party in the Montenegrin political landscape. Second, URA was legally registered and attained official status shortly after its split from Positive Montenegro, and the key figure in the party was a political outsider. Third, while the party's institutions and infrastructure were similar in some ways to those of Positive Montenegro, they also differed in key respects. Both parties put an emphasis on forums for women and young people, but URA approached the territorial organisation of its local executive and political boards very differently. The party's bylaws underscored the importance of local committees, detailing their role in its internal organisation.¹¹ After setting up institutions, URA went through a period of infrastructure development period in which it quickly established local committees in major cities across the country.¹²

Taking all this into account, URA can be seen as a new party in the Montenegrin system. Even so, its true strength and importance remain to be seen. As part of the Key Coalition (*Koalicija Ključ*) in the lead-up to 2016 parliamentary election and an alliance with Democratic Montenegro in the 2018 local elections in the capital, Podgorica, URA has never competed independently in a major election. Moreover, that the party – like Democratic Montenegro, SDP and DEMOS – has boycotted the plenary sessions of national parliament has not enhanced its public visibility and recognition.¹³ As such, it is still unclear whether URA can and will become an institutionalised party.

11 This approach was likely a response to Positive Montenegro's negative experiences in Budva and Nikšić.

12 Party infrastructure and local committees were established in all cities in the southern and central regions as well as in the larger cities of northern Montenegro.

13 The 2016 election day was disrupted by an alleged coup that aimed to topple DPS and possibly kill Milo Đukanović. According to special state prosecutor Milivoje Katnić, this coup was sponsored and financed by Serbian extremists and Russian intelligence agencies with the goal of stopping Montenegro's accession to NATO. The alleged culprits have been on trial since 2017. After this major political and social

Democratic Front (*Demokratski front*; DF)

The Democratic Front was established in the lead-up to the 2012 parliamentary elections under the leadership of Miodrag Lekić, who had been a Yugoslav ambassador in the 1990s. Unlike all the other parties discussed in this study, the DF is not a party *per se* but an alliance between New Serbian Democracy (NOVA) and Movement for Change (PzP), which decided to join forces with Lekić as their leader to try to dethrone DPS. DF was also the first proper attempt at opposition unity against DPS, and it gained 22.8% of the vote in the 2012 parliamentary elections.

While the case may be made that the DF is a party rather than a coalition, it clearly does not meet the relevant criteria set out in the model in this study. Above all, DF lacks official legal status (it is not a registered political party) and distinctive institutions and infrastructure. In addition, there are no formal rules concerning governance at alliance level. The alliance has an informal presidential structure based on the presidents and vice-presidents of its constituent parties. It also has no distinct infrastructure network outside those parties. In this sense, the DF is really a platform for coordinating activities across the separate local committees of its constituent members, primarily NOVA and PzP.

On the other hand, what makes the DF's case interesting is the merger that has taken place among several of the constituent members. This is most evident in the public comments of coalition leaders who tend to advocate for the DF's agenda rather than that of their mother party.¹⁴ As a result, the political activities of these leaders have become interchangeable. Putting aside the question of the DF's formal status as a new party, it has changed the face of Montenegrin politics. This includes the emergence of two new parties – DEMOS and UCG – that resulted from a split in the DF.

DEMOS

In March 2015, four national MPs from the DF decided to leave the coalition and form a new party. That party, called DEMOS, was headed by Miodrag Lekić, a candidate in Montenegro's 2013 presidential election. It was precisely the results of that election where Lekić had fallen short of victory by less than 8000 votes that prompted him to try to organise a new party. In other words, Lekić's success in the presidential elections was what lowered the costs of strategic entry. By using the DF's resources, Lekić was able to establish himself

crisis, several parties (URA, Democratic Montenegro, SDP, DEMOS and DF) contested the election results, arguing that voters had known of the alleged coup from noon on election day and this had influenced their preferences. As such, voters' decisions were said not to be expressions of free will but a fearful reaction to the threat of bloodshed on the streets of Podgorica.

14 The constituent parties do not, for example, have their own specific MP factions. Instead there is a DF MP faction in national parliament.

as a viable political option and ensure DEMOS's initial electoral success. The main idea behind the new party was that of a hub for a united opposition in the 2016 parliamentary elections, a concept that appealed to those convinced of the need for unity to bring down DPS. The party stayed true to its founding goals and, together with URA and the Socialist People's Party (SNP), created a pre-election alliance called Key Coalition under Lekić's leadership. That coalition won 11.5% of the vote in the 2016 elections to take nine seats in national parliament. Nevertheless, this success was followed by another rift that led to the creation of United Montenegro. More recently, DEMOS also failed to meet the election threshold in the 2018 Podgorica local elections and its fate now seems unclear.

DEMOS's creation reflected a clear trend in Montenegrin politics – the emergence of new parties out of splits rather than grassroots movements. Lekić had appeared on the Montenegrin political scene under the DF's umbrella and as a leader of that alliance. When the DF parliamentary whip Goran Danilović decided to join him in a party split, this did nothing to support the image of a distinctly new party. From an organisational perspective, DEMOS's activists were former participants in the DF. On the other hand, since the DF had included no institutions or infrastructure *per se*, DEMOS had to develop an independent party organisation and build new local committees.¹⁵ Furthermore, unlike the DF, DEMOS had official status and was registered as a political party. All things considered, DEMOS may, thus, be seen as a new party albeit one that is peculiar since it was created from a split in a coalition rather than in another party.

United Montenegro (*Ujedinjena Crna Gora*; UCG)

After yet another disagreement among opposition parties, Goran Danilović, the former interior minister in the caretaker government, decided to leave DEMOS and found a party under the name United Montenegro (UCG). According to Danilović, United Montenegro did not result from a split within DEMOS; rather, it simply reflected the need to create a new entity after the Ministry of Public Administration failed to instate him as DEMOS party leader despite his „clear support from a majority within the party “ (Portal Analitika 2017). Because it had been part of DEMOS, UCG held two seats in national parliament which it decided to keep after the split.

As for whether UCG was a new party, UCG created a distinctive name (identity) for itself and had official status. After the split, the party also organised local committees in 12 municipalities, however these were composed predominantly of party supporters who were former DEMOS members. UCG's bylaws

¹⁵ When he announced DEMOS's formation, Miodrag Lekić noted that he was embarking on this endeavour alone and all party infrastructure would need to be built from scratch.

and institutional setup were also identical to those of DEMOS.¹⁶ Given that UCG is still the mirror image of DEMOS in infrastructural and institutional terms, I would argue that UCG does not constitute a new political party.

This lack of newness was most evident in the 2018 local elections in Podgorica where UCG failed to distinguish itself from other political actors. The party did not meet the voter support threshold to enter local parliament. After this defeat, Danilović stepped down as leader, adding that he felt morally and politically responsible for the party's failure (Standard 2018).

Democratic Montenegro (*Demokrate*)

The single most important new party to enter Montenegrin political life emerged in 2015 when part of the Socialist People's Party (SNP) split to form Democratic Montenegro. The political identity of this party emphasised newness (Sikk 2012) and the purification of an ideology that had been betrayed or diluted by existing parties (Lucardie 2000). In its early months, the party established a complex organisational structure with a central headquarters and committees in every local municipality in Montenegro. It also devoted itself to developing strong local party infrastructure, a feature lacking in all of the parties we have discussed so far. This infrastructure is, I would argue, the reason why Democratic Montenegro has emerged as a serious political force, maintaining support from election to election.¹⁷ In its first electoral bid at the national level, the party managed to win 10.01% of votes and pick up eight seats.

Like all other parties in Montenegro, Democratic Montenegro has a party congress (forum) which serves as its main decision-making body. This body is responsible for the party programme and should convene at least once every four years. Between regular congress sessions, an executive committee serves as the party's chief management body, with members including the party leader and the presidents and vice-presidents of municipal party committees. The executive committee is subject to a quota system which requires that at least 30% of members are women and 30% are individuals under the age of 30, a similar approach to the one taken by Positive Montenegro (see above). This approach and the youthfulness of party leader Aleksa Bečić, who was 29 when he founded the party, are the layers on which the party's identity is built. Democratic Montenegro prides itself on being a youthful force in Montenegrin politics.

16 At a press conference after UCG's founding congress, a senior member of the party, Vladimir Dobričanin pointed out that the bylaws of the two parties were the same.

17 While Democratic Montenegro has competed in only one national parliamentary election, its success in local elections suggests it is an institutionalised party. Electoral support for the party is stable in large towns though it has failed to attract voters in rural areas. Democratic Montenegro won 24.22% of the vote in Herceg Novi, 19.5% in Budva and 17.16% in Mojkovac but the figures were far lower in smaller communities in Petnjica (3.25%) and Tuzi (5.3%) (State Electoral Commission 2018). More recently, a pre-election coalition between the party and URA gained 25.5% of the vote in the local Podgorica elections.

While the party's visibility relies primarily on Bečić's public profile, the role of local councils can also be felt in Democratic Montenegro's extensive door-to-door campaigning, social media platforms and commitment to local issues. On this count, several of the party's local campaigns have taken a new tack by focusing on local issues and problems rather than on the national showdown between different party headquarters. Past local elections tended to be dominated by issues of state loyalty and ethnic affiliation. Democratic Montenegro has broken with this tradition of cleavage-based politics, however, by campaigning on the slogan „Victory, not division!“ (*Pobjede, ne podjele!*) at national level and emphasising local issues in municipal elections. A sense of newness has been fostered not only through the party's young and energising leadership but through its abstention from ethnicity-based politics, a dominant feature of party competition. Nevertheless, despite its efforts to shift attention away from ethnicity to the economy, the rule of law and living standards, Democratic Montenegro has had only a limited influence on party politics. And though it may be the most successful of the plethora of new parties to emerge since 2015, DPS and its leader Milo Đukanović have managed to situate the party on one side of the ethnic divide. As such, Democratic Montenegro is depicted as a Serbian party, an association that limits its outreach to Montenegrin voters.

While Democratic Montenegro emerged from a party split, a combination of factors (label, official status, infrastructure, institutions) make it a genuinely new party in the Montenegrin political system.

Role of the governing party

The discussion so far has shown that party fragmentation has primarily occurred on the opposition side of the political spectrum. In fact, DPS has had a significant role in enabling and fostering this fragmentation. Three specific mechanisms can be identified.

First, parties that have threatened DPS's dominance have been neutralised from within. This was the case with Positive Montenegro. After the party's success in the national and several local elections, DPS managed to undo its gains by encouraging defections. This is what happened in the municipal parliaments in Budva and Nikšić, where the votes of Positive Montenegro MPs were crucial in determining whether a DPS candidate would be mayor. On both occasions, local Positive Montenegro councillors defected and provided DPS with the necessary majority.

Second, by offering positions at the executive level, DPS has been able to offset the threats posed by traditional coalition partners and discredit opposition parties. After SDP began to openly oppose the government's economic policy, SD was rewarded for creating a split in the party and supporting DPS. SD representatives now hold a disproportionate number of ministerial posts

as well as the parliamentary presidency (the party obtained a mere 3.26% of votes). Meanwhile opposition parties that joined the caretaker government have suffered in subsequent elections. By offering them a seat at the table, DPS helped to dismiss these parties as serious future threats and effectively removed them from the political landscape. Positive Montenegro failed to meet the parliamentary threshold in the national elections, and the same was true of United Montenegro in the local elections in Podgorica.

Third, where a party's organisation has been strong enough to resist attacks from within and it has rejected any kind of cooperation with DPS, one strategy has remained available: DPS has realigned party competition along ethnic lines by highlighting divisive issues such as support for Montenegrin independence and NATO membership. In this way, it has neutralised new parties' attempts to emphasise their newness. This was particularly clear in Đukanović's 2018 presidential campaign in which he insisted on depicting Democratic Montenegro as a mere successor to SNP. Đukanović argued that while there might be young and new people involved in the party, its ideology, Serbian ethnicity and opposition to Montenegrin independence were part of an old familiar story (CdM 2018). By returning to this cleavage-based politics, DPS neutralised Democratic Montenegro's potential to appeal to a wider electorate as an agent of political change. The party, thus, failed to make the economy, living standards and the rule of law the salient issues of the day.

Effects on party system institutionalisation

The numerous new parties in Montenegrin political life may have affected party competition. The impact of these parties can be evaluated across three dimensions. The first one considers influence on the predictability of the game. Was there any realignment of potential coalition-building after the election? This issue is important since the potential for coalition-building should influence the cost of strategic entry. If new parties have the potential to build coalitions and hold executive positions, then the cost of forming a new party should be lower.

In this regard, several new parties (Positive Montenegro, URA, UCG, DEMOS) chose to join Montenegro's 2016 caretaker government. Their decisions backfired, however, and resulted in these parties' virtual disappearance from the political scene, suggesting that there was no room for parties willing to cooperate with DPS. As such, DPS's coalition-building potential remains the same as ever. On the other hand, SDP has left the government and could potentially be a partner to opposition parties. The fact, however, that this Montenegrin party formed a coalition with DEMOS (known as a Serbian party) for the Podgorica local elections and then failed to reach the election threshold, suggests that SDP's days are perhaps numbered. In other words, even SDP has been unable to change the state of institutionalised party competition in Montenegro.

The second dimension relates to whether the emergence of new parties has increased voter volatility. Such volatility has traditionally been used as a measure of party system institutionalisation (Mainwaring – Torcal 2006). In a recent working paper, Kapidžić and Komar (2019) estimate that electoral volatility in Montenegro stands at around 19.3% depending on the electoral cycle, i.e. an average level compared to other eastern European countries (Bértoa – Deegan Krause – Haughton 2017). However, if we look closely at the data, almost all volatility can be ascribed to *internal bloc volatility* (Bartolini – Mair 1990), that is, the fact that voters change their choices but only within an ethnically limited party bloc (Kapidžić – Komar 2019). Almost all volatility (i.e. 13.98% of 19.3%) takes place within the same bloc (Kapidžić – Komar 2019), supporting the thesis that Montenegro is the most closed party system in eastern Europe (Enyedi – Bértoa 2018). The low level of *inter-bloc volatility* (Bartolini – Mair 1990) suggests that new parties have failed to change party competition or attract the voters of leading parties.

The third dimension concerns whether new parties have managed to change the dominant political issues. Given the limited success of Democratic Montenegro in local elections, it is clear that the key political issues are still predominantly ethnically based and reflect established cleavages. Occasionally events capture the Montenegrin public's attention,¹⁸ but this tends to be short-lived with little impact on the electoral success of parties on either side.

Conclusion

This article has sketched out the development paths of the major political entities that have appeared on the Montenegrin scene over the last ten years. While these are nominally new political entities, I have argued that they are mostly re-configurations of established parties and can hardly be distinguished from their mother parties. Only those that developed as (largely) grassroots movements (Positive Montenegro, Democratic Montenegro and URA) or clearly abandoned their mother party identity (DF) can be regarded as new political parties.

Through my analysis, I have identified two primary reasons for the large number of new parties in Montenegro. First, strategic calculations favour entering the political arena because of the high number of abstaining voters (the turnout for the 2016 parliamentary elections was just 73.2%). Furthermore, new political entities believe that abstaining voters can only be mobilised by a sense of newness. Second, by offering executive posts at the local and national

18 A recent example is the so-called envelope scandal in 2016 in which a local businessman was filmed handing 97,500 euros to the mayor of Podgorica probably in order to pay off a large clientelistic voter network. Once again, however, the opposition parties failed to capitalise on this affair. It now seems that the political consequences will probably be contained and borne by the now former mayor of Podgorica Slavoljub Stijepović, who was officially charged with money laundering on 1 February 2019.

levels, DPS has succeeded in creating fissures within opposition parties that have led to several party splits. This has discredited specific opposition leaders and stopped their chances of bringing about a change of power.

Not only have new parties been unsuccessful in bringing about a change of power, but their effect on party system institutionalisation has been negligible. Party competition remains as predictable as ever and coalition blocs are well established. Meanwhile voter volatility is isolated to parties within the same ethnic bloc and Montenegrin politics is still dominated by cleavage-based issues.

The case of Montenegro has several important theoretical implications. First, regarding the role of newness in the strategic entry calculus, it may make sense to make newness the basis of a party's identity if additional conditions are met. Above all, there must be a significant level of voter dissatisfaction with traditional parties. So long as this dissatisfaction exists, the initial costs of creating a party may be low even in cases where the party system is highly institutionalised and dominated by ethnic divisions. In other words, new parties may form even in unfavourable conditions. Putting aside their influence on strategic entry calculations, however, negative conditions do affect party longevity. The institutionalisation of a political party will depend on its effectiveness in dealing with these conditions. In the context of Montenegro, it may be no coincidence that Democratic Montenegro – the only new party with well-developed institutions and infrastructure and stable electoral support – has had most success in deinstitutionalising the party system and escaping cleavage-based politics.

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