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Pirate Parties of Europe: Built to Last or Destined to Crumble?

Bachelor's Thesis

EDUARD PŘEVLOCKÝ

Supervisor: prof. PhDr. Vít Hloušek, Ph.D.

Department of International Relations and European
Studies
European Studies

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- Author:** Eduard Převlocký
Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University
Department of International Relations and European Studies
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Abstract

This thesis 'Pirate Parties of Europe: Built to Last or Destined to Crumble?' is a literature review that concerns itself with the phenomena referred to as Pirate Parties. Its main purpose is to present a structured overview that has been built upon gathered opinions expressed by experts and scholars. The thesis explores themes such as events leading up to the foundation of the first Pirate Party, pirate policies, and the Pirates' election record.

Statutory Declaration

I hereby declare that I have written the submitted Bachelor's Thesis concerning the topic of **Pirate Parties of Europe: Built to Last or Destined to Crumble?** independently. All the sources used for the purpose of finishing this thesis have been adequately referenced and are listed in the Bibliography.

In Brno 2 December 2019

.....
Eduard Převlocký

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1 Introduction

Bachelor's thesis 'Pirate Parties of Europe: Built to Last or Destined to Crumble?' sets the course to explore the boundaries of the Pirate political movement according to various authors; therefore, the author of this thesis will proceed in accordance with the genre literature review. The purpose of this bachelor's thesis is not to settle the unresolved issues connected to Pirate Parties or provide further research, but to summarize gathered knowledge and map out possible shortcomings of previous researchers in light of new empirical evidence. The author of this thesis hopes that he can contribute to the scholarly discourse even with what essentially is only a student's work. The thesis should also give aid to future researchers by pinpointing areas that need further analysis and prompt questions for other interested parties, which should conclusively be the most important asset this thesis has to offer.

The Pirates are a relatively new force in the present-day European politics. Even though the Pirates have been and are elected into various bodies throughout Europe, there yet remains confusion amongst authors as to how to portray or characterize said parties. Hartleb (2013) describes the Pirates as an "*anti-elitist cyber party*," whereas Lindstam (2019) refers to the Pirates as a "*niche party*." The Pirates have also been called an "*Internet party*" (Bartels, 2009: 8) or classified as a "*tech-nopopulist party*" (De Blasio and Sorice, 2018). While it is difficult to describe the Pirate Parties, or more precisely, the Pirate Movement by a couple of short terms, this thesis should serve as a stepping stone for future researchers and deliver a comprehensive summary of opinions written by selected authors.

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The thesis is divided into three chapters, where each part follows a certain angle and confronts authors' opinions about the Pirates whenever possible. The first chapter, named 'Short-lived History of the Pirate Movement' examines the infancy of the Pirate Parties according to various authors. Moreover, the chapter discusses the Pirate Party International, and also serves as an outline of active Pirate Parties in Europe. It represents the skeletal construct that supplies the basic knowledge that is necessary for understanding the fundamentals of the Pirate Movement. The first chapter should ultimately answer the question: **Why were the first Pirate Parties established?**

The second chapter's 'Pirate Code' ordeal is to explain and interpret the opinions of selected authors, and to solve the question: **Who are the Pirates, and what do they want?** The second chapter is the soul of the bachelor's thesis. It seeks to report on Pirate Ideology; political program; inner mechanisms and interactions; and attitude towards the European Union. It also considers some of the popular ideas professed by authors, such as the similarities between the Pirates and the Greens.

The third and final chapter, 'Success & Failure,' represents a shallower approach to the Pirates and could be referred to as the skin of the thesis. The final chapter examines the accomplishments and the hardships of the Pirate Movement; its public support and reach; and also compares some of the predictions made about the Pirates by selected authors. The asked question is: **Will Pirate Parties last?**

2 Short-lived History of the Pirate Movement

The most peculiar thing about the Pirates is perhaps the selected name *Pirates* itself. People generally associate pirates with 17th-century buccaneers that roamed the New World, or more recently, the Somali pirates pillaging tourist vessels near the coast of Somalia; therefore, the chosen name *Pirates* might be appalling to some. Pirate Parties have been bashed repeatedly for their ill-advised label (Falkvinge, 2011).

What some failed to understand or chose to overlook is that the word pirate is not viewed in its negative sense in the cyber community, but rather embraced as a symbol fighting injustice since the early days of the Internet. Be the issue at hand copyright, free information access, or patent law; the Pirates have battled the corporate opposition on every front with little to no success (Lindgren and Linde, 2012).

That fact, however, does not take away from the enthusiasm of the Pirates. The first chapter named 'Short-lived History of the Pirate Movement' should shed some light upon the Pirate Movement and the consequential development of Pirate Parties and answer the question: **Why were the first Pirate Parties established?**

2.1 The Inception of the First Pirate Party

In order to fully grasp the Pirate Movement,¹ a short history excursion is unavoidable. As it happens, every serious political movement since the dawn of mankind needs an idea to believe in and form around. For the first Pirate Party, these ideas were supplied by The Pirate Bureau, also

¹ Loose structure of organizations and groups that protest against restrictions of freedom, information or access to the Internet (Lindgren and Linde 2012).

known by its Swedish name as *Piratbyrå*—named as a jab at the Swedish Anti-Piracy Bureau established in 2001 (Burkart, 2013: 17).

According to Li (2009), *Piratbyrå* began as a community for Swedish hackers, but as the membership grew, so has the potential of the bureau. Later, it became a think tank dedicated to the issues of copyright and copyright protection. However, Jääsaari and Hildén (2015) think that the interests of the *Piratbyrå* were much broader, discussing filesharing and decrying patent laws. *Piratbyrå* was also the medium that sparked The Pirate Bay² into existence one year after being established in 2003. (Bartels, 2009: 30). *Piratbyrå* ceased to exist in 2010 when one of its founders passed away. Many of the initial members went there separate ways, and some chose to work on Telecomix³ (TorrentFreak).

Similarly to the *Piratbyrå*, The Pirate Bay was instrumental in solidifying the Pirate Movement's identity and future. Especially when it comes to the heydays of filesharing and the raid on the Sweden-based server rooms of The Pirate Bay's proprietors, which—at the time—had drawn global media attention to the Pirate issues when its owners were brought before court and sentenced to one year in prison and fined about 3.6 million US\$ in 2009 (Guardian). Li (2009) believes that the Swedish

² Swedish internet website providing its users with magnet links that allow peer-to-peer data sharing through *torrenting*. The Pirate Bay is often misused for sharing copyrighted content which is deemed illegal by international law. The Pirates are platforming a change for these laws (Wikipedia).

³ Telecomix is in a way a successor to the *Piratbyrå*. It is described as a network of Internet activists whose perhaps most notable work is undermining authorities during the Arab Spring, while restoring Internet neutrality in the region and leaking government sensitive information to the public (Telecomix).

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government was strong-armed into the raid on The Pirate Bay by international pressure. She names the government of the United States of America and the Washington, D. C. based Motion Picture Association as the two main powerbrokers on the issue at the time. Either way, The Pirate Bay servers were moved to the Netherlands and fully operational in three days' time (Wired). The trial was a gamechanger for the Pirate Movement, particularly at home in Sweden. The rebels were seen as heroes and the government as the oppressors in the free-spirited Swedish electorate's eyes and also escalated in world-wide protests. (Burkart, 2014: 35-37).

The inception of the first Pirate Party was closely tied to the Pirate Movement and events happening simultaneously within the Swedish society at the time. The Pirate Movement underlined personal integrity on the Internet, file sharing, anti-commercial downloading, immaterial rights, and copyright restrictions. As a solicitor of said demands, the Pirate Bay—among other similar peer-to-peer websites—was launched in Sweden in 2003 and raided by Swedish authorities back in 2006. Rick Falkvinge birth the Swedish Pirate Party to existence shortly before the raid, which gave the Pirates just enough attention. (Erlingsson and Perrson, 2011). In the words of Jääsaari and Hildén (2015): *“What began as a protest against antipiracy measures in one single country has since transformed into a transnational network of party organizations campaigning for cyberlibertarian reforms.”*

2.2 Swedish Pirate Party

True to the pirate ways, even the first Pirate Party was created on the waves of the web. On the first day of January in 2006 at 20:30, the website for the first Pirate Party was launched and gathered necessary signatures for creating a legitimate political party in just one day, and thus allowed Rick Falkvinge to enact the very first Pirate Party, which was named Swedish Pirate Party and had no ties to The Pirate Bay or *Piratbyrå*. His reasoning for establishing the party was frustration with the political elite and their handling, or more precisely, avoiding the issues concerning cyberspace altogether (Bartels, 2009: 30-31).

It was no accident that the first political party placing copyright as its number one priority was created in Sweden. There were several factors playing into the Pirates' hands, including the Swedish welfare state covering people's basic needs, therefore allowing politicians to focus on post-material topics as well as the deep-rooted democratic tradition (Andersson, 2011). Yet being the new kid on the bloc—even with fresh and interesting ideas—was far from a guaranteed success as evident by the flop in the parliamentary elections held later in 2006 where the Swedish Pirate Party gained disappointing 0.6% of the vote (Röster). Luckily for the Pirates, their key topics gained a lot of traction in the following years at home in Sweden. The first event was an ongoing debate about a law that considered wiretapping phones and prying into Swedes' Internet habits in 2008. The second was the approval of the IPRED⁴ by the Riksdag in 2009. And lastly, the already mentioned case against the Pirate

⁴ Intellectual Property Rights Enforcement Directive – Directive 2004/48/EC. Under the IPRED, Member States may be censured in cases concerning intellectual

Bay, which resolved in 2009. As a result, the Swedish Pirate Party achieved its first success—7.1% of the vote (Röster), earning them a seat⁵ in the European Parliament—that was fueled by public outrage against authorities, escalating as protests and minor riots (Erlingsson and Perrson, 2011).

The first Pirate Party achieved a reasonable amount of success in a fairly short amount of time, and in its footsteps, new Pirate Parties began to emerge, not only in Europe but around the whole world.

2.3 Concurrent Pirate Parties

The Swedish Pirate Party was only the beginning. A new wave of digital pirates swam to the shores of democracy the very same year. Some authors (e.g., Bartels 2009, Deseriis, 2019) consider the fact as a sign that pirate issues are becoming a global phenomenon, while others (e.g., Jääsaari and Hildén, 2015) are more reserved in their statements, conceding that it is only a natural development.

Currently, there are close to 60 Pirate Parties operating throughout the whole world, three of which are represented in local parliaments (see Wikipedia). The organization that facilitates as a cumulative roof above most⁶ of the Pirate Parties' heads is the Pirate Parties International, which is described in the next chapter.

property rights (eur-lex), among other things, which was viewed as unacceptable by the Pirates and their supporters (thelocal.se).

⁵ After the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament faced an expansion of the amount of parliament seats for Sweden by two. (eur-lex) The Swedish Pirate Party was given one of those seats.

⁶ A few Pirate Parties chose to abandon the Pirate Parties International.

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The most accomplished (sorted based on election merit) Pirate Parties are: The Icelandic Pirate Party, the Czech Pirate Party, The Pirate Party of Luxembourg, and The German Piratenpartei. The Icelandic Pirates have become a stable faction within Althing, having been voted in three consecutive times since the party's creation in 2012. Their biggest political achievement was hauling 14,4% in parliamentary elections in 2016, resulting in nationwide third place (piratar.is). The Czech Pirate Party began to operate in 2009 but remained somewhat dormant until 2014, where they almost managed to score a seat in the European Parliament. However, the most favorable outcome happened in 2017 when the Czech Pirate Party came as a third seat in the Czech Parliamentary elections, with 10,8% of the public vote, and its support is steadily growing as seen by their European Parliament election result (Wikipedia). The Pirate Party of Luxembourg managed to gain two seats in the national assembly in 2018, with 6,4% of the public vote (Wikipedia). The German Piratenpartei has hit a rough patch lately, unwaveringly losing members and support. Despite that, they managed to preserve their European Parliament seat in 2019 European Elections (Wikipedia).

These examples should serve as an illustration of the haziness within the support for the Pirates of today. There is no pattern as to why the Czech Pirate Parties support grows when the other Pirate Parties are taking a downfall or at best stagnate. Some authors (e.g., Otjes, 2019) are trying to interpret gathered data. Their conclusions are described in more detail in the third part of the thesis.

2.4 Pirate Parties Internacional

Pirate Parties International is an organization that serves as a platform under which the Pirate Parties of various nationalities coordinate and share information. It is also the 'how' are the Pirate Parties intertwined and create common, cross-border, political programs. That said, the Pirate Parties International is not, in fact, a governing organ with the ability to influence concrete policy-making decisions of sovereign national parties. The Pirate Parties International, however, does have a mandate to resolve disagreements between the member states (Šrubař 2015).

Burkart (2014: 52) thinks that the Pirate Parties International is a very important structure within the pirate hierarchy and refers to the Pirate Parties International as a "*clearinghouse*,"⁷ which is quite fitting given the fact that the Pirate Parties International is the middleman between the seller (Pirate Party) and the buyer (voter). Burkart (2014: 54) further argues in the pirates' favor by saying: "*The PPI's wiki and web pages are resources for fledgling Pirate Parties. Its open publication system permits online content creation and editing. A multilanguage forum for networking, identifying resources, and sharing news and rumors, the website represents the transnational presence of like-minded cyberlibertarians who are working the spaces, connections, and opportunities created by the initial successes of the Swedish Pirate Party.*" The pirates' ability to communicate with their local parties is also praised by Hartleb (2013), who thinks that the Pirates have an advanced level of communication tools, and their effort is even heightened during an election season.

⁷ According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary a clearinghouse is: (1) "an establishment maintained by banks for settling mutual claims and accounts." (2) "a central agency for the collection, classification, and distribution especially of information."

A special case within the pirate family is the Pirate Party of Iceland. The Icelandic Pirate Party used to be a part of the Pirate Party International—as well as three others—but have since resigned, because of inner disagreements.⁸ That said, the Pirate Party of Iceland is not hostile to the rest of the Pirate Parties, evident by statements on their website (piratar.is). The concrete reasons why there have been disagreements amongst the Pirates have yet to be researched further because it could be a sign of a deeper divide among the political family.

2.5 Summary

The first chapter's main goal was to find an answer to the question: **“Why were the first Pirate Parties established?”** The evidence brought up by selected authors suggests that the reason for the creation of Pirate Parties was a lack of trust in the establishment. Especially when it comes to areas such as the ever-expanding Internet, sustainability of civil liberties, issues concerning ownership, and disillusion about transparency.

The history of the Pirate Movement is well documented, and authors more or less agree on the key events that launched Pirate Parties into existence in the last decade. That said, there is a relatively meager amount of reliable sources. Where relevant literature falls short, are events concerning lesser Pirate Parties or personalities tied to the Pirates, which is understandable, given the fact that the Pirates yet are a

⁸ Šrubař (2015) explains that in cases of Australian, British and Swedish Pirate Party it was the idea that having an organ above the singular Pirate Parties was against the pirate ideals.

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new and not always relevant force within the political spectrum of various countries.

Needless to say, the main goal of the thesis is to map out possible avenues when it comes to further research of the Pirate Parties and the Pirate Movement. Shifting the focus away from the mainstream could be one of the implied ways. Future researchers should also turn to interviews, political statements, news outlets, or articles written by the Pirate Parties' members for additional information about the beginning of the Pirate Movement in order to get a deeper understanding of Pirate values and key features.

3 Pirate Code

Pirate Parties are somewhat of a new phenomenon within the political landscape that set themselves apart from the mainstream. The Pirate perspective seems quite confusing to an outsider and even to some authors (e.g., Lindstam, 2019) that have expressed an effort to understand the ideas and wishes of the Pirates. What is also clear is that the Pirates create a certain dilemma when it comes to the older generations that have not grown up in the digital age and that are rather unphased by the rapid changes the world is going through.

The second chapter, 'Pirate Codex,' deals with the ideas layered beneath pirate politics, or rather with interpretations of these ideals by various authors. The chapter should answer the question: **Who are the Pirates, and what do they want?**

3.1 Ideology

Authors have difficulty categorizing the Pirate Parties within the already established frameworks, as is evident based upon statements by Burkart—who has written the most comprehensive literature on the topic up to date. *"Pirate politics is similar in nature to 'anti-political politics,' as Václav Havel once described Poland's Solidarity movement. ... Pirate politics appears to be deeply democratic and anti-authoritarian. ... Pirate politics may be counterhegemonic and countercultural, but it is not anti-systemic"* (2014: 19, 137). That said, Burkart is not alone; the very first paragraph of this thesis should be an apt illustration.

The trouble begins when someone tries to classify Pirate Parties. There are many ideas as to what the Pirates are. Boček (2009) attempted

such feat and came to the conclusion that each Pirate Party he put under the microscope checks different boxes.⁹ Boček attributes this fact to regional tradition and adapting to local values.

Whether Pirate Parties are or are not well-founded political formations has been debated before (e.g., Cammaerts 2015, Khutkyy 2019). For instance, Šrubař (2015) explained that the Pirate Parties' Modus Operandi fits within Sartori's, Beyme's and Gallagher's typologies because of the nature of the Pirate Parties (Czech Pirate Party in its infancy in this case) fits established criteria.

The Pirate Ideology is based upon three pillars that are common for every single party that subscribes to the Pirate Party International. They are: *"(1) protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the digital age (2) consumer and authors rights-oriented reform of copyright and related rights (3) support for information privacy, transparency, and free access to information"* (pp-international). Their deliverance might vary, but the ideas behind the Pirate Parties' political programs remain consistent at their essence (Jääsaari and Hildén, 2015). Furthermore, The Pirates believe that technology could bring a more enlightened and democratic world underlined by solidarity, free sharing of knowledge, and culture (Fredriksson, 2015).

⁹ Boček (2009) examined three of the active Pirate Parties at the time. The Swedish Pirate Party, German Piratenpartei and the Polish Pirate Party. For example he calls Germany *"the cradle of liberalism,"* therefore, according to Boček's findings, it makes sense that the German Piratenpartei is more liberal in its design and aims for individualism as its core value, whereas the Polish Pirate Party—carrying its post-communist legacy, resulting in not having a developed civil society—will skew towards building the missing links in the society. The reasons why the German Pirate Party achieved a reasonable amount of success where the Polish Pirate Party has not have yet to be researched.

Almqvist (2016) identified three phases of evolution in the Pirate Ideology. The first was the days of the Pirate Bureau and activities described in the first chapter of the thesis. The Pirate Ideology was very narrow at this stage, and its substance was nearly identical to the one of the Pirate Movement. Bartels (2009: 223-224) referred to them as a monothematic party at the time. The second phase began when the Swedish Pirate Party was established. According to Almqvist (2016), many individuals that were actively participating in the first phase transformed into politicians, supporters, or at the very least passive supporters. Almqvist goes further in his analysis and likens the Pirates of 2006 to environmental movements and emerging Green parties in the 1980s. At this point in time, the Pirates were still considered a single-issue party championing Internet freedoms. The third and final phase came in 2010, especially when the Pirate ideas began to spread outside of Sweden. Most notable—in this regard—was the German Piratenpartei that brought new ideas and began to “*widen the agenda to attract voters beyond its initial core*” (Almqvist, 2016). Based on Almqvist’s analysis, the Pirates ideology began to expand and include new issues and ideas. One such idea was implementing LiquidFeedback as a powerful resource in promoting direct democracy, or more precisely, its variation liquid democracy, which is described in the ‘Mechanisms & Interactions’ chapter.

Pirates’ futuristic ideas are aimed for the tomorrows rather than for the yesterdays or nows. “*The Pirate Party places emphasis on a transparent and responsible governance, a redistribution of political power, the abolition of centralized power, and emphasizes freedom of information, a reworking of copyright regulations, freedom of expression, the sanctity of private life, and access to information and technology*” (Hawkins and Onnudottir, 2018). It is evident that at heart, the Pirates remain consistent

with their originators while trying to slowly expand their political program and engage with a wider amount of potential supporters. The degree as to 'how'¹⁰ consistent they remain has yet to be researched.

Cammaerts (2015) is also somewhat skeptical. He reports that due to noticeable diversity among the various Pirate Parties and their members, there is a high risk of internal conflict. According to Cammaerts, there is a limit to the Pirate Ideology, and its vagueness is its biggest fault. Where are the boundaries of personal freedom? What is the task of a lean and absolutely transparent state? And to what degree is this kind of state able to protect civic and social rights of its citizens?

3.2 Political Manifestos

The Pirate Parties have evolved from a single-issue movement such as the initial Swedish Pirate Party to parties covering an extensive amount of topics (e.g., Andersson 2011). The question, whether the Pirates should have expanded their political program further or even anchor themselves among the establishment, yet remains unanswered.

Jääsaari and Hildén (2015) think that: "*The endeavor to frame piracy, whistleblowing, hacking, and other Pirate practices as liberating culture from the clutches of corporations for the public good reflects a step toward a realist acknowledgment of the pitfalls of privileging individuals' digital rights over collective rights.*" According to Jääsaari and Hildén (2015), Pirates never had a monopoly on digital-right issues because groups—formed by civilians—fought for cyberspace rights and censoring since the launch of the Internet. The Internet was publicly launched in the

¹⁰ Some authors (e.g., Fredriksson 2015; Khutkyy, 2019) have expressed worries about whether the Pirates of today remain true to the Pirates of the 2006.

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early nineties while the Pirates started to coordinate at the turn of the millennia.

As expected, the actual Pirate political programs are in line with the Pirate Ideology and reflect current political debates and trends. (cf. Erlingsson and Persson, 2011; Demker, 2014; Jääsaari and Hildén 2015; Zulianello, 2017). Digital rights, civic liberties, and critique of democracy remain their strongholds (Cammaerts, 2015). That said, other parties have already begun to adopt most of the Pirate ideas into their political programs, fearing the loss of young voters. An example of this behavior was the Swedish Green Party incorporating Internet freedoms on the verge of the 2014 European elections (Almqvist, 2016). This behavior seems to be effective. The Greens support increased where the Pirates have flopped (Röster).

According to Jääsaari and Hildén (2015), the Pirate Parties have been rebranded to lessen the impact of their radical policy ideas such as patent and copyright reforms; these no longer remain their priorities. Instead, they refer to these ideas as “culture sharing,” which is supposed to be less controversial.

The amount of seriousness put in local Pirate Parties also varies. If someone were to compare the Finnish Pirate Party and one of the successfully elected Pirate Parties, the differences in attitude would become abundant. Cammaerts (2015) concludes his research by stating that the Pirates are a “*clear alternative*” to the mainstream parties in both their views and the way they operate within.

3.3 Inner Mechanisms & Interactions

Liquid democracy, also known as delegative democracy, is an idea where every eligible voter can pass their vote upon someone whom they trust. Liquid democracy is understood as a continual ability to decide the outcome in contrast to going out and voting every four years or so (Behrens 2018). The difference from representative democracy is that the voter is free to choose anyone they would like, unlike in the case of delegative democracy where the pool is restricted to a few career politicians. The chosen delegate is expected to engage and debate and cast the final vote to the best of their assessment of the situation (Ford 2014). They can even extend their accumulated votes to another delegate who are perhaps more suited to answer the initial question, therefore creating a “*super-voter*”¹¹ (Kling et al., 2015). In case the voter is not satisfied with their delegate, they may choose a different one at any time (Ford 2014). This idea came into fruition when the German Piratenpartei introduced LiquidFeedback¹² as its core component in an attempt to promote liquid democracy (Kling et al., 2015).

All Pirate Parties use LiquidFeedback or its variations for horizontal discussion of new policies. Therefore internal debates and participation play a key role in the Pirate structure. Moreover, a sense of collective identity allows alignment and fast mobilization of the Pirate voter base (Cammaerts, 2015).

¹¹ A term used to describe a delegate who has accumulated unproportional amount of votes by proxy (Kling et al.).

¹² LiquidFeedback is a computer software which allows participants to vote on selected issues. Its key features are reliability, equal opportunity and transparency. It is widely used by corporations, civil-society organizations and, of course, by the Pirates (LiquidFeedback).

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When Deseriis (2019) compared the German Piratenpartei and the Italien Movimento 5 Stelle, he concluded that while both parties believe in the democratic potential of the Internet, the German Pirates value individual autonomy from government surveillance, decentralization, and censorship, therefore they used an instrument of their own design—LiquidFeedback, whereas the Movimento 5 Stelle was created as a public opinion based movement led by a charismatic chairman, and where the Rousseau¹³ is only a by-product of the catch-all party.

Khutkyy (2019) also views the Pirates' initiatives in a positive light. He came to the conclusion that the Pirates indeed are forcing "*genuine democratic initiatives*," focusing on the implementation of electronic democracy through which the common people are empowered. According to Khutkyy's research, the Pirates call for a "*wide decentralization of authority*" and lead by example by successfully implementing such systems within the frameworks of their own party. The Pirates are trying to apply those principles to their surroundings, as well as the already mentioned internal method—self-evident by selection procedures initiated by the Czech Pirate Party (Martínek, 2017).

Hartleb (2013) points out that Pirates' obsession with transparency could be harmful. For example, live-streaming each and every session might make a laughing stock out of politics because every malfunction or the viewers seeing an internal quarrel among the members could dissuade potential voters from supporting the Pirates. Additionally, he points out that only those actively participating in the online debate can

¹³ Rousseau, named after a famous French philosopher, is a platform owned by the Five Star Movement that is trying to implement direct democracy into action. It is a website, where registered members can vote on candidatures, legislature or propose changes (Rousseau).

engage in dialog; therefore, this kind of open democracy is limited only to the Internet users and may inadvertently exclude some citizens.

The Pirates were also called out by Fredriksson (2015) for their ambiguity or even hypocrisy in relation to big corporations. According to Fredriksson, while the Pirates are critical to central authority and omnipotent corporations, they still use their services as a means to promote their ideas. The explicit example he illustrated is the wide use of social networks such as Facebook or Twitter to promote Pirate Ideology to their voter base. Fredriksson further argues his point by saying: “*An example of the complexities and paradoxes involved in formulating a position on information politics in an age when information platforms are controlled by the very actors one tries to oppose.*” Even so, Fredriksson believes that the Pirates have not given up on their original ideas such as copyright reforms, but were forced to adapt or “*co-opt*” to the current times (Fredriksson, 2015); ergo pointing in the direction that the Pirates are slowly becoming that which they are trying to dethrone in the first place—establishment.

3.4 The European Union

The initial breakthrough of the Swedish Pirate Party was a direct result of the 2009 European elections; thus, the Pirates and the European Union are well acquainted. Needless to say, given the somewhat poor election results, it is a one-way kind of relationship. Early on, the Pirates aligned themselves with the Greens and became an independent body of the Greens/EFA fraction (e.g., Cammaerts, 2015). To this day, the Pirates remain part of the fraction. (Greens/EFA).

There is yet too much to be unveiled about the relationship between the Pirates and the European Union. Authors have concentrated on partial issues, mostly on election results and not much else. There are many unresolved questions such as the Pirates' appeal to repel the controversial copyright reform or activities concerning the GDPR.¹⁴ What is the motivation behind the Pirates' holy war on copyright within the European Parliament? Or why is it so important to the Pirates to emphasize transparent planning and budgeting? These questions have been asked before and were answered by the Pirates, but to this day have not been extensively researched by unbiased parties.

3.5 Greens 2.0?

A remarkable amount of authors (given that there literally are only tens of works written about the Pirates) have noticed similarities between the Pirates and the Greens. While it is easy to assume that the Pirates are the Greens 2.0, the reality seems much more complicated.

Šrubař (2015) argues that there are many parallels between the Pirates and the Greens, more precisely the environmental family. He names common interests in decentralization, anti-elitism, post-materialism, and similar beginnings as grassroots movements, transparency, or LGBT rights. Boček (2009) goes a step further and deliberately puts the Swedish Pirate Party into the environmental family; other authors (e.g., Hartleb 2013) remain more prudent in their assessments of the Pirates or straight up refer to them as the pirate political family (e.g., Otjes 2019).

¹⁴ Especially the infamous Article 11 and Article 13, which according to the Pirates restricts freedom on the Internet (e.g., Reda, 2018).

Hartleb (2013) says that it is only natural for new formations to emerge in the wake of new millennia the same way the Greens have in the eighties. The key, according to Hartleb, is the promise that every party member can contribute (for example, via LiquidFeedback) and that no one holds any special privileges over others (decentralization of leadership, everyone has exactly one vote). He argues that while the parties might have similar backgrounds, the Pirates have taken their agenda one step further. That said, the Greens and the Pirates have similar ideas that allow them to coordinate and cooperate. These attempts can be viewed in the European Parliament (Greens/EFA).

3.6 Summary

The second chapter's goal was to answer the question: **“Who are the Pirates, and what do they want?”** The Pirates are deeply democratic political parties with a special interest in freedom of choice. The main interest of the Pirate Parties is the continuous support of liberal democracy and its thriving in modern times.

While the Pirate Movement and the first Pirate Parties certainly were single-issue driven and concentrating its focus on the cyberspace and freedom of individuals within (Hartleb, 2013), the emerging Pirate Parties have adapted and bulked over time while retaining their original message and integrating it into their political programs. Therefore, the Pirate Parties have undergone a transition that brings them closer to traditional established political parties. Even though there yet is not enough evidence indicating that the Pirates have docked beside the mainstream vessels (mostly for lack of success), similarities with other political families, especially in some parts of the political programs,

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might give us a clue as to what needs further research, because thus far, researchers have only scraped the surface. And again, some of it is due to time constraints or a lack of appeal to cover a marginal political force whose existence has been characterized as “*somewhat waning*” (Almqvist, 2016).

Albeit the Pirate Ideology and origin have been researched by some (e.g., Burkart), there yet remain a lot of gray areas. Issues, where authors fail to deliver, are: Pirates’ relationship with the European Union, their activities within the European Parliament, find a consensus on as to where do the Pirate Parties belong, or whether they are a new political family altogether. For now—the best authors can offer—are guesses, which is understandable given that the Pirates have yet to hold a relevant office.

Arguably, the most accomplished Pirate thus far is the current Mayor of Prague—Zdeněk Hřib, whose exposure, policymaking, and governance might give future researchers a valuable insight into forming Pirate politics and their continuum.

4 Success & Failure

Bartels (2009: 8) said this about the German Piratenpartei: “*The Pirate Party was one of the few spots of color in a bland election campaign,*” suggesting that the Pirates are at the very least worth to analyze further. The Pirates have been around for more than a decade by now, and the third and last chapter ‘Success & Failure’ should give the reader a better idea of the Pirates’ struggle to carry their ideas over the finish line. Its aim is also to answer the question: **Will Pirate Parties last?**

4.1 Pirate Support

The Pirates have historically had heterogenous election results (e.g., Otjes, 2019) that are put under closer consideration in this chapter. Whereas the first Swedes surfed the wave of general public outrage and won two seats in their second elections, the Pirate Party of Iceland or the Czech Pirate Party had to work harder for their results. Almqvist (2016) praises the Pirates for their efforts in achieving even meager election results that scored them seats in local parliaments or the European Parliament. It is a sign that the Pirates do not shackle themselves to sub-political activism and protests, but rise above and essentially play by the rules. Even though the real impact the Pirates have caused up to date is minimal, it indicates that they have the ability to mobilize outside of their closest supporters (Almqvist 2016).

The Pirates were hopeful and energized whenever something with a global consequence that concerned their core ideas manifested. Be it The Pirate Bay Trial, WikiLeaks, or a whistleblower like Edward Snowden coming forth with damning evidence of mass surveillance. And even

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so, consequently, the Swedish Pirates came up short in the 2014 European Parliament elections with only 2,2% of the vote, after focusing their campaign solely upon data protection and internet security. (Jääsaari and Hildén, 2015). The Pirates were unable to repeat their triumph in elections to the European Parliament after receiving two seats from the last election. The Pirates were no longer seen as a flashy new party but as one of the “*losers of this election*” (Öhrvall, 2014). Bartels (2013: 143) had a similar take on the Pirate election results. He suggested that issues happening in cyberspace were not as headline-friendly as the Chernobyl disaster for the Greens in the mid-eighties, which in itself concerns everyone, whereas data mining or mass surveillance does not speak to the majority of voters as apparent from the Swedish election result. This trend continues as the Swedish Pirate Party keeps falling lower and lower with each subsequent election (e.g., Röster). While the situation in Sweden might appear hopeless, there were others to carry the torch.

The key to the Pirates’ success is consistency. Pirates have a solid position in Icelandic politics and leaped into third place in the 2017 Czech Parliamentary elections, upsetting the liberal-leaning establishment (Khutkyy, 2019). Otjes (2019) confirms that support for the Pirates does not grow or decline linearly and that their success probably lies in the Pirates’ ability to rally voters who are distrustful of the government.

Authors argue (cf. Erlingsson and Perrson, 2011; Demker, 2014; Beyer, 2014; Zulianello 2018) whether voting for the Pirates is a sign of protest voting and or issue voting. While the sample size is still very small, Otjes (2019) interpreted gathered data as ambiguous. In Iceland, the appeal to repeal the establishment and profile itself as an anti-establishment party had worked. On the other hand, in Germany and Sweden, the Pirates were stepped over by right-wing populists and radicals, who

were considered 'the anti-establishment' at the time. This revelation suggests that the Pirates thrive in murky waters, but only until a bigger fish comes along. Does that mean that many voters are sympathetic, but the Pirates remain their second or third choice?

There are several in-depth works (e.g., Maškarinec, 2017; Zulianello, 2018; Otjes, 2019) concerning itself with the Pirates' election results. What it says about those voting for the Pirates is discussed in the next chapter. Statistical data speak clearly (cf. Jääsaari and Hildén, 2015; Otjes 2019). However, there yet remain many question marks because this data needs to be interpreted further. The biggest successes came in 2016 and onwards when the Pirates succeeded in national elections in Iceland, Luxemburg, and the Czech Republic (Wikipedia).

Future researchers should consider looking at these election results in order to better understand the limits and reach of the Pirates' support. Also, what seems to be a vital part of the Pirates' success are volunteers. Authors seem to omit, or straight-up forget this component of civic engagement that has an impact on political campaigns. The author of this thesis would very much like to read a study that would prove a correlation between the number of volunteers and success in elections.

4.2 Pirate Voter Profile

According to Bartels (2009: 9-10), the average Pirate voter is likely to be: young, male, internet-savvy, live in a larger city, and have a higher education.¹⁵ The Pirate Parties are trying to capture the new generation and prefer the use of the Internet and social networks as opposed to

¹⁵ Or be in the process of obtaining one, since the Pirate voter base is very young (Bartels. 2009: 10).

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traditional media (Hawkins and Onnudottir, 2018), which in itself are a strength and a weakness—Internet is a medium with limited reach, especially when it comes to the oldest of generations, but is widely used by the youngest generation. A specific feature of people voting for the Pirates is also their appeal to first-time voters (Brunclík, 2010). Some people may also fear that if they vote for the Pirates, their vote might go to waste. This behavior is less frequent in local or European Parliament elections in contrast to parliamentary elections (Maškarinec, 2017). Demker (2013) points out that Pirate Parties are an option for voters who want to send a message to the establishment, but cannot imagine voting for populists or extremists.

The issue is that the scope of the Pirate electorate is limited to the “*digital natives*” (Otjes 2019), meaning that—with the exception of the Czech Republic (Median)—the Pirates fail to capture the attention of people born before 1985. As a result, Otjes also suspects that Pirate Parties might have formed too early and that their success lies in the future, where “*cyberlibetarian*” parties are common, and where the pool of potential voters caring about the Pirate issues will be larger, because “*young people online are willing to mobilize on behalf of abstract rights claims, and that willingness spreads quickly across the social spaces online.*” (Beyer, 2014).

Zulianello’s (2018) cross-national analysis revealed that while young voters aged 18-24 are the most likely to vote for the Pirates, their participation level remains in the lower margins. Zulianello, therefore, guessed that even though the Pirates are successful in mobilizing some young voters, it is far from enough, and it could be one of the reasons why the Pirates remain largely unsuccessful in various elections. However, his research revealed that rather than mobilizing young voters

(that are only a marginal group out of the whole voter pool), there are more important external factors for voting for the Pirates, such as protest voting by older voters (2018).

The Pirates show great promise when it comes to engaging with the youngest voting-age group. The unsolved puzzle seems to be: (1) keep their core, young voters interested and content with the Pirate Program, and (2) reach out of the young, liberal bubble and persuade the older generations that the Pirate Program benefits them too.

4.3 A Glimpse of the Future

While predictions are usually unreliable, recent election results show trends within the pirate family. Even so, Pirate Parties have evolved over time, and in their 13 years of existence, various parties seem to undergo a “*hype cycle*.”¹⁶ As a result, three Pirate Parties ceased to exist, and four Pirate Parties left the Pirate Parties International (Khutkyy, 2019), which only confirms suspicions authors (e.g., Cammaers, 2015) have about the inner discord within the Pirate Parties.

Burkart (2013) says that even if Pirate Parties were to disappear tomorrow (which is highly unlikely, but not impossible), their ideas would remain because the future lies on the Internet. Internet as a platform that supports “*democracy, shared knowledge, and governmental transparency*” (Burkart, 2013: 158). This movement should work independently upon the Pirate Parties and evolve. Burkart also says that it is entirely

¹⁶ A term used by Khutkyy (2019). It describes the nature of the Pirate Parties. At first, there is a group of core and very active members. As the membership grows, so do the expectations for the party. When it is unsuccessful in pursuing a public office, the membership declines and the party collapses or at the very least stagnates.

possible that the Pirate ideas would be absorbed by other political parties,¹⁷ which would mean that the Pirates have completed their quest in the end.

Nevertheless, it all comes down to personalities and attracting enough attention. Be it, Five Star Movement in Italy or the Greens in Germany. In the Czech Republic, it happened to be the Pirates who managed to pique the interest of young and progressive voters. There are many commonalities among the named parties (see Lanzone and Rombi, 2018).

Li believes that even though the Pirates remain a minority in the political landscape, in time, they might become a major force that would cause a drastic copyright reform. Therefore, springing into action series of events with unpredictable outcomes with “*global ramification*”¹⁸ (2009).

In 2016, Almqvist wrote that it was too early to make any predictions on the future existence of the Pirate Parties. The same remains true today. Wherein countries such as the Czech Republic, Iceland, Germany, or Luxembourg, the Pirates have achieved moderate ranges of success; more often than not, the narrative for the Pirates remains ill-fated, especially when it comes to reaching out to voters in the rest of Europe where the Pirates are not established contenders for the seats at the table.

Missing links are many, however, as evidenced by the articles written about the *lesser* members of the pirate family, or more precisely, the

¹⁷ This phenomena has already been documented. The best, on-hand example are the Swedish Greens on verge of 2014 European elections (Almqvist, 2016).

¹⁸ Li worries about the backlash ranging from publishers to pressure to harmonize legislation by the European Community or even the involvement of courts, were the Pirate ideas to be implemented in full.

lack thereof. As an example, there are exactly zero serious articles concerning the success of the Pirate Party of Luxembourg, which managed to rise into the parliament in 2018 with a respectable 6.4% of the popular vote, taking two seats out of the total sixty (gouvernement.lu).

4.4 Summary

The third chapter's goal was to answer the question: "**Will Pirate Parties last?**" Unfortunately, there is yet not enough evidence to sway the question either way, and the chapter brings forth even more questions than definitive answers. There are Pirate Parties such as the Icelandic Pirate Party and the Czech Pirate Party, which managed to amount their success to some influence upon decision making. That said, there are literally tens of unsuccessful Pirate formations. Gathered evidence indicates that the Pirates may become more relevant with time, but this assumption can only be confirmed or denied in the future.

Even though the third chapter did not manage to find a definitive answer to the posed question, it revealed valuable information about the Pirates and their supporters. Based on gathered research, it is apparent that the core of the Pirate supporters is formed by young, internet-friendly individuals—more so men than women—that care about post-material values and in many cases, are distrustful of their own government. The Pirates might spawn a new generation of parties with special focus upon the intangible—the Internet and digital rights.

There are, however, serious gaps in knowledge when it comes to the Pirate electorate. Why have the Pirates been unable to connect with older generations? Are the Pirates even competing for the votes of the

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elderly? How is it that people who have voted for the Pirates in the past change their vote in subsequent elections? Those are three out of many unanswered questions when it comes to pirates' voter base that should prompt further discussion.

For now, the author of this thesis remains hopeful as it is perhaps too soon to ask for interpretations of elections that have had transpired two or three years ago. It is entirely possible that diligent researchers are working on these statistics at this very moment.

5 Conclusion

The first chapter of the thesis revealed that what brought the first Pirate Parties to life was frustration with elites and their handling of the ever-present Internet and dilemmas concerning the cyberspace (e.g., Bartels, 2009). The second chapter traced the thought process of the first Pirates and unearthed the evolution of the Pirate Ideology. According to various authors (e.g., Cammaerts, 2015), the Pirates are a liberal, cyber-oriented, and anti-establishment party. The last chapter brought forth obstacles that the Pirates had and have to face in their journey to success. Unfortunately, the third chapter has not managed to answer its initial question in a meaningful form. Authors are so far unable to assess the future or longevity of the current Pirate Parties. While some (e.g., Li 2009, Burkart, 2013) remain hopeful and see the Pirates as a futuristic alternative to mainstream, other authors (e.g., Almqvist, 2016; Lindstam 2016) seem less convinced by the Pirates' efforts.

In 2010 Brunclík wrote: *"The scope of the literature is commensurate with the success and influence of the Pirate Parties in each country."* His statement holds true to this day. Authors have focused on particular success stories concerning the Pirates in specific situations, such as getting a favorable election result, which could be described as cherry-picking. There yet remains to be a comprehensive work overlooking Pirate Politics as a whole (with the exception of Burkart's *Pirate Politics: The New Information Policy Contests*) that does not focus solely on case studies. While it is reasonable to assume that Pirate Politics are somewhat newer phenomena, the lack of relevant literature is disturbing.

Most comprehensive literature concerning the Pirates that has been written thus far—Bartels and Burkart—bring valuable insight as well as

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all the other authors. Even so, overall, the thesis suffers from a lack of relevant sources. At times, secondary, supportive sources were necessary to bridge even the most basic ideas. During the researching phase of the thesis, there was a noticeable period where authors seemed to lose interest in Pirate Parties altogether. This phenomenon was especially considerable in the years, where the Pirates were not particularly successful. The Pirates themselves are very active in online communities and update their wikis regularly. The author of the thesis would even argue that the Pirate-maintained wikis are often more reliable than conventional sources, based on his experience. The problem is not a lack of information, but the fact that this information—given by the Pirates or their supporters—might not be reliable because a closer look is needed in order to interpret information fairly and without a positive bias.

In general, works about the Pirates follow a linear structure. Out of the whole bundle of works, the most attention is focused on the Pirate Movement and the early days of the Swedish Pirate Party or the German Piratenpartei. About as much attention is also given to the ideas behind the Pirate Parties. Authors are mostly trying to make sense of the Pirate ideology and find a place for the Pirates on the spectrum. The author of this thesis thinks that categorizing the Pirates is an issue that causes the widest divide amongst authors writing about the Pirates. Lastly, only a few works are aimed at decoding Pirates' election results, which is a shame because that is precisely where the most interesting and the most vital data could be mined. With this knowledge, future researchers could delve deeper and even start comparing the Pirates to established political parties and their electorates. The author of this thesis thinks that with modest results, such as the last couple of elections, comparative studies

could reveal more interesting traits about the Pirate voters and their behavior during election season.

There is yet much that needs to be understood about the Pirate Movement and Pirate Parties—some questions were posed directly or indirectly in reviewed chapters. The largest knowledge gap, however, concerns the European Union. The Pirates support most Commission initiatives (Votewatch); on the other hand, there are issues that the Pirates cannot yield, such as copyright reform (Reda, 2019). Another interesting question that should be asked is: Why has the support for the Pirates shifted regionally? Why is it that the Czech Pirate Party and the Pirate Party of Luxemburg have managed to secure parliament seats while the Pirate Party of Iceland's support is in decline, Swedish Pirate Party did not repeat their success in European elections, and the German Piratenpartei barely scraped together enough votes to retain their one seat? Furthermore, there are very few works concerning the Pirates that are analytical in nature and try to interpret voter behavior. The most important question of all—in order for the Pirate Parties to survive—is most likely: Why are the Pirates unable (with the exception of the Czech Pirate Party) to conserve voters who were swayed to vote for the Pirates in the past? Both research and data prove that people seem to digress away from the Pirates even though they might have been sympathetic to their cause in the past. This behavior is underlined by the loss of registered Pirate Party members and unsuccessful campaigns for public offices.

While it is difficult to assess the current place the Pirate Parties are in—as far as popularity, public image, voter appeal, overall visage, and longevity, are concerned—the author of this thesis thinks that their fu-

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turistic agenda is worth observing further. Pirate ideas are far from extinct, ranging from grassroots Pirate Parties such as the German Piratenpartei or the Czech Pirate Party to USA's democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang.¹⁹

The Swedish Pirate Party might have lost its touch, but there are others willing to continue its legacy. The online and the offline worlds are still miles apart, and the question whether Europe's Pirate Parties are to go extinct or not yet cannot be answered in a satisfactory way since the battle for the Internet is far from over; in fact, it is only in its early stages.

¹⁹ To be clear, Andrew Yang does not refer to himself as 'a pirate' per se, but his policies concerning the cyberspace are very much in line with the Pirate Ideology. An example of this behaviour is Yang arguing that personal data should be a property right, therefore forbidding companies to hoard and sell or buy client information as they have done thus far (Yang2020).

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