A Typology of Parties in Contemporary Europe, 1990-2020

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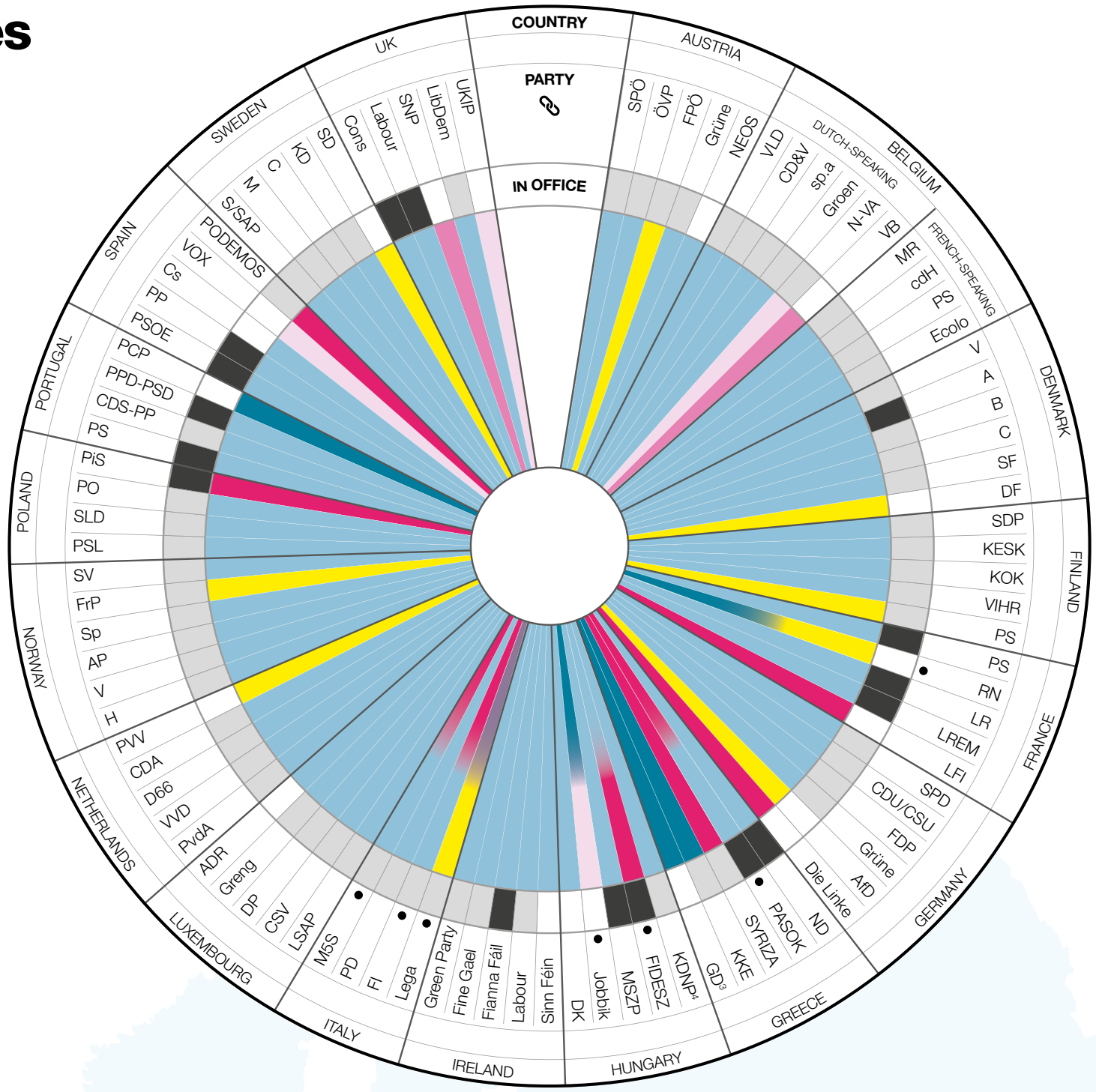
Contemporary Europe's party politics cannot be understood without distinguishing political parties into types that are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. This analysis offers an original typology of parties in Europe for academics, practicioners of politics, journalists, and the general public. It covers the three decades that have passed since 1990[1] and includes the majority of countries in North, Western, and Southern Europe, in addition to the important cases of Hungary and Poland from Eastern Europe. It presents **95** *significant*[2] parties in **18** countries divided into **seven** party types based on the political goals and kind of society each type wants to achieve.



IN OFFICE

Solo · Coalition partner · Never

● Parties with two colors indicates change from one party type to another.

Clicking on party names takes you to their official websites.

Liberal

The majority of political parties in Europe. Both democratic and committed to liberal principles, they are distinguished by three characteristics: their acknowledgement that society is divided by multiple cleavages; the pursuit of political moderation and overlapping consensus; and their adherence to the rule of law and the protection of minority rights.

Populist

A novel party type that developed in Europe after the mid-1970s in opposition to the liberal type. Democratic but illiberal, populists view society as being split between an integrated majority of ordinary people and elite minorities. It inevitably generates political polarization, which, in turn, justifies their pursuit of majoritarianism at the expense of liberal institutionalism.

Nativist

Technically a subcategory of the liberal type, nativist parties advocate a policy of protecting the interests of native-born citizens against alien populations, in addition to their opposition to further European integration. They have risen strong in recent decades particularly in Europe's most wealthy and solidly liberal democracies.

Nationalist

Another subcategory of the European liberal party type, their basic aim is to achieve their respective nation's full sovereignty vis-à-vis other nations or supranational organizations, most notably the EU. Most paradigmatic of this type are the parties which, in recent years, advocated Brexit and British unionism.

Regionalist & Secessionist

These parties constitute specific subcategories of the nationalist party type. They campaign for either greater regional autonomy (i.e., regionalist parties) or full national independence (i.e., secessionist parties) from the centralist control of the nation state in which they belong.

Antidemocratic

Found on either the extreme left or the extreme right of party systems, they participate in elections as typical "antisystem" forces seeking to delegitimize the normative foundations of parliamentary democracy and subvert its legal-institutional structures, often by use of violence.

Sources

On the distinction between liberal and nativist parties, see T.S. Pappas, "The Specter Haunting Europe: Distinguishing Liberal Democracy's Challengers", Journal of Democracy 27:4 (October 2016), 22-36, and also T.S. Pappas, "Populism vs. Nativism" [infographic], 2020. For a more theoretically sophisticated typological analysis of parties, see T.S. Pappas, Populism and Liberal Democracy: A Comparative and Theoretical Analysis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), esp. chapters 1 and 2, pp. 13-78. For much more on populism, liberalism, autocracy, please visit my blog www.pappaspopulism.com.

Citation

You may refer to this infographic as: Takis S. Pappas (2021), A Typology of Parties in Contemporary Europe, 1990-2020 [infographic]

Notes

1 Data last updated, 16 March 2021.
2 "Significant" are the parties that have been in office; enjoy coalition potential; receive at least 5% of their respective national vote; or played some particularly important role in their countries' political lives.
3 In 2020, the Greek courts convicted GD leaders for running a criminal organization and their party was dissolved. There is no official party website.
4 KDNP, officially a coalition partner, is in fact a satellite party used to give Fidesz a supermajority in parliament.

Populism and Civic Engagement

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822337.

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Graphic design: vitoraimondi.com