Pirates board European politics

Antoni Gutiérrez-Rubí

www.gutierrez-rubi.es

Founded in Sweden on 1st January 2006, the [Pirate Party](#) (Piratpartiet) now boasts more than 45,000 members, making it the third largest Swedish political force in number of affiliates. This rapid growth is due in part to the role the group played in the protests against the Swedish police's shut-down of the [Pirate Bay](#) P2P exchange server and because the party represents a challenge to the establishment and formal politics. In other words, they defend very specific interests and, at the same time challenge with their critical vote the entirety of the political and electoral system.

The party strives to reform laws regarding copyright and patents. The agenda also includes support for a strengthening of the right to privacy, both on the Internet and in everyday life, the transparency of state administration, and the promotion of copyleft and free operating systems (such as GNU/Linux). However, although their proposals have an ideological and transformational base, the party takes no position on other issues, making it impossible to place it within the classic scheme of right and left.

The party is primarily made up of young voters, and this has forced more traditional Swedish parties, such as the

Greens, the Moderate Party and the Left Party to change their positions with regard to copyrights.

The party's first grand entrance on the political stage took place during the European elections of 7th June this year, in which the Pirate Party received 7.1% of the Swedish vote, enough to win the group its first seat in European Parliament. An unprecedented success. The next big surprise came from the Member of European Parliament, socialist Jörg Tauss, who left the German Social Democratic Party and joined the *Piraten Partei*, the German Pirate Party, created after the Swedish example.

The German Pirate Party, which participated in German elections for the first time on 27th September this year (in the European elections it won 0.09% of the vote), expected to cause a shockwave through the votes of the younger generation. Pre-election polls yielded interesting results for the party. According to the consulting firm Infratest dimap, about 28% of voters between 18 and 24 were thinking of voting for minority groups not represented in the lower house, a group that includes the Pirate Party.

According to the poll, only eight percent of that group of young voters would support the conservative block of chancellor Angela Merkel, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) or the Christian Social Union (CSU), while nine

percent said that they would give their vote to the main central-left party, the Social Democrat Party (SPD) and its candidate Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The rest favoured parties like the Greens and the Pirate Party. [For example](#), the website of the German social network StudieVZ says that almost half of the 200,000 members who participated in a poll support the party and intend to vote for it.

But the truth is that in Germany these young voters do not wield much influence in elections, as they only comprise ten percent of the voting population. Nevertheless, their voting preferences represent a worrying signal to the big parties, not only now in the present, but also in the medium and long term.

The shockwave the party hoped to create did not occur, but it did double its votes (in just four months compared to the European elections) receiving 845,904 votes (2% of the total), which implies a significant increase and an upward trend, positioning the party as the seventh most voted for political organisation in these elections.

The "pirates" connect with young people using cultural expressions of political rejection with a sense of humour and intelligent criticism. They have traded in the stone-throwing and barricades typical of the German anarchist or antifascist movements that used to fascinate a sector of the

German critical youth for smiles, jokes and digital culture. Young agitators, for example, have followed Angela Merkel to all her meetings to applaud her by [shouting "Yeaaah"](). Without disturbing public order but putting themselves in the public eye through aesthetic parody, they have organised a voting "flash mob", a carnivalesque movement organised and announced electronically via mobile phone and the internet that "followed" the candidate. As a result, they have become part of the electoral landscape and their mocking and joking presence has been echoed in the media. Even Angela Merkel herself, to her credit, has greeted them from the podium on more than one occasion ("My young Internet friends"). The "alternatives" know how to communicate.

But what is important in political terms is that a party that emerged from the web is achieving a political presence in Europe not only due to young people's discontent with the politics of the traditional parties with regard to the internet, but also because of their discontent and indifference towards those traditional parties themselves as well as their politics. The fact that, [for the first time](), a "native" internet organisation especially committed to the most progressive aspects of the web reached the heights of parliamentary representation is a historic landmark that may be the path of the future.

The political importance of the debate around the internet has become manifestly clear in this electoral framework. For the first time, organised citizens can give politicians serious food for thought. It is not the first case in the world. New technologies allow us to get organised, to change things, to improve them with the creation of communities and with the continuous diffusion of information. The Swiss and German Pirate Parties and the virtual candidate Esperanza Marchita in Mexico are only a couple of examples, but there are and there will be more.