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Party Systems?

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Abstract

In a paper published soon after the transition to democracy in East Central Europe, it was suggested that post-communist party systems were expected to be characterized by an unstable and unpredictable structure of competition (Mair 1996). Returning to that original hypothesis, this paper attempts to make a first systematic mapping of the patterns of inter-party competition which have characterised post-communist party systems over the past two decades. Because the main arena of inter-party competition (or cooperation) is the competition for government, we analyse here the way in which government is contested by the various political parties, and how such patterns of interaction vary both over time and across fifteen different post-communist polities. This allows us to derive a much clearer sense of the differences between party systems.

Keywords

Government Alternation; Party System Institutionalization; Post-Communist Europe

Introduction

One of the most evident truisms in the literature on parties and party systems is that party systems, precisely because they are systems, take time to settle down and hence to become institutionalised. As such, and as has been argued elsewhere (Mair, 1997), it may make little sense to speak of ‘emerging’ or ‘consolidating’ party systems. To speak of a system (as opposed to a set) of parties is to ascribe to that system a degree of stability, predictability and familiarity in the interactions between the parties involved, and, by definition, these properties require time to develop. New ‘systems’ cannot be predictable, and they are certainly unfamiliar. Nor can we know whether they are stable, since this also requires the test of time.

Since the beginnings of mass democracy in Europe, we can identify four separate clusters of cases in which parties and party systems have emerged and potentially consolidated (Mair 1997: 177-8). The first was constituted by the cases that emerged at the beginning of the 20th-century in the wake of the establishment of universal male (and often) female suffrage, and were those seen by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) to have frozen into place by the 1920s. The second cluster were the new or revived party systems that emerged in a number of countries in continental Europe in the late 1940s and 1950s following the demise of authoritarian rule – Austria, West Germany, and Italy. The third cluster was constituted by the early third-wave democracies in the mid- to late-1970s – Greece, Portugal and Spain. Finally, in larger numbers, and at a slightly more uneven pace, there is the cluster formed by the post-communist democracies, beginning – in terms of founding elections (see Table 2 below) – in May 1990 in Hungary. It is this last cluster that is the concern of this paper, in which we present and analyze data on government formation and party system institutionalization in 15 post-communist democracies.

Although the first three clusters of cases have become relatively institutionalised with time, and – at least for now – have developed reasonably stable and predictable sets of interactions between the parties involved, there were always reasons to doubt whether the post-communist cases would follow a similar trajectory. The sheer scale of the triple transition that was involved in post-communist democratization, the absence of strong cleavage structures and anchors within civil society, the continuing fractiousness of the political class and the sometimes intense character of inter-party competition all suggested that these new democracies would be marked by instability for some time to come (Mair 1997: 175-98). Added to this was the lack of party organizational structuring, the fact that

party-building and election campaigning were occurring within highly mediated public spheres, and that the political context bore many of the features of what Manin (1997) has defined as ‘audience democracy’. All of these set obstacles in the path of party system institutionalization that were likely to prove more formidable than those faced by the systems that were part of the earlier clusters. For this reason, post-communist party ‘systems’ were expected to be different, and were seen to be less likely to settle down within a reasonable time span.

Twenty years on, it seems worthwhile to check these expectations against the record. To what extent have post-communist systems institutionalized in the last two decades, and to what extent is there variation in this regard across the polities? Can we see differential patterns over time and across the different groups of polities within the post-communist region? Is the level of party system institutionalization comparable to that reached after twenty years in other clusters of newly-democratized polities? This paper addresses these questions and offers a first overview of the patterns of government formation and alternation in 15 post-communist polities that have developed in the past twenty years. Our concern here is to chart the extent to which the party systems have become institutionalized, as well as the extent to which this varies across the region as a whole. The paper does not devote much effort to explaining the variations that are identified, since this is part of other work (Casal Bértoa, forthcoming).

Party System Institutionalization

For the purposes of this paper, party systems are considered to be institutionalized when the patterns of interaction among political parties become *predictable and stable* over time. In other words, the more predictable a party system is, the more it is a system as such, and hence the more institutionalized it becomes (Mair, 2001:38). Moreover, given that the essence of any party system is given by the *principal* modes of interaction – whether competition or collusion – between the parties, the evidence with which this paper is concerned is drawn from the most important arena in which the parties interact: the governing arena. That is, this paper derives evidence of party system institutionalization from data on the changing patterns of government formation. This is where the “core” of the party system is to be found.¹ In order to determine whether a party system does develop stable and predictable

¹ The concept of “party system core” was developed originally by Gordon Smith, for whom it “refers to those features that have been essential for the way in which the system has functioned and, as a corollary, which appear most resistant to change” (1989:161).

patterns of inter-party competition and, thereby, to determine whether that system has become institutionalized, we identify four different, although clearly related, properties or criteria relating to the changing partisan composition of governments.

Frequency of change: The first of these systemic properties is the sheer frequency of change in the partisan composition of government: how often are parties in government replaced by other parties, whether in whole or in part, and how open are the various systems to changes of government? In strongly institutionalized systems, the number of partisan changes in government can be expected to be relatively low and relatively regular, that is, it usually occurs after, and not between, elections. Conversely, in weakly structured party systems, changes in the partisan composition of government are more frequent and are as likely to occur between elections as after them. Partisan alternation in cabinets between elections also removes politics from the influence of voters, making the system less responsive to electoral opinion and therefore also less predictable. The most obvious examples of such extreme patterns of alternation are those of Bulgaria, on the one hand, where partisan cabinet changes have only taken place immediately after the electoral contest, and Latvia, on the other, where each of the many post-communist governments have survived in office for an average of little more than a year - 402 days, to be more precise - at a time.

Alternation in government: The second property concerns alternation in government, and the question of the degree to which the party composition of successive governing coalitions changes at each new period of government formation. There are three conceivable options here: wholesale alternation, partial alternation, and non-alternation. In the first case, the incumbent government leaves the office in its entirety, and is replaced by a wholly different party or group of parties. A second possibility takes place when the new cabinet contains both new parties and old ones from the previous government: that is, one or more parties remain in office while one or more parties leave, generally being replaced, but not always, by an alternative or alternatives. The third option is marked by a complete absence of alternation for the same party or parties remain in exclusive control of government over an extended period of time, being displaced neither wholly nor partially.

Innovation or familiarity of government alternatives: The third property measures innovation and familiarity in governing formulae, and looks at whether the competing governing coalitions tend to be composed of the same line-up of parties each time they come to office. In some cases, there are stable groups of parties that tend to govern together

(familiarity) whereas in other cases there is a tendency towards new combinations of parties that emerge to control the executive (innovation).

Access to government: The final property that is relevant here is access to government, and measures whether, over a given period of time, all parties enjoyed the opportunity to win the spoils of office or whether some parties were permanently excluded from participation in government while others were more or less permanently incorporated. This obviously connects to innovation in that every time a new party wins office for the first time the resultant government is, by definition, innovative. However, not all innovative formulae involve new parties, since the novelty may well derive from a new combination of previously incumbent actors.

The combination of these four properties yields a fairly broad-brush distinction between two contrasting patterns in the structure of party competition. On the one hand, the structure of competition is open, and hence the system is only weakly institutionalized, when there are (1) mainly partial alternations of governments; (2) the governing alternatives lack a stable composition; and (3) access to government is possible for almost all relevant parties. Conversely, the structure of competition is closed and the party systems institutionalized if (1) there is largely total alternation or an absence of alternation; (2) the governing alternatives are stable and familiar; and (3) government is monopolised by a limited number of the competing parties. Finally, in strongly institutionalised party systems, the frequency of government turnover is relatively low, while this is relatively high in weakly institutionalized systems (see Table 1).

Table 1. Party system institutionalization and government formation

| Systemic Properties | Institutionalized party systems | Weakly institutionalized party systems |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| <i>Frequency of change</i> | Low | High |
| <i>Alternation of government</i> | Wholesale/None | Partial |
| <i>Governing formulae</i> | Familiar | Innovative |
| <i>Access to government</i> | Closed | Open |

Operationalization

The task of finding reliable and precise operational indicators for the empirical assessment of the conceptual scheme displayed above is quite complex. Frequency of alternation is, of course, straightforward, and is measured simply by the number of changes in the *party* composition of government, but it should be noted that we exclude from our relevant measure all those changes in government due to an intervening election or a change

of prime minister which do not entail a partisan change of the cabinet itself. The other indicators are more complicated, however. The degree of governmental alternation is measured by a so-called index of government alternation (IGA – see Mair 2007:140), which simply adapts Pedersen’s (1979) well-known index of electoral volatility to the measurement of ministerial volatility. Thereby, ministerial volatility is computed by adding the net change in percentage of ministers (including the prime minister)² gained and lost by each party in the cabinet from one government to the next, and then dividing by two. For example, in a two-party system where a government composed by a single party A is usually replaced by a new government composed of a single party B, the IGA is 100 percent. Otherwise, when a government in which party A contributes 60 percent of the ministers and party B 40 percent is replaced by a new coalition in which party A holds only 30 percent and party C wins the rest, the IGA is 70 percent.

The third criterion, based on assessing whether or not the party or combination of parties has governed before in that particular format, is measured by an Index of Innovative Alternation (IIA), which accounts for the number of innovative governments (excluding the first one)³ as a percentage of all new governments. Finally access to government, which weights the extent to which the process of government alternation involves the introduction into office of new (previously non-governing) political parties, is measured by the Index of Openness (IO). This is calculated by dividing the number of new governing parties by the total number of governing parties in each period of *partisan government change* (adjusted).⁴ The average of all those values constitutes the IO final score.

Compared with the other measures, this last component is the most difficult to measure as it involves a qualitative judgement on what old parties are. Therefore, as far as this analysis is concerned, and building on Sikk (2005:399), *genuinely new governing parties* are

² It is important to note here, that we are counting ministers and not ministries or portfolios, as these may be sometimes combined under the same person.

³ *Innovative governments* are defined here as those which never previously held office in that form during the period examined (first eighteen years since the re-birth of democracy). Thus, a party coming to office for the first time in the form of a single-party government is innovative, even if it had previously governed as part of a coalition. The first new cabinet to hold office after the founding government which is innovative is discounted by the measure.

⁴ Since the first new government to hold office in the period is, in the majority of cases, one that includes a new party, the index does not consider that first experience of government change when counting the number of total and old governing parties. Such experience of cabinet change, together with the founding government, is obviously considered when qualifying governing parties as “old (or new)”. At the same time, and taking into consideration that every time a new party wins office for the first time the resultant government is, by definition, innovative; it is important to note that our adjusted IO measures also the degree to which the closure of access causes familiarity - although not *vice versa*.

considered to be all those parties which have never before been a constituent part of a government, either under similar or different names (but not structure). This latter phenomenon points to the issue of party splits, fusions and name-changes, with Poland offering the most obvious as well as the most complex and difficult example in this context. In order to deal with this problem, the following rules are applied (also to the other measures) when assessing the degree of closure in terms of the accession of new parties: (1) when two parties merge into one, the resulting merged party is viewed as an “old” party; (2) when one party splits, the resulting parties are considered to be “new”; but (3) if any of the newly formed parties can be clearly seen a successor to the previous party, in such case, the former (i.e., the successor) is not counted as “new”, but simply as a heir of the latter (i.e., the splitting party).

Data

In order to proceed with the assessment of party system institutionalization in new post-communist democracies,⁵ we need counting rules to establish the number of governments and their partisan composition. To determine what parties actually have governing status, we shall take into consideration only parties that are directly represented in the executive by their members and/or nominees.⁶ As noted, the only changes of government we record here are those entailing a modification in the *partisan composition* of government (i.e., when a party leaves the cabinet or joins the cabinet), rather than when elections occur or a prime minister is replaced without a partisan change.

A more complicated question is related to the investiture of the first democratic government in post-communist states. In order to allow for a systematic comparison, and building on Reich (2001:1239-40), we define the *founding government* for each country as the one created after “founding elections” have taken place (see Table 2). In this sense, founding governments are defined as being created by the first free election taking place in a country after regime collapse, independence, or after a revised constitution was approved by an interim Constituent Assembly (see also Müller *et al.*, 2004).⁷

⁵ Some of the countries have undergone a transition only very recently, others have a longer period of democratic experience behind them. All of the countries included in the current study are considered to be “minimally” democratic, as they score 6 or higher on the *polity2* variable from the Polity IV dataset (Polity IV Project 2009).

⁶ All cabinets formed by so-called “independents” or non-partisan members have been excluded from the data presented here.

⁷ Focusing only on “founding elections” in Eastern Europe, rather than on “breakaway elections” (i.e., the ones held immediately after the collapse of communist rule) as a point of departure is also justified because the latter

Table 2. Regime transition in new European democracies

| Country | Independence date | Breakaway elections | Founding elections | Founding government |
|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Albania | - | 21/III/1991 | 22/III/1992 | 13/IV/1992 |
| Bulgaria | - | 10/VI/1990* | 13/X/1991 | 8/XI/1991 |
| Croatia | 25/VI/1991 | 22/IV/1990** | 2/VIII/1992 | 12/VIII/1992 |
| Czech Republic | 1/I/1993 | 8-9/VI/1990*** | 5-6/VI/1992 | 1/I/1993 |
| Estonia | 6/IX/1991 | - | 20/IX/1992 | 21/XII/1992 |
| Hungary | - | - | 3/V/1990 | 23/V/1990 |
| Latvia | 6/IX/1991 | - | 5-6/VI/1993 | 4/VII/1993 |
| Lithuania | 6/IX/1991 | - | 25/X/1992 | 2/XII/1992 |
| Macedonia | 8/IX/1991 | 11/XI/1990** | 16/X/1994 | 28/XI/1994 |
| Moldova | 27/VIII/1991 | - | 27/II/1994 | 5/IV/1994 |
| Poland | - | 4/VI/1989**** | 27/X/1991 | 23/XII/1991 |
| Romania | - | 20/V/1990* | 27/IX/1992 | 13/XI/1992 |
| Serbia | - | 23/XII/2000 | 23/XII/2000 | 25/I/2001 |
| Slovakia | 1/I/1993 | 8-9/VI/1990*** | 5-6/VI/1992 | 12/I/1993 |
| Slovenia | 25/VI/1991 | - | 6/XII/1992 | 12/I/1993 |

Notes: * Elections to the Constituent Assembly; ** Still a part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; ***Czechoslovak Federal Assembly; **** Only one-third of the seats were freely contested.

Source: Adapted from Müller-Rommel *et al.* (2004:871)

The end result is a dataset with fifteen countries and 98 observations (i.e., cases of government formation).⁸ The countries and time periods included in the dataset are: Albania (1992-2008), Bulgaria (1991-2008), Croatia (1992-2008), the Czech Republic (1993-2008), Estonia (1992-2008), Hungary (1990-2008), Latvia (1993-2008), Lithuania (1992-2008), Macedonia (1994-2008), Moldova (1994-2008), Poland (1991-2008), Romania (1992-2008), Serbia (2001-2008), Slovakia (1993-2008), and Slovenia (1993-2008).

Patterns of alternation: frequency and level

A first overview of the patterns of alternation is shown in Table 3, which ranks the 15 post-communist democracies in terms of the frequency with which the partisan composition of government has changed during the period 1990-2008, and which also records both the prevailing mode of alternation (total, partial, or mixed) and the mean IGA value. Apart from the pronounced cross-national variation shown by these summary data, two smaller points of immediate interest can be noted. First, and most obvious, Latvia has by far the most unstable

(Contd.)

“were often merely referenda on communist rule rather than true expressions of political preferences” (Ishiyama, 1997:309). Hungary is the only exception to this general rule.

⁸ All the data on party systems and government formation in new European post-communist democracies are based on Woldendorp *et al.* (2000), Müller-Rommel *et al.* (2005, 2008), but cross-checked with information provided by the European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbooks, Blondel and Müller-Rommel (2001), and by country experts and sources on the World Wide Web.

and, therefore, less institutionalized party system in terms of both the frequency and level of alternation. Second, while the Moldovan case, as expected, comes lowest in the rankings, it is also close to the – familiar – cases of Hungary and the Czech Republic (Bakke and Sitter, 2005; Toole, 2000) and the more surprising case of Bulgaria.

Table 3. Alternation in government, 1990-2008

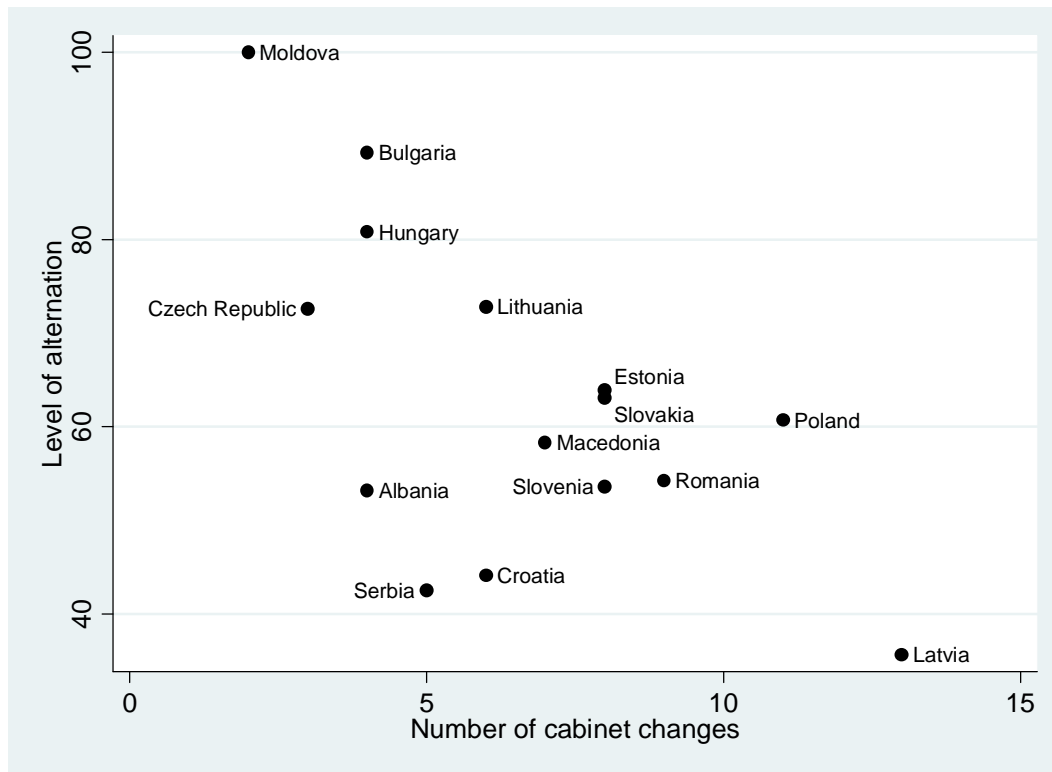
| | N changes in the party composition of government | Prevailing mode of alternation (% of cases with total alternation)* | Mean level of alternation [IGA] (%) |
|------------------|---|--|--|
| Latvia | 13 | Partial (0) | 35.6 |
| Poland | 11 | Mixed (45.5) | 60.7 |
| Romania | 9 | Mixed (33.3) | 54.2 |
| Slovenia | 8 | Partial (0) | 53.6 |
| Slovakia | 8 | Mixed (50.0) | 63.1 |
| Estonia | 8 | Partial (25.0) | 63.9 |
| Macedonia | 7 | Mixed (28.6) | 58.3 |
| Croatia | 6 | Mixed (33.3) | 44.1 |
| Lithuania | 6 | Mixed (33.3) | 72.8 |
| Serbia | 5 | Partial (0) | 42.5 |
| Albania | 4 | Partial (25.0) | 53.2 |
| Hungary | 4 | Total (75.0) | 80.8 |
| Bulgaria | 4 | Total (75.0) | 89.3 |
| Czech R. | 3 | Mixed (33.3) | 72.6 |
| Moldova | 2 | Total (100.0) | 100 |
| <i>mean</i> | <i>6.5</i> | | <i>63.0</i> |

* Mixed cases are those in which more than 25% but less than 75% of cases of alternation involve total alternation.

It is also interesting to note that it is only among both the Baltic and Balkan states that we find a prevailing tendency towards partial alternation. Latvia, Slovenia, and Serbia also stand out here by virtue of their never having had experience of total alternation, whereas the only two cases of alternation in Moldova have both been wholesale. There are potentially interesting temporal contrasts here, however. Both Lithuania and Croatia, as well as the Czech Republic, experienced partial alternation in government for the first time after 2000, with the first Bulgarian experience coming in 2005 and the first Hungarian experience in 2008. A comparable shift occurs in Croatia in 2000, although in this case the shift is marked in terms of the frequency of alternation rather than its prevailing mode: in the 1990s, the partisan composition of Croatian government did not change at all; after the year 2000, by contrast, it changed 6 times. In the same vein, in Lithuania and Poland during the first decade of

democratic politics the partisan composition of the cabinet changed once and three times, respectively; conversely, from the beginning of the new millennium it changed five and eight times, respectively.⁹ Finally, it is important to note here that both in Poland and Hungary alternation after elections have always had a total character – the cases of partial alternation, unsurprisingly, come between elections. Other countries where alternation after elections has been predominantly total are Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria.¹⁰

Figure 1. Cabinet change and alternation, 1990-2008



The most striking pattern revealed in these data, however, is one that is also intuitively plausible: countries in which changes in the partisan composition of government are relatively infrequent – the less fragmented party systems in particular – are also those in which the degree of alternation (IGA), when it does occur, is maximized (see Figure 1). Moldova, Bulgaria, Hungary and, to a lesser extent, the Czech Republic are obvious cases in point. Conversely, countries which experience more frequent changes are also those in which the degree of alternation tends to be quite muted. As in the case of Western European party systems, there is a tendency for infrequent changes to be quite radical in impact, and frequent

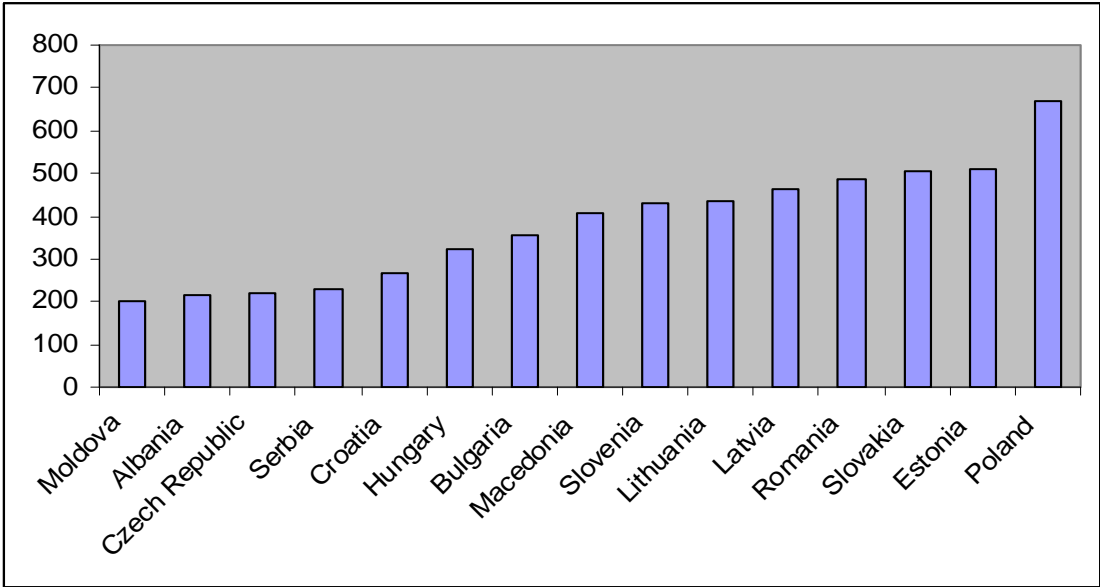
⁹ In all three cases, the main explanation seems to be the initial fierce competition between post-communist and anti-communist forces, which died down after a decade of polarised party politics.

¹⁰ In these countries alternation after elections has had a partial character just once: Slovakia (2002), Romania (2000), and Bulgaria (2005).

changes to be more moderate, although the logic may well be inverted, such that where turnover is likely to be moderate or partial the act itself tends to occur more often (Mair, 2007:143).

Another way to read these two measures of alternation is to consider the level of alternation (IGA) as an indicator of the degree of competition for government and the frequency as an indicator of how much the latter constitutes the focus of the competition. In this context, the few systems in which changes in incumbency occur relatively infrequently, and rarely at a radical level, such as Serbia or Albania, are therefore quite unusual, and it is in these systems that the competition for government proves to be quite marginal to the party system as a whole. At the other end of the spectrum, the only system where partisan changes in cabinet are accompanied by high IGA values is Lithuania. In this country, the competition for government is clearly the overriding dynamic.

Figure 2. Alternation in government: cumulative index (*), 1990-2008



* Simply: the sum of all degrees of alternation in the period (from which the mean in Table 3 is derived).

Figure 2 summarizes the overall scale of alternation in the various countries during the post-communist years by taking account of both measures of alternation (i.e., frequency and level). As is evident from the figure, Poland reflects by far the most pronounced levels of partisan instability or discontinuity in cabinet formation, followed some way back by Estonia and Slovakia. In these countries, the competition for government is clearly central to the party system. A second group of countries where changes in the partisan composition of government is infrequent and/or moderate are clustered at the lower end of the rankings: Moldova, Albania, Czech Republic, Serbia and Croatia. In these cases, government fails to

offer a major dimension of competition either because the changes involved are minimal (e.g. Serbia, Albania), or because government has rarely proved open to competition in the actual practice (e.g., Moldova, Croatia, Czech Republic). Although necessarily tentative given the relatively short periods involved, it is also possible to see some change over time in this regard (table 4). Croatia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Romania, Macedonia and Poland have been subject to much more frequent and/or substantial cases of alternation in the second decade of the twenty-year period, and in this sense are becoming more unstable, whereas Slovakia in particular has experienced much less alternation, with Mečiar's defeat leading to a probable loss in importance in the focus on government as the key arena of partisan competition. But Slovakia is exceptional in this regard, and in many more cases, and contrary to what might have been expected twenty years ago, the competition for government in post-communist Eastern Europe has become more rather than less intensive with time.

Table 4. Cumulative alternation by period

| | 1990-1999 | 2000-2008 | Difference |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Croatia | 0 | 264.5 | + 264.5 |
| Slovenia | 92.2 | 336.5 | + 244.3 |
| Lithuania | 100 | 336.9 | + 236.9 |
| Romania | 142.2 | 345.8 | + 203.6 |
| Macedonia | 121.1 | 286.8 | + 165.7 |
| Poland | 257.2 | 410.5 | +153.3 |
| Latvia | 207.2 | 256.1 | + 48.9 |
| Czech Republic | 100 | 117.7 | + 17.7 |
| Moldova | 100 | 100 | 0 |
| Albania | 124.6 | 88.3 | - 36.3 |
| Bulgaria | 200 | 157.3 | - 42.7 |
| Estonia | 280 | 231 | - 49.0 |
| Hungary | 200 | 123.1 | - 76.9 |
| Slovakia | 327.1 | 177.9 | - 149.2 |

Governing formula

Thus far, our main concern has been with variation in the extent to which government provides a focus for competition, whether across countries or over time. But what is perhaps more relevant to the question of party system institutionalization is whether this competition proves to be *open* or *closed*. In other words, when competition for government does take place, be this at the core of the party system or at the margins, it is important to know whether it works along familiar and hence also predictable lines. As noted above, to the extent that the structures of competition for government are tried, tested, and known, then it follows that the party system is more likely to be characterized by inertia and to be institutionalized. To the

extent that this competition lacks shape, on the other hand, or tends to be unpredictable, then it also lacks structure, and hence the party “system” is likely to remain relatively amorphous and inchoate.

Table 5. Innovative governments by country, 1990-2008

| | N innovative governments (adjusted*) | Innovative governments as % of all new governments [IIA] (%) |
|------------------|---|---|
| Latvia | 12 | 92.3 |
| Estonia | 7 | 87.5 |
| Slovenia | 7 | 87.5 |
| Macedonia | 6 | 85.7 |
| Lithuania | 5 | 83.3 |
| Poland | 9 | 81.8 |
| Serbia | 4 | 80 |
| Slovakia | 6 | 75 |
| Bulgaria | 3 | 75 |
| Albania | 3 | 75 |
| Romania | 6 | 66.7 |
| Croatia | 4 | 66.7 |
| Czech R. | 2 | 66.7 |
| Hungary | 2 | 50 |
| Moldova | 1 | 50 |

* Since the first new government to hold office in the period is, by definition, one that has never held office (in the period) before, it is then also, by definition, innovative. A first innovative government is therefore inevitable in a period-based measure, and hence the adjusted measure used here discounts that first experience of innovation.

As can be seen in Table 5, which employs an adjusted measure of innovation (see below), the variation in this regard is quite pronounced. Latvia proves the most innovative in terms of the sheer frequency with which such governments take office, in that “new” combinations of parties moved into government on 12 occasions during the post-communist period. If we consider that in fifty years, none of the Western European party systems, with the exception of Finland, experimented with such a high level of innovation in forming governments, it appears that the Latvian party system is by far the least institutionalized in Europe. At the other extreme lie Moldova, Hungary and the Czech Republic, none of which has experienced more than two innovative governments in the whole period. Poland, though often changing governments, innovates much less frequently than Latvia, and is closer to Estonia and Slovenia (each with seven cases) than to the latter.

The most evident conclusion to be drawn from these data, however, is once again intuitively plausible: in these new post-communist democracies, new governments are more

likely to require new formulae. Croatia, the Czech Republic and Hungary, where alternation has usually involved returning to formulae that have already been previously employed, clearly illustrate this point. The Moldovan case, where the only two cabinets to hold office have adopted previously unseen combinations of parties, seems to suggest that governments in some polities can affect alternation *only* through innovation. If, as results from another analysis indicate (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa, 2010), governing formulae constitute the most important factor of structuration, these figures seem to give us an early indication of the “stability” of the patterns of inter-party competition in the different countries, with those ranking lower in the list tending to be more institutionalized, and with those ranking higher in the list likely to prove less familiar and predictable.

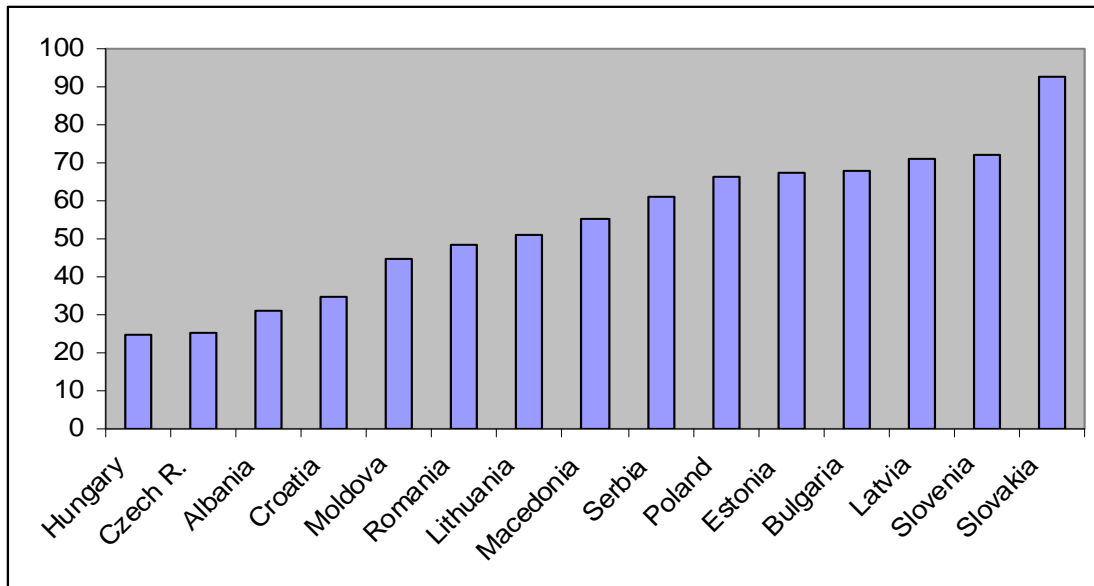
Innovative governments need not always prove successful, of course, and hence even the most frequent resort to innovation, as in Latvia or Poland, need not always imply that the more established and familiar alternatives become wholly marginalized. On the other hand, what we have dealt with up to now offers only a summary value for the entire post-communist period, and takes no account of shifts within the period itself. In the Croatian and Lithuanian cases, for example, five of the six partisan changes of government, and all of the cases of innovation, occurred after early 2000. Prior to that point, and regardless of the indicator used, both party systems emerge as exceptionally stable. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the observation of the Czech party system until July 2002. The Moldovan case is also skewed in time, with the only (innovative) case of partisan governmental change occurring in April 2001. Thereafter, Moldova has been characterized by an over-institutionalized party system (Protsyk *et al.*, 2008). In Hungary, between 1990 and May 2008 there was only one case of innovation. Thus, while the degree of innovation may well offer an indication of the lack of systemic institutionalization, the evidence can be tied to particular periods and elections sequences, and is not necessarily likely to be characteristic of the post-communist period as a whole.

For this reason, is it also useful to account for both the *duration* and *weight* of all innovative cabinets across the different countries during the post-communist period as a whole.¹¹ In order to do so, and bearing in mind that each innovative government is innovative only during its first term in office, we need to fall back on the conventional measures

¹¹ For a similar application to the long-established west European democracies, see Mair (2007:148-151).

employed to distinguish between cabinets.¹² This will enable us to establish the duration of each innovative government and, consequently, measure the scale of innovation across the period as a whole. An overview of the scores is reported in Figure 3, which sums up the duration of all innovative governments in each system and reports this as a percentage of the overall time span.

Figure 3. Scale of innovation (*), 1990-2008



* Simply: total duration of innovative governments (adjusted) as % of period as a whole.

Bearing in mind what has been said above about the importance of governing formulae for the stabilization of the structure of competition, it seems obvious to read Figure 3 as a crude inverse ranking of the degree to which the party systems in Eastern Europe are institutionalized. And in these terms at least, the pattern is striking. At the top of the rankings comes Slovakia where almost the whole post-communist period has been spent under innovative governments. This is far and away above any other system, indeed, the second- and third-ranked systems, Slovenia and Latvia, respectively, cumulate one-fifth less than the Slovak level. This clearly confirms that, as expected (Bakke and Sitter, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Rybář, 2006), the Slovak party system is completely under-institutionalized. At the other extreme comes the familiar group of the Visegrad countries (without Poland), together with Albania and Croatia – all relatively stable, more or less institutionalized party systems with

¹² Following the literature on party government in Western democracies, *changes of government* are recorded here when (1) there is a change in partisan composition of the government coalition (i.e., when representatives of one or more parties leave the coalition government or join the coalition government); (2) the prime minister leaves his/her office, whether they are obliged to because of no confidence vote or they decide to resign for other reasons; and (3) parliamentary elections are held, even in cases when there was no change in the partisan composition of the cabinet (Müller and Strøm, 2000:12).

rather limited periods of rule by innovative governments. In these polities, which adopted a rather straightforward logic of competition pitting one large party or bloc of the “left” (headed by MDSZ in Hungary; ČSSD in the Czech Republic; PSS in Albania; and SDHP in Croatia) against one large bloc of the “right” (commanded by FIDESZ in Hungary; ODS in the Czech lands; PDS in Albania; and HDZ in Croatia), governing formulae are or were – in the case of Croatia – largely predictable. The other systems range quite extensively between these extremes. In terms of the crude post-communist totals, we might consider a break between one group of countries in which the scale of innovation exceeds 50 percent – Lithuania, Macedonia, Serbia, etc. - and which are therefore under-institutionalized and, consequently, more susceptible to change; and a second group, made up of Moldova and Romania, which appear to reflect some progress towards a more stable structure of competition.

Table 6. Scale of innovation by period

| | 1990-1999 | 2000-2008 |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Albania | 28.9 | 37.0 |
| Bulgaria | 32.1 | 100 |
| Croatia | 0 | 99.2 |
| Czech Republic | 0 | 44.9 |
| Estonia | 37.1 | 80.7 |
| Hungary | 15.5 | 26.7 |
| Latvia | 51.9 | 88.5 |
| Lithuania | 0 | 98.0 |
| Macedonia | 21.3 | 74.6 |
| Moldova | 0 | 44.4 |
| Poland | 43.9 | 86.0 |
| Romania | 19.8 | 89.0 |
| Slovakia | 64.6 | 100 |
| Slovenia | 43.5 | 85.2 |
| Mean | 25.6 | 75.3 |

* The scores exclude the first governmental change in every country

It is important to note, however, that only Hungary and the Czech Republic have reached the levels of institutionalization displayed by Western European party systems during a comparable period. Not only the degree of innovation has been, on average, higher in post-communist Europe than in Western Europe (54.2 in the former region compared to 16.3 for the period 1950-69 in the latter) but, if we exclude Finland and Italy (the two countries with the most de-structured party systems at the beginning of the second half of the last century in the West), only Croatia and Albania joint Hungary and the Czech Republic in reaching somewhat similar levels to the *least* institutionalized of the western systems. That said, there is also some variation over time in relation to these figures, with the scale of innovation in

general tending to increase in the second decade of democracy, and with sometimes quite pronounced diversity (see table 6). The figures are too detailed to summarise here, but one general conclusion is perhaps important, particularly in the light of the experiences of previous clusters of democratization: despite diversity in the patterns, there is no single case in post-communist Europe where the scale of innovation had declined over time.

Access to government

The last indicator we will report here concerns the access of new parties into government. As noted above, this is different from measuring innovation. While every new party that enters office involves the adoption of an innovative government formula, not all innovative governments necessarily incorporate new parties. Access is also an important indicator for other reasons, since it recalls one of Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) key thresholds for the channelling of opposition in democratizing polities, the threshold of executive power. Party systems in established democracies vary substantially in this regard, with some executive formation processes being relatively closed to newcomers and others relatively open, and this in turn can have a spill-over effect on the readiness of political entrepreneurs to form new parties. This is also likely to be the case in new democracies, and certainly here too variation is pronounced.

Table 7. Access to government by country, 1990-2008

| | N governments with new parties (adjusted*) | Governments with new parties as % of all new governments | Mean level of openness [IO] (%) |
|------------------|---|---|--|
| Lithuania | 4 | 66.7 | 45.0 |
| Czech R. | 2 | 66.7 | 33.3 |
| Poland | 7 | 63.6 | 43.3 |
| Slovakia | 5 | 62.5 | 41.7 |
| Croatia | 3 | 50 | 19 |
| Bulgaria | 2 | 50 | 55.6 |
| Albania | 2 | 50 | 36.2 |
| Macedonia | 3 | 42.9 | 30.6 |
| Serbia | 2 | 40 | 20.7 |
| Latvia | 5 | 38.5 | 17.4 |
| Slovenia | 3 | 37.5 | 11.9 |
| Estonia | 2 | 25 | 16.7 |
| Moldova | 1 | 50 | 100 |
| Hungary | 1 | 25 | 11.1 |
| Romania | 2 | 22.2 | 16.7 |
| Mean | <i>2.9</i> | | <i>33.3</i> |

* Since the first new government to hold office in the period is, in the majority of cases, one that includes a new party, our adjusted measure does not consider that first experience of government change.

As can be seen in Table 7, which employs an adjusted measure of access, Poland is clearly the most open to access by new parties to office, with such actors being brought into government on seven occasions during the post-communist period, almost two-thirds of the governments in question. Lithuania is also clearly open, with two-thirds of its new governments bringing in new parties for the first time. At the other extreme lie Hungary, where only one in four of the new governments incorporated new parties, as well as Romania and Estonia. In these cases, alternation, when it occurs, usually involves the same parties or coalitions of parties. Other polities also had few new parties entering government, but these were systems where the change of government was in any case very infrequent.

There are two main problems with these figures, however. In the first place, not all governments with new parties have the same impact for the structure of competition. This is obvious when we think of a cabinet formed by a completely new party and a government which incorporates three new parties together with other three well known parties. In order to capture these differences, which are very relevant in terms of routinization, we have also measured an alternative Index of Openness (IO) which, as previously noted, measures the *weight* new parties have in a particular cabinet as well as the *weight* such governments (with new parties) enjoy in the party system as a whole. An overview of the IO scores is displayed in the last column of table 7, which reports the average for the whole post-communist period. Albeit insensitive to specific period effects, this particular index can be read as a ranking of the countries in terms of the impact political parties have on the process of systemic institutionalization. In this sense, it can also be read as a very crude inverse ranking of the degree to which political parties are institutionalized in a particular party system. As might be expected, countries which experience the higher number of cabinets with new parties are also those in which the weight of these parties – and hence the IO value – is higher. Poland, Slovakia and Lithuania are obvious examples here. Conversely, countries with a low number of cabinets containing new parties are also those in which the weight of any new parties tends to be muted. There are, however, a couple of exceptions to this general rule. On the one hand, Latvia, which maintains a relatively high degree of closure despite its inclination to incorporate in office new political parties. The main explanation for this is that when large numbers of new parties gain access to the cabinet in Latvia, as they have done, they tend to do this at the same time. A very similar pattern occurs in Croatia and in Slovenia. On the other

hand, and at the opposite extreme, is the case of Bulgaria,¹³ where access to government has remained open in spite of the low number of cabinets incorporating new parties.

Table 8. Access to government (IO) by period*

| | 1990-1999 | 2000-2008 | Difference |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Moldova | 0 (0) | 100 (1) | + 100 |
| Lithuania | 0 (0) | 45.0 (4) | + 45.0 |
| Czech Republic | 0 (0) | 33.3 (2) | + 33.3 |
| Croatia | 0 (0) | 32.5 (4) | + 32.5 |
| Estonia | 16.7 (1) | 16.7 (1) | 0 |
| Slovakia | 52.1 (3) | 36.1 (2) | - 16.0 |
| Bulgaria | 66.7 (1) | 50 (1) | - 16.7 |
| Latvia | 26.4 (4) | 8.3 (1) | - 18.1 |
| Albania | 40 (1) | 20 (1) | - 20 |
| Slovenia | 33.4 (1) | 10 (2) | - 23.4 |
| Hungary | 33.3 (1) | 0 (0) | - 33.3 |
| Poland | 75 (2) | 35.4 (5) | - 39.6 |
| Romania | 50 (1) | 5.6 (1) | - 44.4 |
| Macedonia | 100 (1) | 20 (2) | - 80.0 |

* The scores exclude the first governmental change in every country.

The second problem is that these data do not take possible shifts in time into account. In fact, when we look at the figures in the different decades (table 8), it becomes apparent that individual political parties tend to have had less impact on the structure of competition in the second decade. In fact, only in those countries which are characterised by a single dominant party (PDAM in Moldova, LSP in Lithuania, ODS in the Czech Republic, and HDZ in Croatia) has the structure of competition tended to become more open in terms of access. More generally, competition for government seems to have become the exclusive sphere of the same sets of political parties. Hungary, Romania, Latvia, and Slovenia, where political parties in general have remained more or less the same from the beginning of the transition, are obvious cases in point.

The Overall Pattern

These are broad-brush figures, and they deal only with the competition for government, which, while arguably constituting the core of any party system, remains just one of many arenas in which party interactions occur. Nonetheless, they do give the clear impression that the party systems of post-communist Europe remain only weakly

¹³ Moldova also ranks highly, but the figure is calculated on the basis of only one partisan change of cabinet which, at the same time, incorporates a previously consolidated party (the Moldovan Communists) for the first time.

institutionalized. Moreover, and this is perhaps the most important observation, with very few exceptions (i.e., Hungary, Moldova, etc.), the level of institutionalization of Eastern European party systems has actually declined in recent years. That is, there has been more indeterminate alternation and more innovation, and hence less familiarity and predictability in the patterns of party competition.

Though never strongly structured at any point in time, it is indeed striking to see that many of these systems seem even less structured now than a decade ago. Not only has the competition for government among political parties become more aggressive and fierce, but the patterns of interaction have also become less predictable. Indeed, the only advance in terms of stabilization seems to have been in the sphere of access to government where, after the electoral and organizational “earthquake” suffered by many political parties at the beginning of the new decade (e.g., Poland, Slovakia or Bulgaria), in the majority of the countries party systems have managed to somehow reduce the challenges to the power of previous “dominant” parties and, thereby, limit the number of political forces likely to cross the threshold of executive power. However, even this conclusion should not be exaggerated, since it has also been recently confounded by the incorporation after the last parliamentary elections in Slovenia and Lithuania of parties established just a couple of months ahead of the electoral contests (*Zares*, on the one hand, and the *National Resurrection Party* as well as the *Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania*, on the other).

To be sure, these conclusions are not necessarily true for every case, and in this sense it is important to note the variation across the region (Table 9). Hungary, for example, has developed a relatively institutionalized party system, and certainly the most institutionalized within the whole region. With a structure of competition which pits one large bloc on the “left” (MSZD-SZDSZ) against one large bloc on the “right” (Fidesz-MDF), the Hungarian party system has retained a stable and predictable structure of competition more or less since 1994. A second group of countries formed by Moldova and the Czech Republic have also been characterized by a relatively closed structure of competition. Where such systems deviate, however, is in the ease with which new parties, mainly with the change of the century, have been incorporated into government: the Communists (PCRM) in Moldova, or the Liberals (US-DEU) and the Greens (SZ) in the Czech Republic. At the other extreme lie those countries where the structure of competition has been characterised by mixed patterns of alternation, frequent shifts in the make-up of governing alternatives, and a relatively high ease of access for new parties. Latvia, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia and Lithuania all fit closely to

this pattern. Between these two clear clusters we find party systems which, in general, are weakly institutionalized, despite the relatively high frequency of wholesale alternations (e.g. Bulgaria), the regular resort to familiar combinations of parties (e.g., Romania and Croatia), or the obstacles that clearly face new parties aiming to win a share of office (e.g., Slovenia, Romania or Estonia).

Table 9. Party system institutionalization in 23 new European democracies (first two decades)

| Country | Frequency (n) | Alternation* | Formula* | Access* |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|----------|---------|
| <i>Post-communist Eastern Europe</i> | | | | |
| Hungary | 4 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Moldova | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Czech R. | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Romania | 9 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Croatia | 6 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Estonia | 8 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Slovenia | 8 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Albania | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Bulgaria | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| Maced. | 7 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Lithuania | 6 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Slovakia | 8 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Serbia | 5 | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Poland | 11 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| Latvia | 13 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| <i>“Third wave” Southern Europe</i> | | | | |
| Greece | 4 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Spain | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Portugal | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Turkey | 5 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| <i>Post-WWII Western Europe</i> | | | | |
| Austria | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Germany | 9 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Italy | 10 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| France | 7 | 3 | 3 | 1 |

* These three key indicators are coded into three levels. The lower the score, the more institutionalized the criterion: *Alternation* is coded (1) wholesale, (2) mixed, (3) partial; *Formula* is (1) familiar, (2) mixed, (3) innovative; *Access* is (1) closed, (2) mixed, (3) open

This overall picture is even more striking when we evaluate post-communist “exceptionalism” in the light of other democratizing experiences in post-war Western Europe and “Third wave” Southern Europe. In order to avoid faulty comparisons, and because we believe that it is only by comparing party systems in their infancy that we can really begin to

understand the more general process of party system formation and development, we only analyze the first eighteen years after the fall of authoritarianism.¹⁴

Apart from the pronounced cross-national variation, a first look at the patterns of inter-party competition displayed in Table 9 brings up three very straightforward conclusions. First, and with the exception of Germany and Italy, which almost equal the rates of alternation of the two most unstable Eastern European party systems (i.e., Latvia and Poland), most of the Western and Southern European states have experienced fewer changes in the partisan composition of government and hence more stable periods for parties in office. On average, the post-communist systems have experienced 6.5 changes of government in the first 18 years of democracy, as against an average of 3.8 changes in Southern Europe and 5.7 changes (excluding the Italian figure) in Western Europe. It is also important to note that while government alternation in Western Europe presents, with no exception, a partial character, in the largely bipolar Southern European polities alternation tends to be wholesale. The post-communist systems fall in between the two.

It is with the last two criteria that we see the strongest inter-regional differences. Despite the predilection for partial alternation, the West European polities have been the least likely to innovate – their average score in this regard being lower than that in either Southern Europe (2.5) or Eastern Europe (2.7). These older democracies were also substantially less likely to experience access to new parties (all score 1.0) than either the Southern European (1.8) or Eastern European (1.7) cases. If the Western European party systems can be said to have institutionalized quite strongly in the early post-war years, certainly relative to the post-communist systems, then this seems not to have been due to any major differences in the frequency and forms of alternation, but more to the lack of openness to new parties and to the tendency to rely on familiar governing formulae and alternatives. It is also interesting to see that both indices run from stronger to weaker in temporal sequence. That is, the strongest are the West European polities followed, at quite a distance, by the Southern European polities, and then by the post-communist polities. Summing the scores for innovation and access yields an average score of 3.0 for the oldest group, 4.3 for the Southern European group, and 4.5 for the post-communist group.

¹⁴ As Parrot has stated, “inappropriate comparisons with states with established party systems lead to misleading conclusions about the permanence of non-party politics in the states of [Eastern Europe]” (1997:17; see also Bielasiak, 2005:334). For this reason, we consider that a more fruitful to compare developments along analogous periods. The time periods for non-post-communist countries included in table 6 are: Austria (1945-1963), France

Why might this be the case? Why should the earliest of the three groups of party systems be most closed to new parties and innovative formulae, and the most recent the most open? One possible explanation may be found at the level of the parties rather than the party system. In other words, the early post-war years are likely to have offered a more favourable environment for the institutionalisation of the party alternatives – allowing them to build up strong memberships, to establish relatively deep roots in the wider society, and to narrow the support market. The interactions between these parties may not have been particularly stable or predictable – hence the relatively high values on the first two criteria in Table 9, especially for Germany and Italy – but the group of actors involved was relatively limited, and their shared control over the spoils of office relatively pronounced. By the late 1970s, by contrast, and even more so by the 1990s, parties lacked organizational capacity and were thereby frequently open to challenges by newcomers – hence more easy access to government, and more innovation. As Sartori ([1968] 1990: 75) once noted, “the critical factor in altering the nature of a party system and in bringing about its structural consolidation is the appearance of the mass party”. The odds still favoured such parties in the 1950s, but had lengthened by the 1970s. By the 1990s, there was only an outside chance.

In many ways, these patterns confirm earlier expectations. As noted above, the sheer scale of the transition that was involved, the absence of strong cleavage structures and anchors within civil society, and the continuing fractiousness of the political class all suggested that the new post-communist democracies would be marked by instability for some time to come. In this sense, there were few grounds to believe that the institutionalization of the post-communist systems would develop as rapidly or as effectively as was the case with the post-war and third-wave clusters of cases. Even allowing for this, however, it remains surprising to see how little progress has been made towards structuration, and how in some cases the level of institutionalization has gone down in recent years. Early stability may not have been a realistic expectation, but further destabilisation was also not expected, and yet this is what these data appear to indicate. Moreover, this pattern is not just visible at the level of party system institutionalization, but is also apparent in the pronounced levels of party fragmentation as well as in the persistently high levels of volatility, and the persistently low levels of turnout (Gallagher *et al.*, forthcoming).

(Contd.) _____
(1947-1958), Germany (1949-1967), Greece (1974-1992), Iceland (1946-1964), Italy (1948-1966), Malta (1966-1984), Portugal (1976-1994), Spain (1979-1997), and Turkey (1983-2001).

It is beyond the scope or ambition of this particular paper to offer systematic explanations for these anomalies or to try to control for differences between this particular cluster of post-communist party systems and the earlier clusters of democratizing polities in Europe. At the same time, it would have been particularly useful to complement our aggregate-level comparison with an analysis of the degree of party system stability at the individual level. That too is beyond the scope of the paper, however, and possibly also beyond the scope of available data. Still, some answers could be found by engaging in a rigorous comparison of the periods involved, and others by engaging in a systematic comparison of those systems that have institutionalized and those that have not.

For now, however, it is worth underlining just one particular factor, which is the apparent link between the low levels of party system institutionalization, on the one hand, and the evidence of continuing pronounced volatility and disengagement at electoral level, on the other. In conventional accounts, one of the explanations of the former would be sought in the latter – that is, we might think to find a key to the lack of institutionalisation in the lack of stable electoral alignments. Once the voters settle down, it might be argued, the party system will follow, and that may well be the most obvious lesson to be drawn from the experiences of the earlier clusters of democratisation.

But perhaps what the post-communist experience may tell us more usefully is that we should rethink this relationship between electoral alignments, on the one hand, and the institutionalization of party systems, on the other. Or at least what this experience may be telling us is that we should rethink the direction of influence that runs between these two processes, in that high levels of volatility and low levels of turnout may be not so much the cause as the consequence of low levels of party system institutionalization.

In general terms, there are three distinct factors that promote the stabilization of party systems. First, and most evidently, party systems are stabilized when the wider institutional order of which they are part is also stable. This is one of the most obvious lessons that have been learned from the so-called ‘neo-institutional’ literature, and it clearly has relevance in the post-communist cluster as well as in earlier clusters of democratizing polities. The more the wider institutional order is disrupted or unformed, the less likely it is that the party system will institutionalize. Second, as Sartori emphasizes, party systems are stabilised and fixed into place by strong cleavage structure and hence by the persistence of mass electoral identities and the emergence of mass political parties. The cleavage structure is not itself part of the party system (Smith 1989), but by helping to close the electoral market it can stabilise the key parties

in place, and this may act to stabilize the patterns of party competition and hence the party system. Needless to say, this factor does not weight heavily in many of the post-communist systems, and in this sense there was always likely to be a greater bias towards instability than in the case of the earlier clusters. Third, party systems are stabilised by – and of course defined by – the structure of party competition, which, by effectively narrowing the governing alternatives available to voters, and by ruling out certain options and ruling in others, helps channel electoral strategies and align popular preferences. Strong party systems – systems which are strongly institutionalized, and which are predictable and familiar – define the governing alternatives available to voters and hence act as ‘instruments of power’ (Schattschneider 1960: 66) in their own right, reducing volatility and stabilising political preferences. In this regard also, as we have seen in this paper, the post-communist region remains different.

If we wish to understand why post-communist electorates remain unstable and volatile, then, as Sartori as well as Lipset and Rokkan remind us, we must look at the lack of a strong cleavage structure and at the absence of mass parties. But what the post-communist experience in particular tells us is that we should also investigate the independent impact of party systems which, being only weakly institutionalized, often fail to offer voters the anchors that might tie them into place. In fact, what we see here is possibly a self-reinforcing and hence self-destabilising process. The lack of strong parties leads to weakly institutionalised party systems; weakly institutionalised party systems are, by definition, characterised by high levels of innovation and access in government formation processes; these latter factors encourage ambitious political entrepreneurs to establish new parties or to break away from existing parties since it is relatively easy for new parties to enter coalitions and to gain access to the spoils of office; because it is relatively easy to establish new parties or to split old parties, it is difficult for parties to develop organizational capacity and to narrow the support market; this lack of strong parties leads to weakly institutionalised party systems...and so on. The later the period, in short, the less likely it is that the conditions will favour the institutionalisation of party systems.

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