Elections and Representation

Gábor Tóka
Department of Political Science
Central European University
Budapest, Hungary
tokag@ceu.hu

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Abstract: This chapter discusses basic concepts and models in the analysis of party-based representation through the electoral arena and provide cross-national data about levels of citizen participation (turnout as well as other modes of participation), identification with parties, electoral volatility, party system fragmentation and polarization, and the importance of various social cleavages and attitudinal predispositions in voting behaviour across European societies around the millennium. The data come from a variety of sources including cross-national surveys covering both the old EU-15 and various East European countries (not just new EU-members and accession countries but also Russia and the Ukraine) like the 1999/2000 wave of the European Values Study, the 2002 European Social Survey, and 1996-2003 data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. The discussion highlights differences in Europe in the centrality of parties in the democratic process; party system stability (as well as the degree to which we can speak of an established party system in the first place); and representational performance. It also discusses possible links between variations along these lines and institutional design as well as the age of democracy. In passing, the chapter revisits some classic models of party competition and party system configuration in the light of changes in, and geographic expansion of European democracy.

In our everyday life, we commonly recognize elections as the most essential vehicle for the expression of citizens' political preferences. Surely the rule of law, a wide range of civil liberties and citizens' equality in front of the law are all valuable things on their own - and there can be more or less of them. But we categorically call countries democratic or otherwise depending on the presence of enough civic liberties to call their elections free and fair; enough equality to believe that in national elections all citizens were granted the same potential degree of influence; and enough rule of law so that the decisions of elected office holders define the rules of the game regarding any matter in the given country. Whether elections really establish a transparent, effective and credible system of representing citizens in the political process is, however, another matter. This depends, above all, on the shape of political parties and the party system. The political science literature of the last few decades is full of arguments about how the representational performance of parties declines due to social changes, political de- and realignments, a changing media landscape, and the rise of multilevel governance. While this chapter cannot review all these developments, it briefly assesses the health of electoral democracy in Europe.

1. The centrality of elections to citizen involvement in the democratic process

1.1. The changing balance of electoral and non-electoral participation

National elections are unrivalled in how close they get to making everyone have an equal say in the determination of a political outcome – admittedly just a single one in every few years, but one that can shape or even determine all other relevant political outcomes in the country. Hence, it has been widely seen with alarm that participation in elections declined in most European countries in the last thirty years. At the same time, non-electoral participation roughly doubled nearly everywhere in Western Europe compared to the 1950s (Topf, 1995). It also vastly increased in the former communist countries since the grip of the former party-states on society vanished in the late 1980s. With the focus of citizen activity shifting towards non-electoral arenas, representative democracy may seem to have changed its character substantially.

Table 1: Differences between rates of electoral and non-electoral participation across Europe

	Total incidence of three most frequent types of non-electoral participation (%)	Voter turnout in Elections (%)	**Difference in favour of turnout**
Bulgaria	21	81	61
Albania	32	88	56
Romania	22	73	51
Portugal	27	77	50
Hungary	21	67	46
Malta	46	88	42
Moldova	32	73	41
Estonia	28	68	41
Latvia	40	79	39
Spain	35	74	38
Ukraine	38	73	35
Slovenia	44	77	33
Bosnia and Herzegovina	29	60	32
Germany	55	85	31
Croatia	41	71	30
Luxembourg	60	90	30
Italy	62	90	28
Austria	64	91	27
Lithuania	28	53	25
Slovakia	63	85	23
Serbia	40	60	20
Macedonia	34	54	20
Czech Republic	64	83	19
Belgium	73	93	19
Poland	31	50	19
Netherlands	70	88	18
Russia	43	58	15
Greece	65	80	15
Finland	62	76	14
Belarus	50	61	11
Ireland	63	73	10
Denmark	79	86	7
Iceland	83	90	7
France	72	74	2
United Kingdom	80	75	-5
Sweden	94	87	-7
Switzerland	Not available	57	not available
Norway	Not available	80	not available

Notes to Table 1: the turnout data are the number of votes cast in percentage of the voting age population averaged across all national elections; communist-era elections in Eastern Europe are excluded. Source: IDEA (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002: 78-9, and p. 155 on Serbia). The column on non-electoral participation shows the percentage of adults who reported either to have ever participated in a demonstration and/or petitioning or to be a trade union member, Source: the author's calculus from the 1999/2000 European Values Study (Halman, 2003).

Yet, as Table 1 shows, voting is still more widespread among citizens than the combined total incidence of the second, third and fourth most common form of

political participation in Europe. The left column of the table shows the percentage of adults who, at the last millennium, ever participated either in a demonstration or a petitioning, or were members of a trade union. Across 36 European countries, the figures range from 21 percent in Bulgaria and Hungary to 94 percent in Sweden, with a modest average of 50 percent. The middle column of the same table shows that about the same time, the percentage of adults voting in competitive national elections averaged, since 1945, from 50 percent in Poland to 93 percent in Belgium, where voting is compulsory. By and large, the turnout figures are well above the cumulated figure for non-electoral participation for every single country save Sweden and the United Kingdom. Generally, long-established democracies show a smaller gap between the two percentages than new ones. Oddly, however, the only former communist countries where non-electoral participation is nearly as frequent as electoral participation are undemocratic Belarus and Russia, where union membership remains much higher than in Central Europe – though not nearly as high as in the Nordic countries.

Clearly, voting in national elections remains by far the most common political activity, especially so in Southern and Eastern Europe, where it largely lacks the assistance of other activities in assuring politicians' responsiveness to their electorate. But in the older and more affluent democracies of North-Western Europe, the frequency of all other political acts taken together is clearly catching up with that of voting. Does this reduce the role of voting in democratic representation? Maybe not: election results never were as articulate guides as other signals of what policies the electorate may support on particular issues, and the role of elections can hardly diminish as the chief regulator of access to political power in democracies anyway, since non-electoral participation comes without the institutionalised guarantees of citizens' equality that the one person-one vote arrangement assures.

1.2 The prospects opened by diminishing turnout

Declining electoral participation may well increase inequalities of political influence between age groups, classes, races, and so forth (Lijphart, 1997). Low and further declining turnout has made elections to the European Parliament particularly suspect of non-egalitarian tendencies and lacking in authority. The political science literature has started identifying the conditions that can ameliorate the problem by analysing the causal determinants of high turnout. As it turns out, nearly everything depends on the stakes in elections and the personal costs of voting. Sanctions for non-voting, the convenience of casting a ballot – e.g. whether one can vote on weekends or by a mail ballot – as well as the clarity of alternative governmental coalitions and the expected policy and vote differences between them go a very long way explaining both cross-national differences and changes over time in how many people vote (Franklin, 2004).

Thus, we need not invoke culture or society as explanations for why countries like Malta and Albania, where every vote has an unusually good chance to impact government composition in the context of intense and inflamed competition between two major alternatives, has much higher turnout than Switzerland, where the frequent referenda and a stable coalition formula, which has collected all major parties into the same grand coalition government for decades, deprive national elections of much political excitement. If so, then it is probably possible to reverse current trends in voter turnout. It remains an open question though whether socio-economic development indirectly reduces turnout by (1) undermining ideological polarization between the parties, (2) creating ample competition to politics as a provider of social

identities and mass entertainment, and (3) increasing the complexity of responsibility for political outcomes through new forms of governance, like EU-structures themselves. If it does, then electoral democracy may never again be the same bastion of political equality what it was in Western Europe in the 1960s.

2. Party and party system institutionalisation

2.1 The importance of parties and an established party system

In addition to free and fair elections, democracies also require what Sartori calls the 'representational transfer of power'. That is to say, elected officials are meant to be responsive delegates of citizens, and remain accountable to them. By and large, they ought to heed popular preferences and be subject to well-measured reward and punishment for their deeds from the electorate – otherwise democracy is a formal façade for elite domination rather than the everyday reality of popular rule. Indeed, chances for genuine democracy may seem rather slim given how many choices every elected official faces every day, and how little time and energy citizens have for monitoring these choices.

Political parties and party systems are essential for making responsiveness and accountability visible, credible, and real (Katz, 1997). Parties in democracies are best defined as groups of politicians contesting elections under a common label (Sartori, 1976: 63). They create continuity between elections: voters can hold a party accountable for the record of its representatives in the past, and anticipate the likely acts of its future representatives even if none of the incumbent legislators seeks re-election. Learning about hundreds of individual candidates would require far more time and attention from both mass media and citizens than either can allocate to politics. In countries like Poland, where legislators very often switch between parties in parliament, these "political tourists" are condemned in general terms, but as individual members of a governing party can escape the electoral sanctions that other incumbents are inflicted by citizens for malperformance (Zielinski, et al., 2003). Scant citizen knowledge of even such trivial facts as the name of the candidates running in their respective constituencies amply demonstrates the gigantic difficulties that mass democracy would face without parties (Norris, 2004). The downside of such a system is best revealed in the Russian lower house, to which most single-member districts send independent deputies. Throughout the 1990s, the large majority of these seeming independents swiftly joined a government party shortly after their election, apparently in exchange for particularistic favours (Moser, 2001), thus providing the appearance of democratic legitimacy to whoever controls the resources of the state.

Following the acts of a small number of relatively enduring parties makes the information requirements of democracy incomparably more manageable. Fellow party members can far more efficiently monitor ministers' and legislators' behaviour than citizens themselves. Given their shared interest in future electoral success and some broadly defined policy goals, fellow party members have the perfect incentive to sanction politicians for deviations from the party line as well as any obvious wrongdoing - even before the public would take notice of anything. The demise of Margaret Thatcher over her European policies in 1990 was a case in point, as was the political retirement of a vice-president of the Hungarian socialists after his parliamentary interpellations in the apparent interests of tobacco companies coincided with an unexplained increase of his personal assets.

Cohesive parties and a relatively stable party system are essential in making the selection of governments and policies relatively transparent. A crystallized party system, in its turn, amounts to a predictable pattern of interactions among parties regarding what coalitions are possible, what are their ideological differences, and where can issue-specific cooperation occur. The domination of legislative outcomes by highly disciplined and relatively predictable parties may make parliamentary politics appear as boring and as unresponsive to popular sentiments as a robot. But the only alternative is a chaotic and unstable give-and-take bargaining game between hundreds of individual deputies, or the more or less covered-up and non-democratic domination of the outcomes by skilful agenda-setters and/or moneyed interest.

2.2 Levels of party attachment in contemporary Europe

The functional centrality of parties to mass democracy does not automatically assure particularly strong attachment to parties among citizens. Party membership figures and the percentage of citizens feeling close to – if you like, identifying with – parties have been declining in most European countries in recent decades, with only a few, mainly new, democracies offering occasional exceptions to the trend (Dalton, 2002, Mair and Biezen, 2001). As the first column of Table 2 shows, party membership now exceeds five percent of the adult population only in some smaller European states: above all in the (formerly) corporatist Nordic states; in some intensely divided South European polities like Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, Macedonia, Malta and Serbia; and the formerly highly pillarized Austria, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, where parties used to be just the centrepiece in vast organizational networks (pillars) of self-help, recreational and other organizations that surrounded the members of the socialist, catholic etc. political subcultures from ‘cradle to grave’. Remarkably, the average membership rate of West European countries around the millennium was just a little over a third of what it was in the 1960s (Mair, 2005).

Partisan attachments are hard to measure comparatively due to the sensitivity to minor linguistic differences of survey responses about the intensity of an attitude. Yet, affective partisanship seems most widespread in the Nordic countries, and, depending on question wording, remains usually limited to a little less than half the electorate elsewhere in Europe (see the second column of Table 2).

Yet, a large majority of the European electorate consider political parties necessary. Between 40 and 86 percent also find at least one party representing them reasonably well (see columns three and four). In a Euro-wide perspective, it is hard to imagine how any other type of organization – save possibly national governments in the context of supranational governance - could compete with parties in this latter respect. Not too surprisingly, though, polities with lower rates of party membership and partisan attachments also show generally lesser approval of the importance and representational performance of parties. At least in the latter, the demand for alternative sources of political leadership and identity may have significant reserves.

Table 2: Attachment to political parties and party-based representation in Europe around 1996-2004

Percentage of the country's adult population who …	… are party members (3-survey average)	… feel close to a political party (5-survey average)	… agree that political parties are necessary to make political system work (CSES1 data)	… say there is a party that represents their views reasonably well (CSES2 data)	… say there is a political leader who represents their views reasonably well (CSES2 data)
Poland	1	40	61	40	40
Belarus	2		50		
Estonia	2	40			
France	2	51		59	60
Hungary	2	49	71	73	80
Lithuania	2		48		
Russia	2		53		
Germany	3	45	82	58	60
Latvia	3	44			
Portugal	3	59	63	56	59
Romania	3		76		
Spain	3	56	81	74	73
Ukraine	3		50		
United Kingdom	3	46	77		
Bulgaria	4			46	44
Croatia	4				
Czech Rep.	4	53	73	78	56
Italy	4	48			
Slovenia	4	35	57		
Ireland	5	44		77	77
Moldova	5				
Denmark	6	59	86	84	73
Malta	6				
Slovakia	6				
Serbia	6				
Belgium	7	46	63		
Bosnia-H.	7				
Finland	7	62		64	51
Greece	7	54			
Luxembourg	7	45			
Netherlands	7	55	85		
Switzerland	8	49	77	86	78
Sweden	9	63	78	78	64
Norway	9	56	88	82	72
Macedonia	11				
Albania	13				
Austria	13	52			
Iceland	17	54	75	64	56

Notes to Table 2: All figures are percentages, calculated by the author from survey data collected between 1996 and 2004 (Halman, 2003, Jowell and the Central Co-ordinating Team, 2004, 2005, Sapiro, et al., 2003, Shively and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, 2003). Party membership and party identification data are averages across the sources, with missing national data points substituted with EM multiple imputations provided by the LISREL 8.54 package except if more than two-thirds of the time-points were missing.

Since building party-voter linkages takes time, the new Eastern democracies lag behind the West and the South on all of these indicators. In the former communist countries, party membership rates tend to be one-third lower than in the rest of Europe; partisanship averages 44 percent against 52 percent elsewhere; only 60 percent, on average, consider parties necessary - compare this to 75 percent in the average non-Eastern country -; and 59, rather than as many as 71 percent feel well represented by a party. Yet, at least outside of undemocratic countries like Belarus and Russia, a convergence between Eastern and Western rates of cognitive and affective party attachments seem within reach in the not too distant future.

2.3 Implications of weak party attachments

Given the current trends, this East-West convergence, should it happen, will occur at a significantly lower level of partisanship in the electorate than what characterized Western Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. The scholarly literature is divided in interpreting this change. Some present it as a breakdown of time-honoured, once functioning patterns of representation, producing increasingly random voting behaviour (Mair, 2005). Another school of thought sees behind the same facts the emergence of a politically more sophisticated and demanding electorate, which forces parties to be more responsive to citizen demands (Dalton, 2002). The only certainty is that weaker mass partisanship contributes to lower turnout and to greater swings of the vote from one election to the other than what post-WW2 Europe was used to.

Another debate about possible party decline concerns the presidentialization of modern politics. One the one hand, the increased complexity of governance, the centrality of leaders in coordinating agreements across national and supranational levels, a supposedly diminishing role of parties in policy-making, the decline of traditional social cleavages, and the probably increased personalization of news coverage in media apparently strengthened the position of individual leaders as prime ministers and party leaders vis-à-vis their parties. These processes can only be expected to downgrade the importance of collective actors, and increase the importance of individual leaders for representation (Poguntke and Webb, 2005).

On the other hand, the very same leaders are - still, or even increasingly - just a temporary standard-bearer of the party that selected them, and which will predictably dispose of them once their personal electoral appeal is gone. Hence, leaders are hardly an alternative to party-based representation. Indeed, as the last two columns of Table 2 suggest, citizens are more likely to find a leader who represent them well in those countries where party attachments are strong than in those where partisanship is weak. Only in a couple of European countries are leaders as likely as parties to provide a sense of representation to citizens. These include only semi-presidential systems (France and Portugal) plus Germany, Hungary, and Spain, where the constructive vote of no-confidence rule creates prime ministerial dominance in the entire democratic process. Hence, it is probably institutional arrangements rather than the defect of parties that may elevate other agents than parties to a central position. But even where the ground is exceptionally fertile for the personalization of politics, as in Hungary, nearly as many citizens find an adequate representative among the parties as among the individual leaders. In spite of prime ministerial omnipotence, weak party attachments, the presence of charismatic leaders, ideological flip-flops and a chronic flow of financial scandals around their

coffers, parties overwhelmingly dominate the Hungarian political process (Enyedi and Tóka, forthcoming).

Thus, it would seem that to the extent that leaders give a sense of representation to voters on their own, parties do not fall far behind either. The reverse, however, is not necessarily true. In the Nordic countries and Switzerland, where the executive is clearly collegial and party attachments relatively strong, the parties are significantly more often seen as representatives than the leaders are.

Yet, popular attachment to parties is clearly much lower in Europe's democracies today than they were thirty-forty years ago. The reduced or anyway weak authority of parties may in part be responsible for many recent reforms that limit party government. These measures include the increasingly frequent use of direct democratic methods, like the first-ever national referendum in the Netherlands with its famous no verdict on the draft European constitution in July 2005; the spread of open-list systems, now also in Sweden, whereby citizens can signal not only the party they support but also which candidate of the party they wish to see in parliament; the introduction of primary elections to give voters a say about candidate nominations in Italy; and the widespread adoption of direct presidential elections all over Eastern and Central Europe save Albania, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Latvia. Weak party attachments among citizens must also bear some responsibility for reduced electoral turnout and the lesser predictability of election outcomes. Yet, they do not reduce the parties' ability to structure the choices offered in elections, and keep holders of public office accountable to their constituents. Details of policy-making are hardly under the impact of party manifestos - but it seems rather questionable whether they have ever been (Budge, et al., 2001). Ultimately, therefore, it is probably unwarranted to say that parties are becoming less central agents of electoral representation than they appeared to be in earlier periods.

2.4 Increased volatility and its causes

Following and impressive degree of stability in West European party systems, earthquake elections, bringing about previously inconceivable vote losses for some established parties and enormous gains for new parties with little-known and untested political commitments, became common place across Europe since the 1990s. Voter loyalties in the new Eastern democracies also proved far more fragile than in Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal or Spain during their (re-)democratization periods. The most dramatic example was probably provided by Italy's 1994 election, which turned Silvio Berlusconi from media magnate to party leader and prime minister almost overnight. Arguably, though, this election was exceptional because of the extraordinary criminal investigations that wiped out of the political scene many leaders of the previously dominant centrist parties in the early 1990s. We can only speculate whether these events could possibly happen if traditional party loyalties and party dominance of the entire public sector had eroded beforehand.

The Netherlands followed a more typical West European scenario. Following a gradual demise of the traditional Catholic, Protestant, Socialist and liberal pillars of Dutch political society, citizens' party attachments and the traditional class and religious cleavages weakened. From the second half of the 1960s onwards, inter-election vote swings between the parties considerably increased, and new parties emerged in the left-libertarian quadrant of the political spectrum. The so-called Pedersen-index of aggregate electoral volatility (AEV) handily sums up the

differences between successive parliamentary election results as $\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}|v_{it} - v_{it-1}|}{2}$, where v_{it} and v_{it-1} are the i^{th} party's share of the vote in the last election (at time *t*) and the one before (at time *t-1*), respectively. If, for instance, in the last election one party obtained 60, and just before 45 percent of the vote, and a single party collected all other votes in both elections, then AEV=½(|60-45| + |40-55|)=½(15 + 15)=15 percent. In the Netherlands, the typical AEV values used to be around 5 percent for the first twenty years after WW2, only to jump to slightly over ten percent between 1967 and 1986 and around twenty percent in the 1990s, when the major parties also converged around a broad consensus on neo-liberal socio-economic reforms. The drama of the 2002 election, which brought about a stunning 34 percent volatility alone, is remembered mostly for the politically motivated assassination of Pym Fortuyn, the leader of a brand new right-authoritarian party. Its lasting policy impact, however, occurred on the issue most closely associated with the meteoric rise of the late leader's party. All major parties as well as the subsequent Dutch governments shifted significantly towards a more restrictive stance on immigration policies, probably not in the most enlightened direction possible, but arguably closer to popular preferences than they were before the 2002 electoral earthquake.

The Dutch developments sum up neatly what many political scientists now believe to have happened all over Europe since the 1950s. As the traditional ideological and social divides between the social-democratic and communist left on the one hand, and the Christian Democratic and market liberal parties on the other gradually diminished, party attachments weakened among citizens and electoral volatility rose. Socio-economic change and partisan dealignment created a market for new electoral appeals, especially two groups, The first was a socially liberal, middle-class segment closely tied to the public sector and supporting environmentalism and gender equality, while the second constituted a right-authoritarian electorate mostly opposed to the internationalisation of markets, social liberalism, public sector growth and high taxes, but supportive of certain aspects of the welfare state. Where traditional social democratic parties were prevented from appealing to the new left-libertarian electorate by the inertia bestowed on them by public office and their ties to trade unions and other traditional supporters, new left parties sooner or later filled that niche on the electoral market. Where the social democrats did move on to this market segment, they risked even further losses to the right in parts of their traditional working class electorate. Similarly, where the traditional conservative and Christian parties developed a distinct appeal to the new right-authoritarian segment, they risked, like the Conservatives in Britain, even more dramatic losses to left-libertarian challengers among the middle-class. However, where they did move to the right too cautiously or not at all, as it was the case in Belgium and Scandinavia, the rise of new anti-immigrant and/or anti-tax parties was just a matter of time (Kitschelt 1995). The net result of all these developments was, arguably, a marked drop in ideological polarization, class and religious voting, and party attachments; and a rise in electoral volatility as well as the fragmentation of party systems along old and new lines of divisions.

In the scholarly literature some question whether class voting and ideological polarization really decreased. Otherwise, however, the above explanation is increasingly accepted as common wisdom. Table 3 summarizes where contemporary European political systems stand with respect to the key concepts involved in this account.

Table 3: Ideological polarization, class and religious voting, party attachments, aggregate electoral volatility, and party system fragmentation around the millennium

	Effective number of electoral parties	Ideological polarization between party electorates	Class voting	Religious voting	Feels close to a political party (%)	Aggregate electoral volatility (%)
Greece	2.6	0.14	0.06	0.09	54	6.8
Portugal	3.1	0.08	0.07	0.07	59	5.9
Spain	3.2	0.1	0.34	0.14	56	8.6
United Kingdom	3.3	0.05	0.07	0.07	46	9.3
Austria	3.4	0.05	0.21	0.21	52	14.4
Bulgaria	3.5	0.14	0.29	0.58		51.9
Hungary	3.7	0.07	0.08	0.13	49	25.9
Germany	3.9	0.05	0.04	0.16	45	8.4
Sweden	3.9	0.14	0.15	0.16	63	14.8
Ireland	3.9	0.03	0.06	0.18	44	
Iceland	4	0.11	0.08	0.04	54	6.4
Luxembourg	4.6	0.07	0.05	0.17	45	8
Croatia	4.6	0.08	0.13	0.14		30.8
Poland	4.6	0.13	0.19	0.07	40	52.7
Macedonia	4.6	0.1	0.06	0.85		46.1
Czech Republic	4.8	0.12	0.1	0.21	53	19.8
Denmark	4.8	0.1	0.12	0.09	59	13.5
Netherlands	5.6	0.09	0.11	0.36	55	26
Slovenia	5.6	0.09	0.12	0.25	35	38.2
Finland	5.6	0.13	0.15	0.21	62	7
France	5.8	0.12	0.08	0.16	51	21.7
Romania	5.8	0.1	0.11	0.45		34.4
Estonia	6.1	0.07	0.15	0.06	40	41.1
Lithuania	6.4	0.18	0.11	0.18		49.1
Italy	6.5	0.16	0.06	0.18	48	24.4
Serbia	6.7	0.04	0.05	0.37		64.9
Latvia	6.9	0.06	0.06	0.06	44	57.4
Slovakia	7.2	0.08	0.1	0.14		44.8
Russia	7.9	0.06	0.13	0.04		50
Ukraine	8.1	0.16	0.17	0.13		59.2
Bosnia-H.	9.1	0.08	0.11	0.82		24.5
Belgium	9.1	0.09	0.12	0.25	46	13.9
Average:	*5.3*	*0.1*	*0.1*	*0.2*	*50.0*	*28.4*

Notes to Table 3: For sources on party attachments see Table 2. Indicators of class and religious voting as well as ideological polarization were calculated by the author from the 19990/2000 European Values Study (Halman, 2003). Ideological polarization is measured as the within-country standard deviation of the mean left-right self-placement of each party's voters, with parties weighted by the number of supporters. The class and religious voting measures show the (1-Wilks lambda) statistics derived from discriminant analyses of vote choice with manual work, education, and income, and as religious denomination and frequency of church attendance as independent variables, respectively. The data on electoral volatility and the effective number of electoral parties is the average across two

subsequent legislative elections around 1999/2000, and were computed from election results as reported by (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2004) and various sources on the internet.

The data displayed in the table confirm that less ideological polarization among the supporters of the rival parties comes together with weaker party attachments, and prompts, through the latter, higher electoral volatility. This is borne out by the fact that partisanship levels are significantly and negatively correlated both with polarization and volatility, but the latter two are not significantly correlated with each other (correlations not shown). Volatility, in its turn, is also correlated with the effective number of electoral parties – i.e. one of the Laakso-Taagepera measures of party system fractionalization, calculated as $1 \Big/ \sum_{i=1}^{n} v_i^2$, where *n* is the number of parties winning any votes, and v_i is the fraction of the total vote obtained by the i^{th} party. Fractionalization and volatility are, presumably, interrelated – the more parties there are, the more movement there is between them, which in its turn creates chances for small and new parties. Interestingly, though, levels of class and religious voting are unrelated to any other indicator appearing in Table 3. This suggests that social cleavages are probably not so important for cementing modern party systems as they have been much too often thought to be. Some party systems like that of Greece and Portugal display, by now, considerable stability despite the weakness of class and religious voting in these countries. Conversely, denominational differences between Moslems and orthodox Slavs in Bosnia, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia seem to anchor some party alignments firmly in ethno-religious identities, but appear to do surprisingly little to cement voter loyalties in the party system as a whole. Instead, countries of ethno-religious heterogeneity, clustering mostly in the bottom half of Table 3, tend to end up with a far more fragmented party system than relatively homogeneous countries like Greece, Portugal, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Sweden and Iceland. Fragmentation, in its turn, facilitates weakened partisanship and further volatility.

2.5 Accountability in volatile electoral contexts

As inquisitive eyes can read it from Table 3, party systems tend to be somewhat more fragmented and dramatically more volatile in new democracies than in older ones. In the former communist countries, the cross-country average of electoral volatility is about three times higher than the rest of Europe, and the average effective number of parties, based on the fractionalization of citizens' votes rather than those of seats in parliament, is about six compared to 4,6 elsewhere. While hardly a surprise, this raises further questions about the quality of the democratic process. What is in doubt is not so much the centrality of East Central European parties in electoral and parliamentary politics: in fact, they often seem to dominate political agenda-setting and decision-making to a far greater extent than their counterparts in Western Europe (Enyedi and Tóka, forthcoming). But extreme swings between parties in such ideologically polarized party systems as the Bulgarian, Lithuanian or Ukrainian may create unpredictability and short-termism in public policies, and limit the system's capacity to aggregate popular preferences coherently.

The apparent increase in erratic election results also raised doubts about the capacity of Western party systems to represent coherently the underlying policy preferences of citizens. First, as the seat share of an average parliamentary party becomes smaller and the range of conceivable coalitions increases, the mathematical chances diminish that vote gains for a party directly translate into increased presence in governmental office. Second, the more parties there are in

parliament and especially in government, the more difficult it should become for citizens to apportion credit and blame for performance among the parties.

Recent studies in the impact of macro-economic conditions like economic growth and unemployment rates on the political fortunes of government parties explored these arguments in considerable detail. They found that in multiparty systems, where the dispersion and sharing of executive power undermines direct accountability to the electorate, economic conditions have indeed less of an effect on the vote for governments (Anderson, 2000, Powell and Whitten, 1993). At the same time, however, parties chances' to hang on to governmental office are far more sensitive to economic conditions in multiparty than in majoritarian democracies (Cheibub, 1998). Presumably this is so because of the stronger indirect accountability of executives in the former systems, which is established through less spectacular but apparently more effective system of checks and balances than the feedback directly from the electorate.

Thus, it would be premature to see a loss of accountability stemming from the greater fragmentation of European party systems and the slightly shorter lifespan of governments that it probably implies. In fact, it was the very same trends that made electoral accountability a reality for all politicians and governments. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, several European party systems saw long-term governmental dominance of one side – social democrats in much of Scandinavia, and of Christian democrats, in various coalitions or on their own, in large parts of Continental Europe. Some parties just could not be left out of any conceivable government, while others seemed permanently delegated to the opposition benches. The erosion and diversification of traditional cleavage structures, the rise of volatility and party system fragmentation might have complicated policy linkages between citizens and parties. But the same trends certainly allowed for more frequent and more comprehensive alternation between government and opposition in the 1990s, and a much faster access for relative newcomers to governmental office, than what was the norm forty years ago. The consequences are not necessarily bleak.

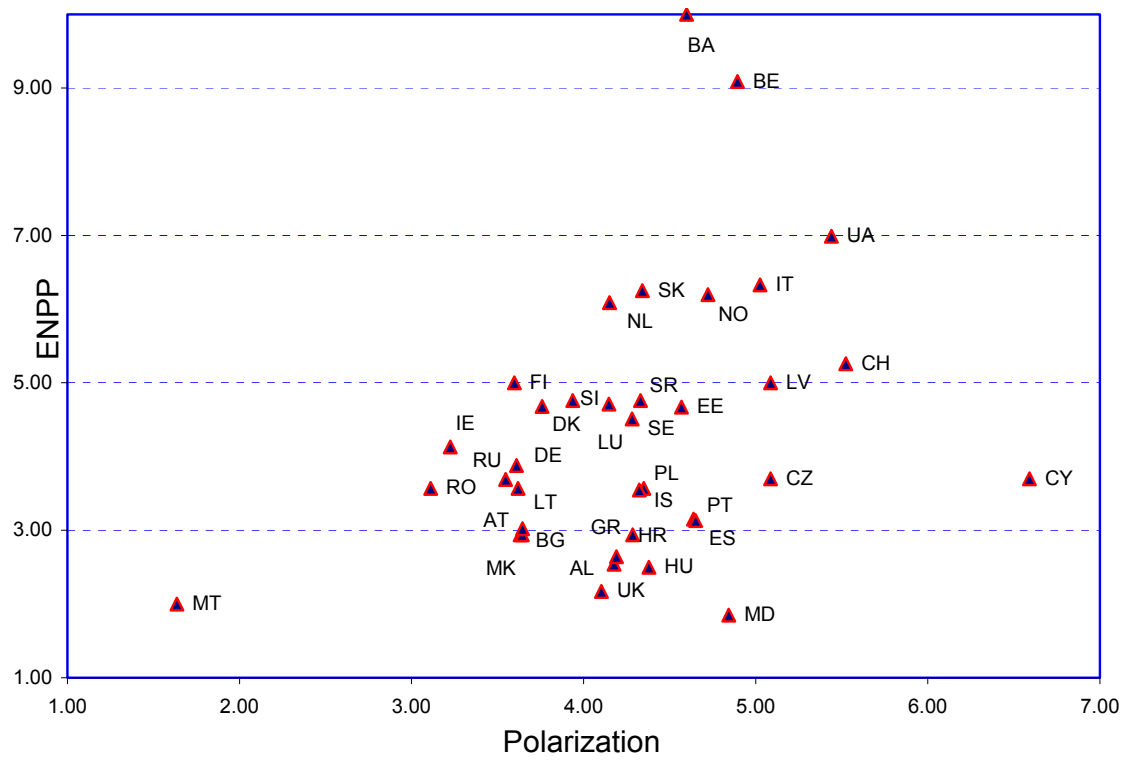
3. Change of what?

3.1 Changing party systems

The most influential typologies of European party systems charted a world that by now seems to be long gone. The number of European democracies at least doubled since the 1960, and the historically 'frozen' party systems of that time made remarkable achievements in politically pacifying the class divide and the secular-clerical cleavage. These systems and the end of the Cold War helped to incorporate and assimilate into the democratic process the (former) supporters of non-democratic alternatives on both the right- and left-wing edges of the political spectrum. Consociational democracy gave way to party competition as usual in Austria and the Netherlands. Two-party systems practically disappeared from the map, and so did the one-sided social democratic hegemony in Scandinavia. Among the democracies that have been emerging in Europe since the early 1970s, no one turned into a true two-party system, and yet all except the still undemocratic Belarus and Russia developed regular and straightforward alternation between left- and right-wing parties in government from very early on. As a minor exception, Bosnia-Herzegovina – born and tied together as an international protectorate, not entirely unlike Belgium in the 19th century – developed consociational arrangements for perpetual power-sharing between its ethnic blocks.

The ideologically polarized, immobile multiparty systems that blocked wholesale alternation in governmental office in post-war Italy and France – and, on some account, also in Finland and Denmark - also disappeared. Among the new democracies, only Spain in the late 1970s and the Czech Republic about a decade later showed some potential for maintaining uncoalitionable, anti-system opposition on both the left and right end of the spectrum. Their dynamics was, however, never the same as that of classic polarized multiparty systems, and they soon moved into the very opposite direction.

Chart 1: Fractionalization and ideological polarization of European party systems around 2003



Notes to Chart 1: Ideological polarization was calculated by the author from the PPMD elite survey data set (Benoit and Laver, 2005), as the within-country standard deviation of the mean left-right self-placement of each party by groups of experts in 2003, with parties weighted by the number of supporters. Party system fractionalization is measured here with ENPP (the effective number of parliamentary parties) in the last election prior to mid-2003. If n is the number of parties winning any votes, and s_i is the fraction of seats obtained by the i^{th} party, then $ENPP = 1 \Big/ \sum_{i=1}^{n} s_i^2$.

The variation in European party systems in the number of parties is still very large today (see chart 1), and in quantitative terms it is probably larger than any time before in history. However, it is not clear any longer what major qualitative differences of political dynamics can be expected from the mechanical difference

between three- and four-party systems, or between five- and six-party systems. Writing in the 1960s and 1970s, Giovanni Sartori inserted a distinction between polarized and moderate multiparty systems (Sartori, 1976). In the first type, government is more or less perpetually controlled by a centrist party facing ideologically extreme, anti-system opposition on both ends of the left-right spectrum. As a result, the pattern of competition is 'centrifugal'; parties engage in irresponsible outbidding and ideological wars, rather than a competition for the middle ground. In Sartori's reasoning, extremely fragmented multiparty systems are prone to develop in this direction whenever a single ideological dimension regulates friend-foe relations between the parties. In Sartori's moderate multiparty type, ideological polarization remains much more muted, because either (A) two relatively moderate blocks compete for governmental office; or (B) the number of parties remains moderate and, thus, they all need to maintain the loyalty of a relatively diverse electorate; or (C) multiple dimensions of identification and policy competition divide the numerous parties, such that each can carve out a safe and unique electoral niche for itself without adopting a far too extreme position on the main ideological divide.

What changed since the 1970s is partly the way political scientists understand multiparty systems. Empirical research motivated by new theories of party competition and voting explored how a relatively large number of parties, each emphasizing a slightly different set of issues rather than confronting each other directly on a single dimension of ideological differences, maintain a distinct electorate in each West European country, and build reasonably meaningful policy linkages between electoral preferences and the acts of government (Budge, et al., 2001, Iversen, 1994). At about the same time, studies of coalition government discovered surprisingly powerful ways in which fragmented party systems structured by multiple dimensions of ideological differences lead to fairly stable and centrist governmental policies, due merely to their merciless competition for votes, office, and policy on the one hand, and the typical institutional arrangements of legislative committees, parliaments and cabinet governments on the other (Laver and Schofield, 1998).

Looking at Chart 1, we can observe that more fragmented party systems indeed do mean ideologically more polarized party systems. We can probably discount the results for Cyprus (CY), Malta (MT), and Moldova (MD), three small countries for which the available elite survey data on ideological polarization may feature unusually great measurement error. Then, only the two consociational ethno-federal states, Belgium (BE) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (BA) stand apart with excessive party system fragmentation, but relatively limited left-right ideological polarization. The rest of Europe seems to line up nicely along a single continuum running from the somewhat less fragmented and less polarized party systems clustering between Great Britain (UK) and Romania (RO), towards the more fragmented and highly polarized systems in Italy (IT), Norway (NO), and the less obviously democratic Ukraine (UA). What is interesting is that all these endpoints in the distribution feature predominantly centripetal party competition and straight alternation between left and right-wing governments: the configuration that political scientists usually deem most favourable for creating accountable and responsive governments.

3.2 Changing cleavage structures

Another thing that changed since the 1970s is the world itself. Not only did polarized pluralist systems totally, and anti-system oppositions largely disappear, but the ideological divisions underlying European party systems also became slightly more

multidimensional following a modest decline in the hold of traditional cleavages and the emergence of new social and political divides concerning immigration, social liberalism, environment, regionalism, European integration and the opening of domestic markets to global competition. At the same time, party systems became slightly more fragmented. All this probably increased the range of possible inter-party coalitions, which appears to be confirmed by the acceptance of hitherto inconceivable coalition formulas in Austria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and the Netherlands in the 1990s, and in Greece a little earlier. In terms of government formation, the new East European democracies seem to fit the same emerging pattern of relatively open, multidimensional competition with a nevertheless strong left-right patterning of alliances between the parties.

Many building blocks of the Lipset and Rokkan model of cleavage structures still hold true. The socio-economic left-right divide still homogenizes European party systems. Not so surprisingly, then, the large majority of the MEPs in the European Parliament can be conveniently accommodated in just two party groupings, the Christian-conservative European People's Party and the social democratic Party of European Socialists. Only latecomers to nation-building - like Ireland earlier plus Slovakia and probably Macedonia today - nurture an unambiguously different 'national' issue dimension that cross-cuts the left-right divide and yet becomes the chief determinant of coalition alternatives. Unusually deep ethno-religious divides, even where they are organized into party alternatives as in Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Finland, Macedonia, and Romania, tend to be bridged, rather than deepened by governmental coalitions.

It also remains true that patterns of historical development make curiously lasting effects on the cross-national variation of cleavage structures. Religious divisions play marginal role in both the Nordic Protestant and the Eastern Orthodox countries where a single church clearly and unambiguously have turned into a state-church a long time ago: Sweden and Russia are probably the key examples. In other religiously homogeneous countries, where the church tended to coalesce with public authority for long historical periods, but without achieving broad national acceptance of this outcome, the religious-secular divide remains not only salient in politics but also largely overlaps with the modern socio-economic divisions between left and right. The classic examples include France, Spain and now Poland, but non-Catholic countries can also develop in the same direction, as shown by contemporary Turkey.

Religiously heterogeneous countries, like Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, still maintain a moderately salient clerical-secular divide that at least partly cross-cuts the socio-economic divide and leaves relevant liberal parties occupying an unambiguous position, typically to the right of Christian-democrats on economics, and towards - or even to the left of - the social democrats on social liberalism.

Yet contemporary analysts of cleavage structures are less impressed by the persistence of the patterns discovered by Lipset and Rokkan forty years ago, than by the apparently declining impact of religious denomination and social class on voting behaviour (Knutsen, 2004). At the same time, they note that even if class voting, as most claim, declined, there is really no sign that citizens' views on socio-economic issues traditionally dividing left and right would impact their vote choice less than before. Quite the contrary, in the last few decades the party choices of (West) European have come to reflect their values more unequivocally, and on a wider range of issue dimensions, than before (Knutsen, 1995). Again, the evidence points to possible improvements, rather than a decline in the capacity of European party

systems to articulate and aggregate popular preferences on issues. A parallel development is noticeable in how parties rely more and more on private polling and focus groups to find out possible electoral responses to new policies or leaders. Why seemingly downgrading the value of elections as providers of feedback from voters to parties, these devices derive their popularity with parties exactly from the fact that they allow them to match electoral preferences better than ever before.

4. Conclusion

One view on the ongoing changes in party-based representation in Europe stresses that the decline of traditional cleavages, the withdrawal of citizens from parties, the growing dominance of the 'party in public office' over party headquarters undermines representational linkages between citizens and parties. The probably most influential statement of this position talked of the emergence of cartel parties (Katz and Mair, 1995). The present review focused on readily quantifiable developments only and they seemed to support a far more upbeat interpretation (Kitschelt, 2000). Contemporary party systems, with their increasingly fragmented character, niche-marketing techniques and multidimensional structures of policy divisions, may make it harder for citizens to choose among the alternatives and hold parties accountable – certainly harder if they were to rely solely on their social group identities as a possible cue to vote choice. Yet, as long as citizens live up to this challenge, the above developments allow citizens to convey more information about their policy preferences through the ballot than a few decades ago. At the same time, in a Euro-wide perspective, the electoral accountability of government parties arguably increased. Whether the choices offered in national elections are more frivolous and insubstantial today than forty years ago is a question that this review could not address, and we could not investigate the issue of citizen representation at the European level either. Yet these potentially troubling questions appear to have little to do with parties and voters. In the world of the latter, the only danger that we could foresee here is that substantially more choice for citizens may indirectly generate slightly less political equality between them if fewer people are inspired to take advantage.

Further readings

Dalton (2002),Katz (1997) and LeDuc *et al.* (2002) offer comparative, data-rich and accessible surveys of issues in representation and electoral politics. For state-of-the-art analyses and concise theoretical overviews of the same see Kitschelt (2000), Powell (2000), Przeworski *et al.* (1999). Regarding the variation in party systems and their effects, Sartori (1976) remains a must-read. The probably most interesting further developments concern why, how and with what effect party systems also vary with respect to institutionalisation and the extent to which any programmatic differences occur between parties – see Mainwaring (1998) and Kitschelt (2000). For recent overviews of party systems in individual European countries as well as at the European level see Webb *et al.* (2002) and Berglund *et al.* (2004). Regarding citizens' behaviour, a most comprehensive recent analysis of electoral turnout is provided by Franklin (2004), while Dalton (2004) is an insightful analysis of trends in citizen participation and support for democratic institutions in general. On the disputed issue of the decline of traditional electoral cleavages, the last word now belongs to Knutsen (2004), while on voting behaviour in general Evans (2004) is the most up-to-date introduction.

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