Territory and Electoral Rules in Post-Communist Democracies

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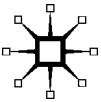

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Notation of Variables

c	Share of compensatory mandates in mixed electoral systems [$c = 1 - S_{SSD}/S$]
comp	Necessary share of compensatory mandates for a just compensatory system
d	Number of electoral districts
e	Ethnic fractionalisation (Hirschmann–Herfindahl index)
e_C	Territorially based ethnic groups
m	Average number of mandates by electoral district
N_0	Absolute number of parties
N_2	Effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979)
N_V	Effective number of parties, based on their vote share
p_1	Largest seat share of single party
p_{1SSD}	Largest seat share of single party in the plurality/majority tier of mixed electoral systems
$\dot{P}_1$	Absolute number of seats held by largest party in parliament [$\dot{P}_1 = p_1 \cdot S$]
$\dot{P}_{1SSD}$	Absolute number of seats held by largest party in plurality/majority tier [$\dot{P}_{1SSD} = p_{1SSD} \cdot S_{SSD}$]
pres	Super-presidential systems (dummy variable)
q	Parameter for the comparison of district-based PR with threshold-based PR systems
S	Overall number of mandates in parliament
S_{PR}	Number of mandates in proportional or compensatory tier of mixed electoral systems
S_{SSD}	Number of mandates in plurality/majority tier of mixed electoral systems [$S_{SSD} = S \cdot (1 - c)$]
SSD	Single-seat district system (dummy variable)
t	Legal threshold
Δt	System with legal threshold (dummy variable for $t > 0$)
T_D	District threshold ($1/(m + 1)$)
T_E	Effective threshold – the higher of the district and the legal threshold
T	Ordinal number of elections
ΔT	First multiparty elections (dummy variable for $T = 1$)

Preface

This book is based on three years of research, which I started at the end of 2004 at the University of Lausanne, continued after 2005 at the University of Geneva, and completed in 2008.

I have been lucky to find many people who gave me the support that I needed for my project. Foremost, I am deeply indebted to Pascal Sciarini and to Rein Taagepera. Pascal Sciarini has not only encouraged me to tackle this research, but, throughout the whole research and writing process, has given me full support as a very valuable advisor. His qualities as a critical commentator were very helpful not only for the development of my research design but also for the structuring and writing of the book. And his backing was crucial for the organisation of the research stays abroad. Thanks to this, I had the good fortune to work with Rein Taagepera, whom I followed to Estonia (Tartu Ülikool) and to the USA (University of California at Irvine). Rein Taagepera was not only always approachable and open for inspiring discussions, but he also made extensive in-depth comments which helped me to develop my project a great deal further and to sharpen my analysis. I am also indebted to Eugène Horber, Simon Hug and Jan-Erik Lane, who helped me with valuable comments and suggestions.

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This book consists not only of ideas, but of numbers too. This required an extensive search for data, which was not always very easy, but many people have helped me to build an almost complete dataset. Among them are Marijana Bijelić, academics such as Sarah Birch, Andrey Meleshevich and Tomas Zarycki, and officials of NGOs, Electoral Commissions and the OSCE/ODIHR, namely Zane Duze, Arben Idrizi, Diana Railean, Gilles Saphy and Zlatko Vujović.

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1

Introduction: Electoral Systems and Party Systems in the New European Democracies

The investigation of electoral systems' effects in post-communist democracies has so far led to very surprising results. The effect of electoral systems in Central and Eastern Europe appears 'not [to] be the same' as in the rest of the world (Golder, 2002, p. 24); several studies conclude (Clark and Golder, 2006, p. 693; Grzymala-Busse, 2006, p. 421; Moraski and Loewenberg, 1999) that the common models that are valid in the rest of the world seem not to hold when they are tested on post-communist countries in Europe. Attempts to explain patterns of party systems through electoral systems often lead to results that fundamentally contradict common knowledge on electoral systems.[1]

Usually, elections in single-seat districts (or single-member districts) are associated with two-party systems, whereas elections with proportional representation (PR) allow the existence of large multiparty systems. But elections in post-communist Europe seem to invert this relationship, leading to either nonsensical or no results. Repeatedly, a much higher number of parties have resulted from single-seat districts than from PR elections. Overall, variables which are central in common studies on electoral systems are not conclusive when applied to post-communist countries in Europe. This result is more than a little puzzling. Are party systems in post-communist democracies non-institutionalised and just chaotic, so that one should avoid trying to make sense of them? Do they possibly confirm the limits of electoral system approaches?

In contrast to many earlier conclusions, my study shows that, after an omitted variable is accounted for, electoral systems work even in post-communist countries in Europe. To put it briefly: *it does not matter only how many votes you get, it matters where you get them from*. If we want to understand how electoral rules affect party system fragmentation in post-communist countries, we need to analyse the territorial

structure of the vote, which has recently become a very popular aspect of party research, discussed under the slogan 'party nationalisation' (see Caramani, 2004; Chhibber and Kollman, 2004). Party nationalisation is understood as the territorial homogeneity of party support, or as the reverse of a regionalised system of parties, characterised by territorial splits.

This is the first study that offers a description and an analytical discussion of party nationalisation in Central and Eastern Europe, and the first that employs this concept to explain the effect of electoral systems. My study is based on possibly the largest database on electoral results from Central and Eastern Europe, including results at the sub-national level (such as districts or municipalities) from twenty countries, and including data that was gathered from different Electoral Commissions and that was not previously publicly available. Altogether, I provide an almost complete dataset on post-communist elections in Europe, including ninety-five elections in the period 1990–2007.

Here, I discuss the gaps in previous research, present the three main innovating ideas of this book, and give a short summary of each chapter.

1.1 Previous research

Why study electoral systems and party systems?

The efficiency of electoral systems and party systems has widespread implications for democracy, politics and policies. Parties are one of the basic pillars of representative democracies, and elections and electoral systems are the foundation on which democracy is built. It is thus no wonder that the establishment of the electoral system is seen as one of the most crucial aspects of democratisation and democratic consolidation (Merkel, 2007, p. 416). The question of whether and how electoral systems affect party systems is too crucial to be left to paths of historical coincidence.

While in a handful of micro-states modern democracy without political parties is thinkable and practised (Anckar and Anckar, 2000), in all other cases it is unthinkable. An important dimension of party systems is the contrast between representation and governability, or the contrast between large and small party systems. Large systems threaten to obstruct coalition-building (Nohlen, 2004, p. 158), cut the life expectancy of cabinets (Sanders and Herman, 1977; Taagepera and Sikk, 2010; Taylor and Herman, 1971) and over-emphasise particular group demands over national interests (e.g. Shepsle and Weingast, 1981, p. 109). Small

party systems are said to increase government responsibility (Powell, 1989), but risk producing governments which lack broad popular support (Lijphart, 1999, pp. 167–8). While they might decrease the representation of extremist parties (Powell, 1989), they might also exclude minorities from politics (e.g. Rokkan, 1970, p. 157), and this might result in political violence (Powell, 1982) or the breakdown of democracy (Diskin, Diskin and Hazan, 2005). And those who care more about policies than about democratic coherence can find that party system size has consequences for welfare expenditures (Crepaz, 1998, pp. 74–5) or macroeconomic outcomes (Lijphart, 1994a; Roubini and Sachs, 1989). While party systems, and notably their fragmentation, have been shown to be one of the basic factors of the political system and to be crucial for many political outcomes, electoral systems are commonly treated as the key variable structuring party systems. Many further models include electoral systems as a proxy variable for the party system, acknowledging the central role of the party system, but avoiding problems of endogeneity that might emerge in some studies if it were included as an explanatory variable.

Explaining party systems: Legacies, political cleavages and electoral systems

The study of electoral systems and party systems in democratising countries has remained marginal so far, in spite of the voices of prominent scholars on democratisation, who stress that the efficiency of electoral systems and party systems has widespread implications for the consolidation of young democracies (Merkel, 2007, p. 416). This is valid for the young post-communist democracies too. Most cross-national studies on the electoral systems' impact on party systems have either been written before Central and Eastern European democracies held several elections,[2] or otherwise they have given a wide berth to young democracies, arguing that party systems in development might produce fuzzy results. The overwhelming view is that party constellations during early democratisation are no more than 'kaleidoscopic configurations of individual politicians, devoid of anything akin to a system' (Taagepera, 2007a, p. 6), where proto-parties arise and vanish in a short time.

Twenty years after the opening of the wall, democracies in Central and Eastern Europe are approaching adulthood. Have their party systems reached political maturity? Many of the countries have experienced a series of four or five multiparty elections, and institutions now change much less often than they did in the early 1990s. Still, in many

of the countries the party systems are not highly institutionalised, or have not adopted a stabilised programmatic competition similar to Western democracies (Enyedi, 2006a; Innes, 2002). Many of the functions of political parties, such as working as a reliable mediator between the society and government (Sartori, 1976, p. ix), might suffer if the party system is 'floating' (Rose and Munro, 2003), if parties constantly merge, split, rename, and there is a high fluctuation of MPs between parties (Shabad and Slomczynski, 2004). However, for our understanding of political party development and of the electoral competition, a study of party configurations in young democracies is still worthwhile. Also, in this book, the term 'party system' is employed with a very broad understanding of party competition in general, not addressing the question to what extent this competition has been stabilised. Certainly, party competition is not 'floating' in all post-communist democracies, and at all times. Quite to the contrary, in many countries, two decades of free elections have brought about quite a clear pattern of party competition, which is based on policy issues (e.g. Tavits, 2008). In some cases, we find small party systems with low inter-election volatility, while in other countries large party systems prevail, with new parties emerging in almost every election. The results presented by previous studies mostly point to the problems of common approaches to understanding the party systems in post-communist democracies.

Three main approaches – based on historical legacies (Geddes, 1995; Grzymala-Busse, 2002, 2006; Ishiyama, 1998; Kitschelt et al., 1999; Tworzecki, 2003, pp. 192–5; Werning Rivera, 1996; see Kreuzer, 2004 for an overview), social cleavages (e.g. Johannsen, 2003; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2009; Werning Rivera, 1996; Whitefield, 2002; Zarycki, 2000) and institutional explanations (mainly based on electoral systems) – have been applied to explain the structure of party systems in post-communist democracies. So far, they have led only to partial results, and have shown some of the limitations of these approaches.

In a nutshell, *historical legacies* have been important in explaining the roots of specific political parties, specifically the transformation of former communist parties (Grzymala-Busse, 2002, 2006; Ishiyama, 1998), but they are less powerful in explaining party system formats in a comparative approach. In their four-case study, Kitschelt et al. (1999) distinguish different types of *legacies*, but they fall short of explaining the different party system formats which have emerged.[3] The social cleavage school has been reflected in studies on the social basis of political parties, but it has been noticed that parties along social

divides in post-communist countries frequently change (Zarycki, 2000), and, apart from that, many parties that do not have strongly visible differences compete with each other in the social groups they appeal to.[4] The post-communist context is not very favourable for the emergence of cleavage-based parties. The main divides along which political cleavages formed in Western Europe (namely the class, the rural–urban, the church–state and the centre–periphery cleavages) had been levelled down during communist rule, which changed the social and economic structure of the countries completely (Elster et al., 1998), so that the classical cleavage approach cannot be applied (Bielasiak, 1997; Miller et al., 2000; White et al., 1997). Lipset (1994, p. 13) argues that post-communist countries lack a strong enough civil society for the formation of a strong, cleavage-oriented party system. Grzymala-Busse (2006, p. 422) summarises the critique of the social cleavage approach in post-communist Europe, arguing that parties usually have neither the organisational wherewithal to organise voters, nor the willingness to seek out voter instructions, so that parties with true cleavage characters remain the exception rather than the rule.

The common electoral system approaches seem not to lead to the expected results (Clark and Golder, 2006; Golder, 2002; Grzymala-Busse, 2006; Moraski and Loewenberg, 1999). Clark and Wittrock (2005) argue that presidentialism might be more important than electoral systems. It is, however, unsurprising that they do not find any electoral system impacts, because they only control for the difference between single-seat district systems and others – and in their database they have only two, furthermore mitigated, examples[5] of these. When searching for reasons for the problems of the institutional approaches, Moser (1999a) and Birch (2003, pp. 115–18) identify former Soviet countries as the most important outliers. While Moser attributes this effect to low party institutionalisation, Birch (2003, p. 118) guesses that 'high levels of regional fragmentation' might play a role. The reasons for the different impacts are not entirely clear. If there are fairly simple formulae to explain party system size for given electoral system characteristics, and they work fairly well in established democracies, why do they fail in certain countries? The quantitative analytic models in both studies go only as far as to identify former Soviet countries as outliers, identified through mere dummy variables, but there is no accurate explanation of the classification. The simplified treatment of post-Soviet countries as deviant cases misses the fact that some of the post-Soviet party systems (such as Estonia, Ukraine or Moldova) became much more stable after a few