Party System Institutionalization:
Bringing the System Back In

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Introduction:

Transitions to liberal democracy have provided students of political parties with challenges and opportunities. Confronted with a broader range of parties and party systems established and operating in different circumstances, parties specialists responded by packing their toolkits and examining the extent to which older models and concepts could be applied in new settings.   Examining party organizations in four southern and eastern European countries, van Biezen (2003) found parties far more thinly organized than parties in western Europe, and students of central and eastern European party systems argue that few are as solidly grounded in cleavage as their counterparts in older democracies. Comparing the party systems of post-1978 democracies with those of older democracies, Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) argue that the latter are far less institutionalized than the former. Parties lack solid grounding in society and election outcomes and even parties participating vary considerably from election to election. According to Mainwaring and Torcal, the dynamics of these party systems are sufficiently different from those of older democracies that party system institutionalization should be taken as a third dimension, co-equal with number and the extent of polarization (Sartori 1976), on which party systems can be differentiated. They also argue that the programmatic structure which underpins many formal models of party systems is absent in the party systems of post-1978 democracies. As a result, we cannot assume that models of party positioning and voting behaviour developed in older democracies will operate in newer ones.

Mainwaring and Torcal's comments are important. The Western European party systems on which the comparative parties literature was based were so static that parties specialists regarded them as frozen. Even a cursory examination of more fluid party systems, such as those of Slovakia, Poland, or Brazil suggest their dynamics are different from those of older democracies. Few parties can count on loyal supporters and parties competing in one election often disappear in the next. In no small measure because of Mainwaring's efforts, (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Mainwaring 1999; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007), party system institutionalization has become part of the toolkit which political scientists use to study central and eastern European, African and Asian party systems. Whether institutionalization can be taken as a third dimension of party systems, on par with those defined by Sartori, is a matter for discussion. Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) argue that institutionalization is a continuous variable. At a minimum, we need to know how it meshes with established classifications. In addition, investigation of party system institutionalization take us into a territory which Sartori (1976) insisted could not be studied. Sartori argued that party systems with ten or more relevant parties were inchoate: because the party system had not yet been consolidated, relations among parties were too fluid to be studied with any certainty. Missing were the regular and recurring relationships which make a system a system. In contrast, Mainwaring and his colleagues insist that we must study them if we are to understand the party systems of newer democracies.

This paper examines party system institutionalization and the ways it which has been measured.   Although Mainwaring and his colleagues mooted multiple measures, party system institutionalization is most frequently assessed by computing electoral volatility scores. Volatility scores tap attributes of the electorate and the ability of parties to build up stable bases of support, from which the relational features of party systems can be inferred. This is fine for some purposes, but if we want to capture the dynamics of party systems or study the processes through which relationships among parties become regularized, then different ways of measuring party system institutionalization may be necessary. This is particularly important if we remember Mainwaring and Torcal's (2006) observation that the party systems of newer democracies are different and that established theories may not operate in them. It is possible that some of these party systems are acquiring regularity and systemness in ways which are different from those of established democracies. The paper considers whether party system institutionalization can be measured by adapting Gordon Smith's (1989) notion of a party system core. It then uses this approach to demonstrate that some Central European party systems are acquiring elements of structure despite weak attachments to parties.

Definition and measurement

Although party system institutionalization gained currency only in the 1990s, we can trace its origins to Samuel Huntington's *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968). Huntington argued that strong parties were needed to channel masses of citizens mobilized in the course of political development. Without such channelling, mobilization could lead to praetorianism or other forms of authoritarian rule. Huntington equated party system institutionalization with the presence of strong parties. Organizations which were flexible, internally complex, autonomous from social classes, groups, or the state, and coherent, Huntington argued, were more durable and thus more institutionalized than those which were not and better able to channel the torrent of newly mobilized voters. (Huntington 1968)

Current definitions of party system institutionalization draw on Huntington. According to Mainwaring and Torcal (2006):

> *Institutionalization* refers to a process by which a practice or organization becomes well established and widely known, if not universally accepted. Actors develop expectations, orientations, and behavior based on the premise that this practice or organization will prevail into the foreseeable future. (p. 206)

They go on to argue that:
> An institutionalized party system, then, is one in which actors develop expectations and behavior based on the premise that the fundamental rules of party competition and behavior will prevail in the foreseeable future. (p. 206)

On the surface, there is little to quibble about in this definition. Most of us expect institutions to shape the behaviour not only of individuals or entities who work within them as well as those who interact with it. However, one element is missing. Sartori (1976) argued that parties "make

for a 'system' (p. 44)" only when they engage in regular and recurring interaction with each other. These kinds of interaction are implied but not specified in Mainwaring and Torcal's definition. As we shall see, they are also absent from the operational measures used to assess institutionalization.

Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) argue that party system institutionalization has four dimensions. First, there should be stability and regularity in patterns of party competition. Second, parties should have strong roots in society and voters strong ties to political parties. Third, political actors should regard political parties and party competition as legitimate, and fourth, political parties should not be subordinate to single individuals, but should be entities which are themselves institutionalized.

The four dimensions specified in Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) differ only marginally from those specified in Mainwaring and Scully (1995) or Mainwaring (1999). Of greater interest is their status. Mainwaring and Scully (1995: pp. 4-5) explicitly introduce them as "conditions which must obtain" if a democratic party system is to be institutionalized, but then treat the four as dimensions or indicators of institutionalization. This raises questions about whether all or most must be present if a party system is to be institutionalized. Because Mainwaring and Scully (1995) and later iterations of the argument treat the four as separate dimensions, we assume that they are not pre-conditions, but rather dimensions which, individually or collectively, tell us whether a party system institutionalized.

Of the four dimensions, only the first, the stability and regularity of party competition, refers to relational features of party systems. However, as Mainwaring and Torcal point out, the second is closely related: If parties have strong roots in society and voters become strongly attached to them, then party strengths should be relatively constant and relations among parties regular and predictable. The third dimension, the legitimacy accorded to political parties, taps attitudes toward party competition which could be considered not to be facets of the party system itself, but rather elements of elite political culture which have an important bearing on how the party system operates. The fourth dimension, the extent to which parties are institutionalized, taps features of the parties which make up the system.

Whether the failure of three of the four dimensions to tap relational features of party systems is a shortcoming depends on one's perspective. If we follow Sartori to the letter, then only the relational features of party systems should be considered. However, party systems are made up of parts and cannot be studied without considering the components which make up the system. Rather than insisting that each dimension tap relational features, we can consider any facets which bear upon the operation of the party system because they shape the ways in which individual and collective actors behave within or in regard to the system. Each of the four dimensions fits this criterion: the legitimacy of party competition and the extent to which parties are organized, along with the extent to which parties are rooted in society, can affect patterns of party competition. Nevertheless, care should be taken in using each of the dimensions. We need to know whether the four dimensions co-vary or operate independently of each other, and we need to consider which are indispensable to party system institutionalization.

Of the four dimensions, the first two seem are closer to the regular and recurring relationships among component parties that are at the core of a party system. The third, the legitimacy which elites accord to the party competition, appears to be a necessary condition – it is hard imagine a party system being institutionalized if key elites do not regard it as legitimate – fulfilled in most countries in which democratic rule is fully consolidated, but problematic in competitive systems in which it is not. The fourth, the extent to which component parties are institutionalized, is requires further consideration. We need to know whether all or only some of the parties in a party system need to be institutionalized and we need to take care not to equate institutionalization with formal organization. (See Lewis 2006) A few examples will illustrate the problem: Parties on both sides of the spectrum in France vary in the extent to which they are formally organized. Larger parties on the left and right typically better organized than the smaller parties with whom they ally, but almost all are less well organized than parties elsewhere in Europe. Even so, Fifth Republic France has entrenched patterns of competition within and between blocs (Knapp 2004). Although it could be argued that Fifth Republic Party system is less well-institutionalized than those of neighbouring countries, patterns of competition are sufficiently well-established that it would be incorrect to say that the party system was not institutionalized. Equally, it has been possible for parties such as *Fine Gael* in Ireland to cultivate substantial electorates of belonging without extensive formal organization (Gallagher and Marsh 2002) and for the Justicialist Party (PJ, Peronistas), to adapt and survive without a highly institutionalized or routinized party organization (Levitsky 2003). In the case of the latter, Levitsky (2003) argues that it is its lack of routinization which has enable the Justicialists to adapt. Enyedi (2006) also argues that leader-centred parties can be institutionalized. These few examples suggest that it might be best to separate formal organization from party system institutionalization. As we shall see, the key question is whether parties possess sufficient presence and resources – whether formal organization, experience, loyal support, or a recognized place on the political spectrum, among others – to ensure that they have a continuing presence in the party system. One indicator of this may be parties' ability to recover despite setbacks. This is equivalent to Huntington and Mainwaring's emphasis on "value and experience."

Operational measures:

Each of the four dimensions can be measured quantitatively or qualitatively by combining data on election outcomes and the age of political parties with attitudinal data and expert judgments. Students of party system institutionalization typically use Pedersen's index of electoral volatility to measure the stability and regularity of party competition. The second dimension, party roots in society can be measured, as Mainwaring (1999) does, by comparing the proportion of the vote won by older and newer political parties or by comparing data on party identifications or consistency of the vote from election to election. The former requires reliable data on the ages of political parties, while the latter requires data-sets with comparable questions. The third dimension, the extent to which political elites regard party competition as legitimate requires either expert judgments or specialized data sets, and the fourth, the predominance of party organization over single leaders would either require detailed data or expert judgments on parties and how they are organized in a large number of countries.

Although all four dimensions can be measured in one way or another, researchers often rely on electoral volatility scores to assess the degree to which party systems in different parts of the world are institutionalized.[1] There are a number of reasons for this: First, electoral volatility scores can be calculated easily from data which is readily available by summing the gains and losses of political parties (disregarding signs) in two successive elections and dividing by two. The operation yields scores which can be compared over time, across political systems, and between older and newer democracies. Averaged over several elections, volatility scores can then be correlated with other indicators.[2] As table 1 demonstrates, the results yield a wide spread in the mean volatilities of older and newer democracies. Volatility scores from the party systems of older democracies, including ones in which there have been pronounced shifts in recent years, are considerable lower than those of newer democracies.

[Table 1 here]

Convenience, of course, is only one reason to resort to a given index. Before we accept electoral volatility scores as an indicator of party system institutionalization, it is useful to consider what volatility scores do and do not measure. Electoral volatility scores are based on aggregate election results. Based on the difference in party results from one election to the next, volatility scores estimate the minimum percentage of voters who would have had to change their votes in order to produce the outcome. Not included are the entry and exit of voters because of death, coming of age, or voting and non-voting or voters whose changes in preferences may have cancelled each other out. As such, electoral volatility scores typically underestimate the extent of switching between any two elections. However, this kind of noise is present in every election. Changes in the rates of electoral volatility between pairs of election, trends over time, and differences in levels of volatility across political systems indicate that something is different. The question is what: Students of party system institutionalization typically use volatility scores as an indicator of the stability and regularity of party competition. However, because volatility scores measure the proclivity of voters to stick the same party or switch to another, volatility scores can just as readily be taken as an indicator of the degree to which parties have stable roots in society. There is only so much that we can read into an aggregate measure. If volatility is

[1]Mainwaring's research is a partial exception. Mainwaring and Scully (1995) rely on volatility scores for the first dimension and qualitative judgments, extracted from chapters in their book and their own knowledge of Latin American political systems, for the rest.. Mainwaring (1999) uses all four dimensions in order to frame his analysis of the Brazilian case. Elsewhere Mainwaring relies primarily on volatility scores. See Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) and Mainwaring and Zoco (2007).

[2]For example, Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) explore relationships between mean electoral volatility, Freedom House scores, per capital income, and the Human Development index; others have explored relationships between electoral volatility and the effective number of electoral and legislative parties

low, there is a high probability that relatively few voters are switching parties. As a result, both parties and voters operate in a predictable environment in which relations among parties are stable. If volatility rises, not only politicians but also voters find themselves in a far less predictable environment. (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007) Students of party system institutionalization infer that relations among parties become less predictable, but without further information, we do not know how unpredictable this is or that this has definitely occurred.

This problem can be mitigated if we know more about the sources of volatility. In order to demonstrate the long term stability of Western European class alignments, Bartolini and Mair (1990) found it useful to not only to consider aggregate volatility but also to distinguish between inter- and intra-bloc volatility – i.e. the extent of switching between and within the left and right. Investigating the party systems of new European democracies, Rose and Munro (2003) distinguish between volatility which has resulted from the entry and exit of parties and volatility which has resulted from party switching. By doing so, they are able to demonstrate that a substantial portion of the volatility in newer central and European democracies is due to changes in supply – voters are forced to vote for a different party because their previous choice is no longer available – rather than changes in demand or voter's preferences. (See also Bieselak 2005) This tells more about what is going on in the party system, although not perhaps as much as we would want to know if relationships among parties are our primary concern.

Volatility scores are a useful device for macro-comparative analyses. Mainwaring and his colleagues have demonstrated their utility not only for demonstrating broad differences among older and newer democracies, but also for explaining reasons why some party systems have ended up far more institutionalized than others. They also do a good job of telling us whether the parties in a system have stable roots in society. However, volatility scores, in and of themselves, tell us little about the relational features of party systems – the patterns of sympathy and antipathy – which are at the heart of a party system. If we want to know about the extent to which these are entrenched or institutionalized, a different approach is needed. We propose one in the next section.

An alternate approach
Let us consider what we mean when we talk about a party system or entities as institutionalized. Normally, we think about something which is not only is there, but also has been there and is likely to be there in the future. However, institutionalization implies more than presence. If the term is to be meaningful, it also implies regular and predictable interaction, both within the institution or structure and in its relationship with other entities. Following Huntington, Mainwaring and Scully (1995.p 4) maintain that this implies a "process by which the organizations and procedures acquire value and stability (Huntington 1968, p.11)." Entities which are institutionalized shape behaviour because people or organizations have to take the ways in which it operates into account.

With Sartori, we have argued that the relational features of party systems – those which make them a system – are their defining characteristics. (See also Lewis 2006) In an

institutionalized party system, these are easy to discern. Whether we are talking about a two party or multiparty system, parties interact in predictable ways, competing with each other in elections, and governing or opposing afterward. The party system is defined not only by the number of parties in competition, but also patterns of alliance and cooperation or alternatively, opposition and antipathy. If the players who make up the system are relatively constant and interact in predictable ways, repeated over time, the system is institutionalized. If neither the players nor patterns of interaction are predictable, then the system clearly is either barely institutionalized – we are better able to describe what is not there than what is – or it falls into the category of inchoate party systems which Sartori argued could not be studied. If we want to consider degrees of institutionalization, the problem is to find categories or terms which describe what lies in between.

One approach is to draw on Gordon Smith's (1989) notion of a party system core. Smith proposed focussing on the core as a device to characterize the extent of party system change. Except in instances of complete breakdown – the replacement of one party system by another -- party system change was never complete; there were invariably elements which continued. These were:

> features or parts of the system which are most immune to change and which
> provide a significant continuity(Smith 1989, p. 536)

defining and anchoring the party system whatever changes were going on within it.   For Smith, these were the larger parties which were normally the principal players in elections campaigns, cabinet formation, and the support and maintenance of governments. For our purposes, it is useful to include smaller parties if they are also involved in the support or maintenance of governments. Focussing on these parties is justified because however strongly or weakly organized they are, such parties typically have sufficient resources that they can bounce back even if they have suffered major defeats. Their ability to bounce back reflects who and what they are – parties who have or are governing who even in hard times can count on reserves of loyal supporters willing to stick with through thick or thin. Politically ambitious people recognize them as vehicles to power. Other parties take account of them as well because their behaviour in government is predictable and because such parties can draw on reserves of people who have government experience. In other words, they have "value and experience," as both Huntington and Mainwaring argue.

The core of a party system, then, consists of the parties within it which are normally involved not only in contesting elections but also in the formation or support of governments. In a parliamentary system, these would be the parties, larger or smaller, either normally involved in government formation. In a presidential system, the core would consist of larger parties fielding candidates for legislative and presidential elections and, once a president was elected, supporting or opposing the president's legislative program. In either instance, we would expect parties which make the core to display recurring patterns of alliance and antipathy or some combination thereof. These are the relational features which make up the systemic component of a party

system. Typically, these should be visible both in election campaign, in subsequent periods of cabinet formation in parliamentary systems and in the support or maintenance of the executive thereafter. They can either be considered a second dimension of the party system core, or for our purposes, a second dimension along which both institutionalization and party system change can be assessed.

Unless a party system is so totally fragmented that it falls into Sartori's category of inchoate systems, it should be possible to identify a party system core in any legislative period. Developing this into a measure of party system institutionalization is another matter. We need to be able to distinguish differences in degrees of institutionalization while allowing change to occur over time. Both require us to extend our assessment over several election periods. An institutionalized party system, then, would be one in which there was a visible core, which is both discernable and relatively constant over three or more election periods. That core – the parties which are the major players in election campaigns and the formation and maintenance of governments – should either be constant or, failing, that, change only gradually, either through the entry and exit of parties from the game of government formation or support of the executive. If there is rapid turnover – the disappearance or replacement of all or most of the parties within the core – over three or more election periods, then the party system is either weakly institutionalized or undergoing rapid change. Discerning one from the other is not as difficult as it might appear: In institutionalized party systems, the core should change only gradually. If change is more rapid, then we should expect either the stabilization of a new core in subsequent elections or the reappearance of the older core, albeit in a slightly different form. In contrast, ongoing change and constantly shifting cores would indicate a party system that is at best weakly institutionalized.

Determining whether there is a stable party system core, one which is changing gradually, or one which is changing rapidly and repeatedly is only one of several steps required to assess the extent to which a party system is institutionalized. It is also important to assess patterns of competition and consider whether these take place on discernable dimensions of conflict. Normally, we would expect a visible core and discernable dimensions of conflict to be features of institutionalized party systems. However, it is possible for the latter to occur without the former. In some Canadian provincial party systems – Alberta and British Columbia, competitors on one side of the party spectrum have disappeared and been replaced by completely different party, sometimes but not always representing the same point of view. This could be taken either as wholesale party system change or weak institutionalization, but in both cases, once the dust had settled, the basic contours of the party system remained the same – competition between a socialist party and an anti-socialist party in British Columbia and continued single party dominance by a party of the right in Alberta. The reassertion of similar, if not identical, patterns of competition with different parties suggests that both were instances of modest party system change. However, this need not be the case. There are instances of weakly institutionalized party systems – Poland and Slovakia – in which competition takes place along predictable dimensions of conflict with parties which change from election to election.

The mode of analysis we described can only be useful if it can be applied to actual cases and used to distinguish instances of party system change as well as more and less institutionalized party systems. In subsequent sections, we will demonstrate its application to selected Western and East and Central European party systems.

Western Europe: continuity amid change

We can demonstrate the approach by considering examples from western and east-central Europe. Many Western European party systems have been undergoing change, with new right parties wedging themselves into already crowded party spectra. Nevertheless, most observers would regard all or most party systems as highly institutionalized. A quick survey confirms this. In Scandinavia, the principal changes have been the addition of new right parties. Nevertheless, the principal competition is between larger Social Democratic and bourgeois parties, albeit with new right parties gaining influence in cabinet formation in Denmark and a lesser extent, Norway. Party systems cores have changed gradually, if at all. In Germany, the core, visible throughout the postwar period remains intact, changed only by the inclusion of Greens when they became involved in laender and federal coalitions. On the surface, the core of the Belgian party system(s) might appear to be changed, but in both Flanders and Wallonia, and nationally, it is the names of the principal parties, and not their centrality or interaction which is changed. New right parties such as the Vlaams Blok (VB) remain outside the core despite their electoral strength.

Party systems which have experienced greater change are somewhat more problematic, but in most, party system cores remain distinctly visible. We consider two pairs: the Netherlands and Austria and France and Italy. The first two, consensual democracies, have undergone discernable changes. Until the 1980s, the Austrian party system was dominated by two larger parties, Socialists (SPÖ) and the People's Party (ÖVP), with a smaller liberal party, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) a distant third, but part of the core because of its role as junior coalition partner for the Socialists. The FPÖ came under control of Jörg Heidar and new right elements in the late 1980s. Re-orientation removed the FPÖ from the core, but growth in the 1990s brought it back as into a significant electoral force and uneasy partner in coalition with the ÖVP before its subsequent split. Despite these changes, though, the party system remains highly institutionalized. The core is larger and patterns of sympathy and antipathy and coalition patterns have changed, but the essential characteristic of a recognizable core changing only gradually is met.

The Netherlands is somewhat different. Prior to the 1970s, the core consisted of five major parties, reduced to three by the merger of the principal confessional parties in 1976, and augmented by one with the occasional participation of Democrats 66 (D66). Since 1994, changes have become pronounced. Swings in the vote are greater [data], and particularly since 2002, new or newer parties have wedged themselves into the party system. In 1994, both the Social Democrats (PvdA) and Christian Democrats (CDA) suffered major defeats, with the CDA losing half its support. This resulted in the formation of a secular coalition, long mooted but hitherto never acted upon. A further shock occurred in 2002 when an anti-immigrant populist party, the List Pim Fortuyn gained 17% of the vote despite the assassination of its leader nine

days before the parliamentary election. In the aftermath, Christian Democrats and Liberals incorporated the LPF into a short-lived coalition. Further shifts occurred in the 2003 elections. Although the Social Democrats gained, disagreements between Social Democrats and Christian Democrats prevented the formation of a centre-left government. Instead, a coalition of Christian Democrats, Democrats 66 and Liberals governed until 2006. Disputes over the citizenship of an outspoken member of parliament precipitated new elections and further shifts in the vote. Parties gaining strength in 2006 included a new right protest party, the Freedom Party (PVV), formed by a Geert Wilders, a dissident who had left the VVD, a Calvinist, the Christian Union (CU), and the Socialist Party (SP), an *ouvrierist party* to the left of the PvdA. Surging from 6.3%to 16.6%, the SP ended up as the third largest party. Because of its gains, the SP was included in the coalition formation but subsequently withdrew. Instead a coalition of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and the Christian Union took office.

There are a number of lessons which we can draw from this cautionary tale. One is that the Dutch party system is undergoing change, if not in its format, certainly in the number of parties in its core. The electorate shows clear signs that it is less attached to the established parties.   The number of parties in the core has also changed. Through 2002, the core included only the larger three parties, PvdA, CDA, and VVD, as well as the D66. In 2002, LPF entered but only barely and very briefly. But since then, both the SP and the CU have joined, while D66, with only two seats in 2006, is barely a part. The inclusion of the two newcomers could be temporary, but both parties have enjoyed growth, in part because both maintain presence on the ground and contact with the electorate. The Dutch case is an instance of a core which is discernable yet also changing, but not so rapidly that we cannot discern it. Despite setbacks, the three older parties continue to be significant players.

The party systems of Fifth Republic France and post-1993 Italy present a different set of contrasts. Most students of European party systems would consider the former less rigidly structured than the party systems of countries to its north, and the latter considerably less institutionalized than the pre-1993 Italian party system. Nevertheless, both party systems have regular and discernable patterns of competition. In Fifth Republic France, competition is between and within two blocs, the right and the left. Although parties come and go on both sides of the political spectrum, each bloc is anchored by a larger party, the Socialists (PS) on the left, and the Gaullists (UMP),on the moderate right. However, relationships among parties within blocs tend to be more fluid. For a time, the party system could be described as a 'bipolar quadrille,' with left consisting of Socialists and Communists, and the moderate right of Gaullists (then the Rally for the Republic, RPR) and an umbrella group, the Union of Democrats for France (UDF). However, Communist strength subsequently shrunk and other parties, e.g. the Greens, gained footholds on the left. On the right, the Gaullists, reorganized at a stroke as the Union for a Popular Majority (and briefly as the Union for a Presidential Movement), have assumed a more prominent position, absorbing elements of the UDF. Nevertheless, the latter has not disappeared and the broad contours of the party system remain entrenched and reappear from election to election despite shifts in party strength within and between blocs. (Knapp 2004)

We can make a somewhat different, although not unrelated observation, about the Italian party system. The pre-1993 party system and the parties which composed it were among the more institutionalized in Europe. Several of the parties had well articulated organizations and, at least earlier, could count on substantial followings. In addition, relationships among parties – DC and its allies in government, Communists (PCI) in opposition – were not only predictable but almost immutable. Riddled by scandal and under judicial investigation, pre-1993 party system collapsed, giving way to a party system which is substantially different. Parties, if they have continued at all, are pale shadows of what they once were, and competition is between two blocs or clusters of parties, Ulive on the left, and Liberta, on the right. Parties are clearly considerably less institutionalized than before. Nevertheless, patterns of competition and the relational features of the post-1993 party system are sharply defined.

Identifying the party system core and relational features in stable and well institutionalized Western European party systems is only half the battle. If the approach is to be useful in studying instutionalization in newer and less institutionalized party systems, it must be able to discern different degrees of institutionalization in party systems which are more fluid than the Western European party systems to which we have briefly alluded.   In the following section, we consider party systems in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland.

Central and Eastern European Party Systems
Party systems in Central and Eastern Europe are generally considered to be less institutionalized than those in of older Western European democracies. Scholars such as Rose and Munro (2003) have described party systems as floating – e.g. unanchored – with many countries characterized not only by high electoral volatility but also a changing supply of political parties from election to election. The reasons for this reflect conditions to do with the fall of Communism and in some instances, the extent to which liberal democracy has been consolidated. Important for our purposes is that there is considerable variation across the region. Party systems in Russia and the Ukraine border on inchoate, with competition between 'parties of power,' themselves not always constant, and a shifting array of challengers. Party systems in the Baltic countries have been slower to take form, with some displaying astonishing rates of 'political tourism' – the phenomena of members of parliament leaving older formations for newer ones, either in between or at elections, and in doing so, avoiding electoral accountability (Kreuzer and Pettai 2003).

Central European party systems also display considerable variations. Area specialists consider the party systems of Hungary and the Czech Republic, along with that of Slovenia, to be more institutionalized, those of other countries in the region, considerably less (Lewis 2006; Millard 2004). Because our purpose is to try out an alternate approach to the assessment of institutionalization, we concentrate primarily on the party systems of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland with occasional references to other countries. Differences and similarities among the Visegrad Four are sufficient to demonstrate the approach. As table 1 shows, all have high rates of electoral volatility, but rates of mean volatility are higher in Slovakia and in especially in Poland than in either Hungary or the Czech Republic. In addition,

through 2003, three of the four countries have had a changing supply of political parties. This has been especially true in Poland and Slovakia. Only in Hungary does volatility resulting from changes in demand (electoral) choice outweigh volatility which has resulted from changes in the supply of political parties. (Rose and Munro 2003)

Hungary's party system is one of the more institutionalized in central Europe. In the founding election in 1990, the dominant force was the Hungarian Democratic Forum. However, this subsequently split, with most elements forming separate parties. In the first governing period, three parties, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), Smallholders (FKGP) and Christian Democrats ((KDNP) governed together in a surplus coalition. In 1994 this was replaced by a coalition of the Social Democrats (reformed Communists, MSZP) and the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ). A defining feature of the party system was the decision of Fidesz, originally the League of Young Democrats and part of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, but currently the Hungarian Civic Union to reposition itself as a conservative nationalist party on the right of the political spectrum. Doing so, Fidesz not only filled a 'gap' on the political spectrum, but also emerged as the principal party on the right, alone or with others, winning 29.5% of the vote in 1998, 41.6% in 2002, and 42.0% in 2006. (Bakke and Sitter 2005; Enyedi 2005) The Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) occupies a similar position on the left of the political spectrum, with 33.0% in 1994, 32.9% in 1998, 42.1% in 2002 and 43.2% in 2006. Since 1994, governments have alternated between left and right. The pre-eminent position of the two larger parties, Social Democrats on the left and Fidesz, on the right, with a combined share of 85% of the popular vote provides the Hungarian system with a well-defined core, anchored by the two larger parties, but also augmented by smaller ones on each side of the spectrum. (Lewis 2006) Although rates of electoral volatility are higher than many Western European countries, they are lower than those of other countries in the region. Here as elsewhere, parties appear to lack the stable position on the ground. However, patterns of party competition are closed and predictable.

The Czech party system is similar in some respects but different in others. Initially, the dominant elements were the Civic Forum and its Slovakian equivalent, Public Against Violence. Subsequently not only parties but also the country split. Through 1998, three elements of the Civic Forum governed together: Vaclav Klaus' Civic Democratic Party (ODS), the Christian Democrats (KDU/CSL) and the Civic Alliance (ODA). From 1998, the Czech Social Democrats (CSSD) have governed either alone, as a minority government through 2002) or with the Christian Democrats, through 2006. In 2006, a government of Civic Democrats, Christian Democrats, and Greens (SZ) assumed office in an evenly divided parliament. The two parties anchoring the system and the most important elements in the core are Social Democrats on the Left and the Civic Democrats on the right. (Lewis 2006; Millard 2004; Deegan-Krause 2006) In contrast to Hungary, the Social Democrats are not reformed Communists, but a newer party which emerged after the founding elections. The Czech Communists normally win 10-13% of the vote. With vote totals of 26.4% in 1996, 32.1% in 1998, 30.2% in 2002 and 32.3% in 2006, the Czech Social Democrats anchor the party system on the left. With 29.6%, 27.8%, 24.5% and 35.4% in elections from 1996 through 2006, the Civic Democrats perform a similar function on the right. As in Hungary, there is a discernable core. However, the two anchors are weaker than

their Hungarian equivalents, and parliaments more frequently deadlocked. The Christian Democrats try to play a pivotal role but in light of Communist strength on the left are not always able to do so. In contrast to Hungary, the pattern of party competition is partially open. Even so, the principal actors and their positions on the political spectrum are fixed and there is a discernable core. Rates of electoral volatility are comparable to Hungary, suggesting a party system which is becoming institutionalized.

The parties systems of Slovakia and Poland contrast sharply with those of Hungary and the Czech Republic. Rates of electoral volatility are higher in both. Slovakia's party system grew out of the Public Against Violence. Its principal source of definition in the 1990s was the pre-eminent position of Vladimir Meciar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). Governing alone or with one or other smaller parties in a fragmented parliament, Meciar was able to dominate all but one cabinet through 1998. In 1998 opponents of Meciar banded together in Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK). Winning 26.3% of the vote, SDK nearly matched HZDS's 27.0% and was able to form a broad anti-Meciar coalition.   However, the Slovak Democratic Coalition was an umbrella of anti-Meciar forces which disintegrated almost as rapidly as it was formed (Millard 2004; O'Dwyer 2006). HZDS managed to win 19.5% of the vote in 2002 but has since disappeared from the political scene. In contrast to Hungary and the Czech Republic, the number of parties and factions represented in the Slovak parliament has grown rather than shrunk, and it is difficult to pinpoint a common or fixed core. (Lewis 2006; Millard 2004; Deegan-Krause 2006) Although both emerged from mergers or splits, the two largest parties in 2006, Direction Social Democracy (SSD), with 29.1% of the vote, and the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party, with 18.4%, were not represented under their current names in the previous parliament. With a rapidly shifting and barely discernable core, the Slovak party system is weakly institutionalized, with parties and umbrella groups reconstituting themselves at or between elections.

The Polish party system can be viewed in different ways. On one hand, elections have been characterized by an inordinately large number of political parties, artificially reduced by increasing electoral thresholds, and bundling parties together in electoral coalitions or umbrella groups facilitated by the (changing) provisions of the electoral law. Nevertheless, there has been clear-cut competition between clusters of parties of the left and right and regular alternation in government. Equally striking has been the relative disunity of political forces on both the left and the right. Most parties of the right emerged from the Solidarity Trade Union movement. However, Solidarity was more successful in opposing the former Communist regime than in serving as a coherent political force thereafter. Although Solidarity continued as a trade union federation, political forces divided into multiple parties and factions. Only in 1997 was the Solidarity Trade Union federation able to bring these together in an umbrella party, Solidarity Election Action (AWS). (Lewis 2006; Millard 2004; O'Dwyer 2006) However, this had all but disintegrated by the end of the election period. Until recently, the left was more coherent. Former Communists (SrdP) joined with Socialist trade union elements to form the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), which in alliance with other parties, was able to win an expanding share of the vote. The Democratic Left Alliance in turn allied with the Polish Peasants Party (PSL), a

former satellite party) to form coalition governments from 1993-1997 and again from 2001-2004. However, the relative unity of parties on the left – although generally greater than the right – may have been more apparent than real. Millard (2004) argues that SLD was beset by tensions both among component parties and between national and regional leader. (See also O'Dwyer 2006) Only in 1999 did SLD constitute itself as a political party rather than an electoral alliance. SLD won 41.0% of the vote in the 2001 parliamentary elections elections, but only 11.3% in 2005. By then, the party was beset by scandals; its leader and prime minister, Lesek Miller, had been forced to resign, and the party had split into smaller components. (Markowski 2005) This was not the only change underway. In the 1990s, it was possible to discern clear-cut dimensions of competition between clusters of parties on both the left and the right, sometimes more unified than others. After 2000, new and different forces began to emerge, including populist forces, such Self Defence (SRP), with 10.2% in 2001 and 11.4% in 2005 and Law and Justice (PiS), with 9.5% in 2001 and 27.0% in 2005. (Markowski 2005) The shifts are sufficiently dramatic to indicate either declining institutionalization in party system which was at best partially institutionalized, or alternatively, ongoing change in a weakly institutionalized party system.

Discussion

Let us draw the argument to a close. The paper has proposed an alternate method of assessing the degree to which party systems are institutionalized. Instead of relying primarily on measures of electoral volatility, this focusses on the extent to which party systems have a discernable core, relatively constant over successive elections and examining patterns of competition within that core. The approach is much more labour intensive than the predominant approach used in the literature. Rather than simply calculating electoral volatility scores, scholars must investigate the party system and consider what is going on. If the approach is to be applied to a large number of systems, expert judgments would be required.

There are several reasons to resort to a method which is more labour intensive. Volatility scores are extremely useful if we wish to engage in macro-comparative analyses, examining the correlates of greater or lesser institutionalization, but even if they are re-calculated to take account of intra- and inter-bloc volatility and volatility resulting from the entry and exit of political parties, volatility scores are a surrogate measure for institutionalization, telling us little directly about what is happening in the party systems under investigation. Put differently, there is very little system in analyses of party system institutionalization. Missing from most is any sense of how parties and political actors interact. If we discover that a party system has high rates of electoral volatility, we know that parties are failing to put down roots and that voters, either because they are confronted with a shifting supply of parties or because they find parties and their performance wanting, are either dropping out or changing their preferences. What is less clear, without further information and analysis, is why this happening.

We can put this in context by returning to Mainwaring's critique of Sartori. Sartori argued that party systems with ten or more parties could not be studied because they were inchoate. Relations among parties – those features which make for a system – were too fluid because the party system had not yet consolidated. Mainwaring argues that the numerical

criterion is too rigid, and more important, that such systems can and should be studied. However, the method which he uses does little to tap the relational features of party systems. This is surprising if we believe, with Sartori, that it is precisely these features which define a party system, but not only plausible but also reasonable if we believe that those features have not crystallized in party systems which are less institutionalized.

One issue is whether such systems can be studied at all. They can, but not necessarily in the ways that Sartori would. Party competition can be studied wherever it takes place, including countries in which liberal democracy is not consolidated. However, what is studied is not necessarily the regular interaction of parties or political actors whose behaviour is constrained by the system of which they are a part, but rather a political game in which a semblance of party competition is one element in a struggle to gain or maintain power. In countries like Russia, the provision of "parties" of power, bolstered by the resources of the state, along with often futile attempts of others to organize in opposition to them, appear to be regular features of party competition and, as such, an element which would be missed if we threw up our hands and argued that party competition in such systems could not be studied.

Party competition in unconsolidated democracies is only one facet of the problem. Mainwaring and others argue that we need to pay attention to different degrees of institutionalization if we want to capture or understand the dynamics of party competition in newer democracies. Although not always specified, these appear to differ a) because there is sometimes a changing supply of parties, b) because parties have failed to put down roots in the same ways that parties did in older democracies, and c) because such systems are vulnerable to populist challenges. However, not all of these elements are present in parties systems which are less institutionalized. If we wish to capture the dynamics of such systems, then we need to know more about the incidence of different patterns of weaker institutionalization, why parties fail to take root, and ultimately, why some party systems end up more institutitionalized then others. Finding answers to the first requires deeper study of a broader range of countries. Ultimately, a party system cannot be institutionalized unless it has a regular and discernable core whose components change only gradually, with regular and predictable patterns of interaction. This is unlikely to occur unless some – not necessarily all – of the parties in a system are able to establish themselves in ways which make them semi-permanent features of the system. We have a good idea of how this happened in older democracies: Parties were agents of mobilization, able to cultivate and sometimes encapsulate electorates of belonging, which along with intensive organization, enabled parties to establish a presence which is difficult to dislodge, even when parties suffer one or more defeats. If we want to understand why party systems of newer democracies are less institutionalized than those of older democracies, we need to know about what parties do to establish presence and why this does or does not work.

The literatures on party system institutionalization and parties in newer democracies provide diverse answers to this. On one hand, the experience of parties and party systems in older democracies provides a benchmark and expectations about what should be happening – parties competing around programmatic concerns with predictable locations on the political

spectrum cultivating loyal followings – while at the same time warning us, as Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) do, that conditions are different and increasingly, explaining that they are. Thus, Mainwaring and Zoco (2007) argue that the conditions under which parties in newer democracies compete make it difficult for parties to cultivate electorates of belonging: television enables party leaders and their challengers to reach substantial numbers of followers without building extensive or well-developed organizations. (See also Dalton and Weldon 2007)   In addition, the availability of public subsidies allows parties to operate and mount substantial election campaigns without cultivating large memberships, or putting down roots among voters.   Finally, governing parties in newer democracies are constrained by the limited range of policy options available to them. Limited in what they can do by the constraints of EU membership or by international financial institutions, parties are unable to deliver on promises made and unable to cultivate electorates of belonging by building up 'ideational' or programmatic capital (see Hale 2006).

This in turn raises questions. If parties operate in situations which are dramatically different than parties in older democracies, then it is possible that parties will never develop the same kinds of roots or electorates of belonging. The question, then, is whether this is a reasonable expectation and whether parties and party systems can become institutionalized in other ways. Our argument suggests that this is possible if parties develop resources which provide them, if not with staying power, an ability to bounce back from defeat. Obviously, one such resource is loyal followings or electorates of belonging. However, there are others, including governmental experience, knowledge of issues, and reputation. Parties can develop these by operating at different levels of government, accumulating experience, and establishing themselves as viable conduits to office for those who seek it. If one or more parties on different sides of the political spectrum can establish this kind of presence, then it is possible for party systems to develop a discernable core, with predictable relations among parties, changing only gradually from election to election, and to be institutionalized, albeit differently from the party systems of established democracies.

The argument suggests that we need to know a good deal more about the processes through which parties and party systems come to be established. That can only happen through detailed studies of both, undertaken in comparative context. In particular, we need to know why and to what extent politicians in different systems invest in party building and developing organizations with the kind of staying power and presence which we have described. We also need to explore the effects of electoral systems and election finance regimes, and the degree to which these encourage or discourage new competitors and encourage politicians to stick with party organizations. Finally, it is important to consider the ways in which parties and party systems fit with other patterns of linkage, including the flow of patronage and existing patterns of patron-client relationships. In the case of the party systems of central and east European democracies that means resolving a puzzle. Parties in these countries are known not only to operate on public subsidies but also to avail themselves of patronage while in office. Some of this may reflect efforts put their own people in place in order to assert control while governing,

but it would also be useful to know if in some instances patronage has also been used to build more durable political parties and if not, why not.

Table 1 Electoral Volatility in Older and Newer Democracies

Older Democracies	Elections included	Mean Volatility*	New democracies or semi-democracies	Elections included	Mean Volatility*
United States	1946-2002	3.3	Greece	1974-2000	10.4
Switzerland	1943-2003	6.5	Portugal	1975-2002	15.2
Australia	1946-2001	6.6	Chile	1989-2001	16.7
Austria	1945-2002	6.6	Spain	1977-2000	17.0
United Kingdom	1945-2001	6.8	Taiwan	1992-2001	20.4
Finland	1917-2003	7.4	Brazil	1986-2002	21.8
Germany	1949-2002	8.7	South Korea	1988-2000	24.6
Sweden	1911-2002	9.0	Argentina	1983-2001	24.9
Belgium	1945-2003	9.2	Hungary	1990-2002	25.1
Norway	1945-2001	10.2	Czech Republic	1990-2002	25.7
New Zealand	1946-2002	10.6	Slovakia	1990-2002	33.3**
Ireland	1923-2002	10.9	Thailand	1995-2005	34.7
Denmark	1945-2001	11.2	Ecuador	1979-1998	36.4
Netherlands	1945-2003	11.7	Bulgaria	1990-2001	36.8
Canada	1945-2004	11.9	Bolivia	1985-2002	38.0
Iceland	1946-2003	14.0	Slovenia	1992-2000	38.2
Italy	1946-2001	15.1	Philippines	1992-1998	41.9
France	1946-2002	15.3	Estonia	1992-2003	45.4
Japan	1952-2000	16.2	Lithuania	1992-2000	49.1
Israel	1949-2003	22.1	Russia	1993-2002	50.0
India	1951-1999	25.5	Romania	1990-2000	53.0
Venezuela	1958-2001	31.4	Latvia	1990-2002	56.2
			Ukraine	1994-2002	59.2

Adapted from Mainwaring and Zoco (2007), pp. 159-160

*for democracies established before 1902, from 1945

**calculated from data supplied by Alan Siaroff

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