



## **Changing Nature of Partisanship in a Post-Communist Society: Comparing “Old” and “New” Parties in Lithuania**

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# CHANGING NATURE OF PARTISANSHIP IN A POST-COMMUNIST SOCIETY: COMPARING “OLD” AND “NEW” PARTIES IN LITHUANIA

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**Abstract.** The article explores the nature and the causes of changing pattern of partisanship in Lithuania. Even though the students of post-communist democracies seem to suggest that party systems in post-communist societies have been formed from above and are lacking social roots, the case of Lithuania reveals that old parties, established at the beginning of the party system formation, had a great deal of loyal supporters and quite a few members. New parties, on the other hand, are floating above the society. The differences between the old and the new parties in Lithuania are mainly apparent when analysing the reasons of joining a party and motives for keeping up partisan involvement. While members of the old parties are mainly motivated by value orientations, emotional engagement and group solidarity, the membership of the new parties is based on instrumental motivation and rational decision. Lacking social and normative grounds, these parties are not able to attach their voters and to develop ties with their electorate. Instead they are successfully using anti-party sentiments of the population and mass media-based electoral technologies.

## *Introduction*

Post-communist societies are generally characterized by relatively low party membership and weak partisan attachment of voters. The party systems in Central and Eastern Europe remain unstable, voting volatility is substantially higher than the average volatility in Western states (Innes, 2002, Jungerstam-Mulders, 2006). The level of partisanship, however, is expected to increase in these democracies together with the stabilization of party alignments and the development of the voting habits of the citizens (Mair, 1993, Dalton and Weldon, 2007).

Contrary to the expectations, the partisanship in Lithuania is decreasing rather than increasing. The level of partisanship was relatively high at the beginning of

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the formation of the party system in 1990–1996, and is constantly decreasing afterwards. The “old” parties (i.e. parties established in 1989–1992) with relatively high party membership are challenged by the “new” parties (i.e. parties established after 1998) lacking developed organizational structure and loyal electorate.

The article explores the nature and the causes of the changing pattern of partisanship in Lithuania. It is based on the data from in-depth interviews with local party members and the data from pilot survey of party members collected in August – September 2005.<sup>1</sup> The research was carried out in three Lithuanian regions: Radviliškis district, Klaipėda district and Vilnius (the capital). The research included 6 political parties: the Social Democratic Party, the Homeland Union, the Liberal and Center Union, The Labor Party, the New Union and the Lithuanian Christian Democrats. Two parliamentary parties (the Union of Peasants and New Democracy and the Liberal Democratic Party) were not included in the research because of an uncooperative attitude of the party leadership. Moreover, the paper will draw on the public opinion survey conducted in September 2005 exploring the partisan attachment of the electorate.

In the first section of the paper, a brief overview of the development of Lithuanian party system is presented and the difference between “old” and “new” parties is explained. Further, the party membership level and the motives of joining a party are analysed, displaying the difference between old and new parties. In the next section, the partisan attachment in the wider electorate in Lithuania is examined. Finally, the explanation of the weakening party ties and changing pattern of party membership in Lithuania is given.

### *Overview of the development of the Lithuanian party system*

Democratization process in Lithuania started in 1988, when Communist party monopoly was broken by opposition movement “Sąjūdis”. Opposition political parties started to emerge in 1989 but they were still unimportant political players in the first free elections to the Supreme Soviet of Lithuania in 1990, as the political arena was dominated by the Lithuanian Communist party and Sąjūdis. The formation of Lithuanian party system started in 1991 when Sąjūdis began to disintegrate and early parliament elections were announced in 1992 (see Ramonaitė, 2006).

<sup>1</sup> The research on ‘The structural and functional capabilities of Lithuanian political parties’ was carried out by the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University. During the research, 36 in-depth interviews with local activists and a survey of 246 local party members was made.

In parliamentary elections of 1992, four parties crossed the 4 % electoral threshold. Ex-communist Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party won the elections with 73 seats out of 141; remnants of Sąjūdis, later transformed into Homeland Union (Lithuanian Conservatives), received 28 seats and became the second biggest political force in Lithuania (see Table 1). The other two successful parties – Lithuanian Social Democrats and Lithuanian Christian Democrats, “historical” parties claiming to be descendants of pre-war Lithuanian parties – received respectively 8 and 9 seats. Several other parties won some seats in single – member districts.<sup>2</sup>

*Table 1.* Results of parliamentary elections in Lithuanian (% of votes in the multimember district and total number of seats received)

<i>Party</i>	<i>1992</i>		<i>1996</i>		<i>2000</i>		<i>2004</i>	
	<i>votes</i>	<i>seats</i>	<i>votes</i>	<i>seats</i>	<i>votes</i>	<i>seats</i>	<i>votes</i>	<i>seats</i>
Homeland Union (Lithuanian Conservatives)	21.2	28	31.3	70	8.6	9	14.8	25
Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party	44	73	10	12	31.1	27	20.7	20
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	6	8	6.9	12		18		
New Union (Social Liberals)	–	–	–	–	19.6	29		11
Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party	12.6	9	10.4	16	3.1	2	1.4	–
Lithuanian Centre Union	2.5	2	8.7	13	2.9	–	9.2	18
Lithuanian Liberal Union	1.5	–	1.9	1	17.3	34		
Lithuanian Peasants' Party	–	–	1.7	1	4.2	4	6.6	10
New Democracy (Women's Party)	–	–	3.9	1	*	3		
Labour Party	–	–	–	–	–	–	28.4	39
Liberal Democratic Party	–	–	–	–	–	–	11.4	10

Source: Central Electoral Committee, Krupavičius and Pogorelis (2004)

\* In 2000 elections New Democracy ran in coalition with Labour Democrats and Social Democrats

In parliamentary elections of 1996, the same four parties – the Homeland Union, Social Democrats, Labour Democrats and the Christian Democratic Party, retained positions in the Parliament, even though the distribution of the seats changed drastically. The Homeland Union (Lithuanian Conservatives)

<sup>2</sup> In Lithuania mixed electoral system is used: 71 members of parliament are elected in single member districts by majority system, while other 70 are elected by PR system in a multimember district (see Žeruolis, 1998).

won the elections with 70 seats. Christian Democrats moved into the second place, while former governing Labour Democrats having won only 12 seats went down to the 4th place sharing it with Social Democrats. Moreover, the Lithuanian Centre Union with its charismatic leader Romualdas Ozolas managed to cross the electoral threshold and received 13 seats.

Although electoral volatility was comparatively high and electoral success of parties was quite wavy, a bipolar party system of Lithuania appeared to be rather stable. The pattern of party competition was determined by the tension between ex-communist Labour Democrats and anti-communist Homeland Union (Lithuanian Conservatives). Christian Democrats were considered to be a 'younger sister' of Conservatives since the political positions of both parties coincided on many questions. Social Democrats and the Centre Union were seeking to impose a socio-economic rather than communist – anticommunist conflict dimension; their attempt, however, was not successful.

The Lithuanian party system experienced rather unexpected shake-up in 2000, when two new parties – the New Union and the Liberal Union – came into political arena, pushing out Christian Democrats and the Centre Union. The pattern of electoral competition was drastically transformed since both new parties claimed to be centrist and ignored the communist – anti-communist political cleavage. Even though these two parties had different origins – the Liberal Union had roots in Sąjūdis and the New Union was a newly created political formation – both of them could be labelled as charismatic rather than programmatic parties (for the types of parties see Kitschelt, 1995).

The New Union (Social Liberals) was established by former General Prosecutor of the state Artūras Paulauskas in 1998 after nearly victorious second round of presidential election.<sup>3</sup> The party as well as its leader was not committed to any ideology. The party is considered to be a centre – left political force. Appealing mainly to dissatisfied electorate, the party received 20 per cent of votes and turned to be the first according to the votes and the 2<sup>nd</sup> according to the seats received.

The Lithuanian Liberal Union was more successful in single-member districts than in the national-wide constituency, and having received only 17 percent of votes, managed to get 34 seats in the Parliament, becoming the biggest party in the Seimas. The Liberal Union was created in 1990 by liberally oriented intellectuals. Its jump into the national political arena, however, was related

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<sup>3</sup> Paulauskas lost the election to Valdas Adamkus by less than 1 percent of votes.

with controversial personality of Rolandas Paksas rather than liberal ideology. Rolandas Paksas was a Prime Minister of Conservatives in 1999. Refusing to sign a privatisation agreement of the biggest Lithuanian enterprise “Mažeikių nafta” and resigning from the office, he raised his ratings and changed the party (see Clark and Verseckaitė, 2005). Welcoming Rolandas Paksas and electing him the chairman of the party, the Liberal Union increased impressively its popularity but undermined its ideological purity. The collaboration of Rolandas Paksas and the Liberal Union, however, was short-lived, as Paksas soon left the party with his team and created his own party – the Liberal Democratic Party, later renamed *Order and Justice (Liberal Democrats)*. The Liberal Union subsequently merged with the Centre Union creating the Liberal and Centre Union.

The political shake-up of 2000, as it appeared later, was only a beginning of the disintegration of the Lithuanian party system. In parliamentary elections of 2004, the Lithuanian party system experienced a second transformation, as three new parties – the Labour party, the Liberal Democratic Party and the Union of Peasants and New Democracy – entered the political arena, increasing dramatically the political fragmentation. The Labour Party was established by a businessman of Russian origin Viktor Uspashich several months before the elections. The leadership of the party is dominated by businessmen while the voters of the party are concentrated in the lower social stratum. The party is not an advocate of socialist ideology as its name would suggest. It is rather a populist party gaining from the popularity of its charismatic leader.

The Liberal Democratic Party was established to support Rolandas Paksas in the presidential elections of 2002. After unsuccessful tenure in the President's office and subsequent impeachment<sup>4</sup> (see Clark and Verseckaitė, 2005), the party turned to radical anti-establishment party and became an outcast in the Lithuanian party system. In the local elections of 2007, however, the party received 13 percent of votes on a national scale and was among the winners of the elections.

The Union of Peasants and New Democracy, later renamed the Party of Peasants and People, increased its popularity after the successful performance of its leader Kazimira Prunskienė in the presidential elections of 2004. Prunskienė was supported by ex-president Rolandas Paksas who was not able to run for the office again because of the break of oath. Prunskienė managed to get to the 2<sup>nd</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Rolandas Paksas was removed from the office by the impeachment procedure for break of oath in April 2004.

round but lost the elections to Valdas Adamkus (see Matsuzato and Gudžinskas, 2006). Her relative success was beneficial to the party in parliamentary elections in October 2004. The party is appealing mainly to rural electorate and is advocating the interests of farmers.

The radical transformation of the party system is related with the collapse of party competition space. Former adversaries – the Homeland Union and Labour Democrats which merged with Social Democrats and changed the name in 2000 (the party has chosen the name of the Social Democrats even though former Labour Democrats are dominating in the party) – are now cooperating to prevent new parties, especially the Labour Party and Liberal Democrats, from power. A divide between “traditional” and “populist” parties is replacing the Left-Right political dimension in the public discourse. The “traditional” camp is composed of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (former Labour Democrats), the Homeland Union and Christian Democrats. The label of “populists” is usually stuck to the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats and Peasants, while the Liberal and Centre Union and the New Union (Social Liberals) are in an ambiguous position.

The division between traditional and populist parties, however, is somewhat misleading, since there are no considerable differences between the first and the second group of parties neither on campaigning strategy, nor on the actual economic policy. Therefore, in this paper, the division between “old” versus “new” parties rather than “traditional” versus “populist” is used. The Homeland Union, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats are regarded as old parties, while the Labour Party, the Union of Peasant and People (further the Union of Peasants), the Party “Order and Justice” (Liberal Democrats), and the New Union (Social Liberals) are assigned to the group of new parties. The Liberal and Centre Union is not assigned to any of these groups because it is not a genuinely new party but it cannot be regarded as traditional party either. In the next section, the differences in membership and motivation of members of the old and new parties are examined.

### *The members of old and new parties*

The party membership in Lithuania is comparatively low. The membership rate of the biggest parties does not exceed 15 thousand members. According to the data of European Value Survey (1999/2000), self-reported party member-

ship in Lithuania is among the lowest in post-communist countries. In terms of membership, the biggest parties in Lithuania have always been the Social Democratic Party (former ex-communist Democratic Labour Party) and the Homeland Union (see Table 2). The “golden age” of the Homeland Union was 1996–2000 when this party was in the government. The Democratic Labour Party lost some of its members after the unsuccessful rule of 1992–1996, but retrieved the losses after merging with Social Democrats. As it is the ruling party since 2000, its membership is steadily increasing.

The third party that was able to compete with the leaders in terms of membership was the Christian Democratic Party. In 1996 it claimed to have 10,000 members and it was the second biggest party at the time. Poor electoral performance in parliamentary elections of 2000 and 2004 considerably diminished its ranks. Nevertheless, it is still one of the most numerous parties in Lithuania.

As can be seen from Table 2, in 1992–1996, the size of a party in terms of membership was correlated with the electoral performance of a party: the Homeland Union, the Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party and Christian Democrats had most members and the biggest electorate while Social Democrats and the Centre Union were less numerous and less successful in the elections. Parliamentary elections of 2000 have changed the situation. The Liberal Union won the elections having only 2,000 members, the New Union (Social Liberals) won 20 percent of votes with 3,500 members, while Christian Democrats with 10,000 members failed to cross the electoral threshold.

The strategy of the new parties in regard to recruitment of members varies from party to party. The Union of Peasants, Liberal Democrats, the New Union and the Liberal and Centre Union do not strive for mass membership. The Labour Party, in contrast, put big efforts to the organisational development and recruitment of members. The membership rate of the party was increasing in extraordinary speed and now exceeds the rate of one of the strongest traditional parties – the Homeland Union. As our research shows, however, the membership rate of the party might be somewhat fictitious. Some respondents confessed that they formally joined the Labour Party together with their boss and had never been involved into the activities of the party.



Table 2. Party membership in Lithuania in 1992–2006

<i>Party</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2006</i>
Homeland Union	–	16,164	19,487	12,269	12,514
Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party	13,600	9,200	8,300	12,506	14,805
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	500	1,500	4,000		
Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party	5,251	10,500	10,500	10,000	4,660
Lithuanian Centre Union	–	1,500	3,000	3,640	4,466
Lithuanian Liberal Union	550	1,000	2,000		
New Union (Social Liberals)	–	–	3,500	4,926	6,224
Union of Peasants and New Democracy	–	–	–	1,500	2,500
Order and Justice (Liberal Democrats)	–	–	–	4,998	5,263
Labour Party	–	–	–	2,642	13,777

Source: 1992–2003 data from Krupavičius and Lukošaitis (2004), 2006 data from the Central Electoral Committee

The qualitative research revealed the problems in members' activism in other new parties as well. For instance, we witnessed how a leader of a branch of the New Union was desperately searching members that could come into a party meeting and fill in our questionnaire. Even though the branch officially had about 40 members, she was not able to find more than 10. The others were not active any more in the party though they still were included in the list of party members.

Interviews with local party members revealed the differences in the motivations for joining a party. The dominant membership motive in the old parties – the Homeland Union and the Social Democratic Party – is a continuation of political activity. The members of Homeland Union relate their membership in the party with the activities in Sajūdis movement. In 1989, Sajūdis could have had about 180,000 members. Many of them disengaged from political activity after the declaration and consolidation of independence in 1990 – 1991. Those who stayed in politics usually have chosen the Homeland Union which was considered to be the direct successor of Sajūdis: “At the time I experienced the restoration of independence. It seemed to me that this party (Homeland Union – A.R.) was the most solid party, developing from the core group of Sajūdis, where the biggest cohesion was felt.” (member of the Homeland Union, Radviliškis region).

Decision to join the Homeland Union was based on anti-communist sentiments and group solidarity. A considerable part of members of the party are former political prisoners and victims of Soviet repressions. As one member

comments, a will to join an anti-communist party was natural for her: "I am a child of Siberia. I was conveyed from the North, my parents were deported. So there was nothing to consider, everything came naturally." (member of the Homeland Union, Vilnius).

Similarly, some members of the Social Democratic Party claim that the main reason of partisan involvement was a continuity of political activity from the Soviet times. In this case, however, the essential motive was inertia rather than emotional engagement. As one party member explains, she simply remained loyal to the party in the period of transition and naturally retained her partisan card even though the name and the program of the party have changed.

Joining motives of members of the Social Democratic Party, however, seem to be more diverse than that of Conservatives. The party is of catch-all type and is making efforts to attract members from different social and ideological background. Since it is now in a ruling coalition for more than 6 years, and it is probably the strongest and most well organized party in Lithuania, some individuals join the party because of instrumental motivation. Moreover, some members came to the party through the activities in trade unions. Still others claim to be engaged by Social Democratic ideology (see Table 3).

Christian Democrats recruited their members through the network of the Catholic Church. In Soviet times, the Catholic Church was the only social organisation relatively independent and alternative to the state. During transformation period, the Catholic Church in Lithuania was active in supporting democratisation and national liberation, therefore, it acted jointly with Sąjūdis. The Christian Democratic Party was established in 1989, well before the creation of the Homeland Union. Old members of the Christian Democratic Party claim to be involved into partisan activities through the religious community, while new members join the party mainly willing to be active in local politics<sup>5</sup>.

In the case of new political parties, pragmatic and social motives of joining a party are dominating. The members of the Labour Party and the New Union explain their decision to get involved into party politics as a means of self-expression and desire to make influence on political decision making. Some

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<sup>5</sup> Even though Christian Democrats currently are not represented in the parliament, there are more successful in local self-government institutions in Lithuania. In local elections of 2007 they received more than 5 percent of votes on a national scale and have two mayors.

Table 3. Motives of joining a political party

<i>Party</i>	<i>Motives for joining a party</i>
Homeland Union	Continuation of participation in Sąjūdis movement Patriotic feelings Victims of Soviet repressions Trust in the first leader of the party (Vytautas Landsbergis) Support for the program principles of the party, such as community building, importance of family
Lithuanian Christian Democrats	Commitment to the Church community Self-expression, enthusiasm Will to change the situation, to work for Lithuania Interest in politics Liked the leader of the local branch Ambitions to pursue political goals
Labour party	Self – expression, wish to share experience Influence of the employer Promises, entertainment
Liberal and Centre Union	Self – expression Commitment to liberal values Work in the electoral campaign of a member of Parliament
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	Self – expression Inertia, loyalty to the party from soviet times Social Democratic family traditions Political beliefs, ideas, ideology of the party Professionalism of the party Participation in the activities of trade union
New Union	Wish to participate in political decision making Desire to ascertain if parties function in the name of ideas Participation in the Paulauskas' electoral campaign Invitation of friends or colleagues

Source: in-depth interviews with local party members (2005)

of them reported the influence of friends and colleagues: “At the time I had a desire for some kind of activity; I met a playfellow, he participated in this activity (party activity – A.R.), he talked how much one can do, how much one can change; so I got attracted and joined. (member of the New Union, Radviliškis region).

Moreover, some members of new parties confess that the main reason of joining a party was a fear of losing a job: "oh, perhaps colleagues [influenced], let's say. (...) Just for safety's sake." (member of the Labour Party, Radviliškis region). As some party members report, it is usual that workers of an enterprise join the party together with the administration: "I think, in those enterprises where several managers joined [a party], they recruited those people to this circle." (member of the New Union, Klaipėda region).

The differences in the nature of members' involvement are visible in the partisan activities as well. Dominant activity in the Homeland Union seems to be political discussions; the Social Democrats attempt to engage members by extra-party activities, such as football games, fiestas as well as by soviet-style meetings of the representatives of different economic sectors, Christian Democrats usually combine partisan activities with religious celebrations. The Labour Party is attracting and mobilizing its members by free concerts, trips, etc., while the New Union activity is mainly limited to the working meetings of party elite and local activists.

In conclusion, the research of the party members revealed that the level and the character of party membership in Lithuania depend on the origin of a party. The ex-communist Lithuanian Social Democratic Party has the highest membership rate; its members joined the party for various reasons, including inertia, ideological beliefs, and pragmatic incentives. Anti-communist Homeland Union has a relatively high membership too. Members of the party tend to see their partisan involvement as a continuation of an activity in the anti-communist movement; the party is distinguished by high normative and emotional engagement of its members. The membership of Christian Democrats has diminished because of poor performance in the national elections. Most of its members were recruited during early 1990s as a consequence of national and religious enthusiasm. New parties in Lithuania have low to high but presumably unsteady membership. They are characterized by dominating pragmatic motives of partisan involvement and low normative engagement of the members.

### *Parties in the electorate*

Public attachment to political parties is claimed to be one of the basic features of representative democracy and a sign of its vitality (Dalton, 2000). Partisan ties mobilize individuals to participate in politics and accumulate their support for political system. Strong partisan attachment of voters ensures stability of a party system and diminishes the chances of new parties to enter the political arena (Converse and Dupeux, 1962). Party identification is widely used to analyse voting behaviour in Western countries, even though there is convincing evidence about the decline of partisanship in post-industrial societies (Dalton, 2000).

Partisan attachment is usually analysed in the framework of the theory of party identification (Campbell et al., 1960). The theory, however, is hardly applicable to new democracies characterized by the instability of parties (Converse and Pierce, 1992). Nevertheless, the concept of party identification is used in the analysis of post-communist democracies with some methodological corrections, e.g. using some “softer” measures of partisanship such as closeness, attachment or “transitional partisanship” (see e.g. Colton, 2000, Paškevičiūtė, 2006, Rudi, 2006, Ramonaitė, 2007). Partisan attachment in new democracies can be defined as emotional relationship with a party that is not necessarily longstanding and stable but is nevertheless stronger than simple partisan preference.

The theory of party identification implies that partisan identification results from early socialisation and increases as individual gets older (Rudi, 2006). A social learning model of Philippe Converse (1969) assumes that young people inherit their partisan identification from their parents and the partisan attachment tends to strengthen over time. The model can be applied for new democracies with some modifications (Dalton and Waldon, 2007). Even though the citizens in new democracies could not have acquired partisan attachment in their childhood, it might be suggested that partisanship of the citizens in new democracies should grow over time as citizens become accustomed to democratic political process. In Lithuania, however, the opposite development is observed: partisan attachment of the voters is gradually diminishing.

The studies of partisanship in post-communist countries in early 1990s demonstrate high level of partisan attachment in Lithuanian. Evans and Whitefield (1995) report that about 50 percent of voters in Lithuania had a

party attachment in 1993, and it was a high score, compared with Poland, Estonia and other post-communist countries (see Table 4). The lack of comparable data from different points of time, unfortunately, does not allow tracing credibly the changes in partisanship of Lithuanian voters. A set of evidence, however, suggest that the partisan ties of the population are declining.

As can be seen from Table 5, Lithuanian score of partisanship in 1996–1999 was among the lowest in Central and Eastern Europe. The data from Baltic Barometer

1999 and 2001 show that only about 5 percent of Lithuanian voting age population had a strong partisanship, 20 percent declared weak partisan attachment and 60 percent said that they did not support any political party (see Degutis, 2001). A question asked in the Baltic Barometer Survey was similar to that in Evans and Whitefield study; therefore, a negative trend in the level of partisanship in Lithuania is rather obvious. This claim is confirmed by other data as well: e.g., Degutis (2001) reveals that in parliamentary elections of 1996, 66 percent of voters had been determined in their voting preferences well before the electoral campaign, and in 2000, only 48 percent of respondents said they had made a decision before the start of the campaign.

The distribution of loyal voters, i.e. voters with partisan attachment, is distributed among parties very unevenly. The Homeland Union and Social Democrats (former Labour Democrats) always enjoyed the highest numbers of supporters (Degutis, 2001). Even though those two parties lost their dominant positions in elections of 2000 and 2004, they still have much more loyal voters than the new parties. As can be seen from Diagram 1, the Homeland Union and the Social Democratic Party has more than 5 percent of supporters on a national scale and it is more than enough to cross the electoral threshold having in mind that electoral turnout in recent elections in Lithuania was less than 50 percent.

The Homeland Union has the biggest share of voters with partisan attachment. As can be seen from Diagram 1, loyal supporters comprise more than

*Table 4.* Percentage of party supporters by party (1993)

Lithuania	49,6
Bulgaria	45,1
Romania	42,7
Hungary	39,8
Poland	22,5
Estonia	17,6
Ukraine	14,6
Russia	13,3

Source: Evans and Whitefield, 1995

Note: The question reads: "Do you think of yourself as a supporter of any particular party?"

*Table 5.* Partisan attachment in 1996–1999 (percents of respondents with partisan attachment)

Ukraine 1998	69,4
Russia 1999	62,8
Poland 1997	52,3
Czech Republic 1996	48,8
Romania 1996	46,9
Hungary 1998	35,0
Lithuania 1997	34,3

Source: The Comparative systems of Electoral Systems (CSES) <<http://www.jdsurvey.net/bdasep/jds/cses/home.jsp>>

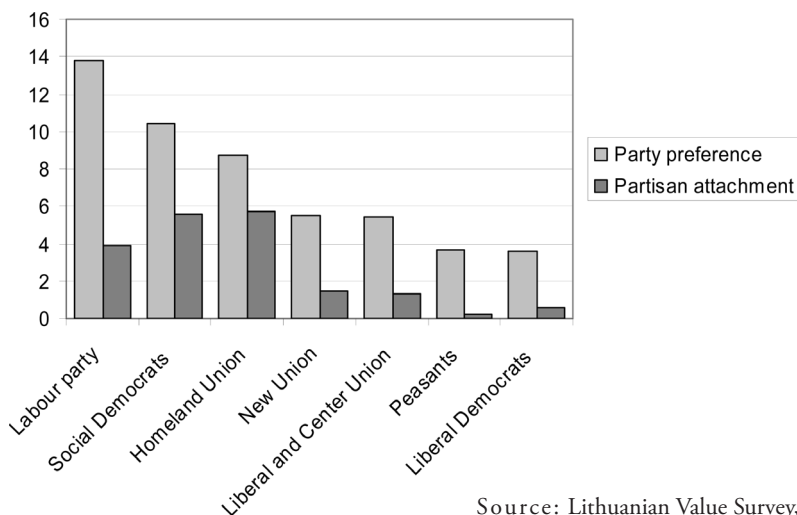
Note: the question reads: "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?"

half of those ready to vote for the party in the next elections. The Social Democratic Party has a similar share of loyal supporters and a slightly higher percentage of supporters without a partisan attachment. This seems to be a surprising finding because the social learning model would predict the advantage of ex-communist parties in stimulating party ties (Dalton and Weldon, 2005).

A difference between the percentage of potential voters and determined supporters of the new parties is much bigger. As data show, only a ¼ of those who are ready to vote for the Labour Party, the Liberal and Centre Party and the New Union consider themselves the supporters of the preferred parties. The

supporters of the Peasants Union and Liberal Democrats comprise only less than 1 percent of Lithuanian adult population and it makes up only 14 and 15 percent respectively of their potential electorate.

*Diagram 1.* Party preference and partisan attachment by party (percentages)



Source: Lithuanian Value Survey, 2005

In conclusion, the differences between the old and the new parties are also reflected in the electorate. Even though the new parties demonstrated remarkable results in the parliamentary elections, they were not able to generate a network of supporters comparable to that of the old parties. Of the new parties, the Labor Party has the highest percent of loyal voters and this probably has to do with well developed organization structure of the party. In general, however, the new parties seem to be detached from the voters much more than the old parties.

### ***Explaining differences between old and new parties***

What explains the diminishing partisan attachment of Lithuanian population and the differences between old and new parties? Two alternative explanations might be suggested: one of them attributes these trends to the specific logic of the development of a party system in a post-communist society; the other relates the changes to the world-wide trends of transformation of partisan politics.

The formation and stabilization of the party systems in Western Europe are commonly explained by the influential cleavage model of Rokkan and Lipset (1967). As Bartolini and Mair (1990) claim, a cleavage is a specific type of division which refers to an *organized* social dividing line in a polity accompanied by a *normative element*, i.e. the set of values and beliefs which provides a sense of identity for the people of a particular social group. In other words, a cleavage is based on an emotional solidarity of an organized social group. This definition relates a cleavage model of Rokkan and Lipset (1967) with the party identification theory which originally stems from reference group theory.

It is often claimed that post-communist societies lack strong socio-political cleavages, therefore voting behavior of the citizens is more volatile and the conditions for the stabilization of party systems are rather adverse. First, the societies in post-communist states are said to be flattened by socialist "egalitarian" policy; second, they are said to lack organizational networks which could segment the electorates into stable and relatively closed partisan blocs (Mair, 1993). The research of the members' recruitment patterns and motives of joining a party in Lithuania revealed, however, that the formation of the party system in Lithuania was shaped by the communist – anticommunist political conflict that comes close to the notion of a cleavage as defined by Bartolini and Mair (1990).



First, the research demonstrated that the old parties – the Social Democrats, the Homeland Union and Christian Democrats – were building their structure on the existing social networks. The structure of the Social Democratic Party was built on the basis of the former Communist Party of Lithuania; the Homeland Union successfully used the network of Sąjūdis, while Christian Democrats employed the organizational structure of the Catholic Church. Second, the motives of joining these parties, the Homeland Union in particular, were related with emotional and normative commitments rather than pragmatic incentives.

The emotional solidarity with a social group seems to be an important factor stimulating the ties between the parties and their voters. As Alfred Erich Senn (2002: 20) reports, “By 1991 and 1992, politically aware Lithuanians had divided into *brazauskininkai* and *landsbergininkai*, supporters of Brazauskas (*the leader of the ex-communist Democratic Labor Party*) and Landsbergis (*the leader of Sąjūdis and later the Homeland Union*). (...) The politics became intense, sharp rivalries developed and emotions ran higher and higher.” The tension, however, gradually diminished, as the Democratic Labor Party (later transformed into Social Democrats) were keeping on a pro-western and pro-liberal political line.

The new parties, in contrast, were not organized along the lines of socio-political cleavages. Instead they were employing the techniques of public relations and relying on the popularity of their leaders. The organization structures of these parties are poorly developed, except for the Labour Party which claims to have more than 13,000 members. The long – term efficiency of its mobilisation strategy, however, is doubtful as members of the party joined the party because of instrumental motives and apparently lack the sense of solidarity with the party.

Moreover, the new parties failed to mobilize and encapsulate their supporters. Instead of putting efforts to tie and discipline their voters through institutional intermediaries, they relied on populist appeals of the leaders and mass media-based electoral campaign. Their strategy was successful in the context of public disillusionment with the political establishment and, what is even more important, in the era of mass media election.

The partisan dealignment thesis in post – industrial societies is linked with the diminishing value of partisanship in contemporary politics (Dalton and

Weldon, 2007). As Dalton claims, general erosion of partisan attachments in advanced industrial societies is related with socioeconomic changes in the society and the transformation of the political context, i.e. changes in the technology of politics (Dalton, 2000, Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000, Dalton and Weldon, 2007). A shift from labour intensive campaigning to a capital intensive style of mass marketing, and increasing reliance of the parties on public financing diminishes the need for mass membership. Moreover, it changes the focus of the electoral campaign from mobilisation of collective identities to catch-all strategy and candidate-centred politics.

Even though dealignment thesis is primary applied to the post-industrial democracies, there is good evidence to claim that comparable trends are also present in new democracies (Dalton and Weldon, 2007). While in the beginning of the party system formation in Lithuania, electoral technologies were not used extensively because of the lack of know-how and financial resources, professionalization of electoral campaign and the use of new technologies increased substantially since 2000. The victory of new parties in parliamentary elections of 2000 and especially 2004 is linked with heavy use of media technologies in their electoral campaign. Moreover, the phenomenon of Rolandas Paksas and Viktor Uspaskich, the founder of the Labor Party, might be regarded as a direct consequence of mediatization of politics. For example, the popularity of Viktor Uspaskich is related with a popular Lithuanian political TV show “Dviračio šou”. Being a member of parliament in 2000–2003, Viktor Uspaskich was used as a prototype of a popular character in the TV show, and it often believed that this laid the foundation for the subsequent rise of his popularity.

In conclusion, diminishing importance of the “transitional” communist – anticommunist cleavage eroded the partisan attachment of Lithuanian voters to the old parties, organized along the cleavage. Moreover, the loyalty of the voters was diminished because of high dissatisfaction with the politics of the ruling parties. The new parties, challenging the political establishment, were not, however, rooted in the society. Instead they were using the advantages of new technologies and have transformed the political competition in Lithuania into candidate – centred politics and campaigns of public relations.

## Conclusions

In the article, the evidence was provided to support the claim that contrary to the logic of social learning model, partisanship in Lithuania is decreasing rather than increasing. The paper suggests that partisan attachment in Lithuania in the early 1990s was based on group solidarity rather than social learning of the voters. The communist – anti-communist social cleavage provided organisational and normative basis for the mobilisation of voters along partisan alignments. Together with the weakening normative element of the communist – anticommunist cleavage, however, the partisan attachment was gradually decreasing.

Even though the students of post-communist democracies seem to suggest that party systems in post-communist societies have been formed from above and are lacking social roots, the case of Lithuania reveals that the old parties, established in the beginning of the party system formation, had a great deal of loyal supporters and quite a few members. The new parties, on the other hand, are floating above the society.

The differences between the old and the new parties in Lithuania are mainly apparent when analysing the reasons of joining a party and motives for keeping up partisan involvement. While members of the old parties are mainly motivated by value orientations and emotional engagement, and group solidarity, the membership of the new parties is based on instrumental motives and rational decision. Lacking social and normative grounds, these parties are not able to attach their voters and to develop ties with their electorate. Instead they are using successfully anti-party sentiments of the population and mass media-based electoral technologies.

A phenomenon of new parties, trying to reach broad segments of the electorate, using an anti-establishment rhetoric and focusing on the novelty *per se* is not unique to Lithuania (Bågenholm & Johansson, 2005). It seems that institutional and media-related transformations of partisan politics that are discussed in Western Europe are evident in post-communist societies even more than in the West. Using picturesque words of Lithuanian philosopher Arūnas Sverdiolas (2006: 42), “We were going our own speed and in some cases we went further than the others. (...) With the tail of an eye we notice how the West comes up slowly and gingerly, using a parallel road.”

The paper supports the claim of Dalton and Weldon (2007) that “the erosion of mass-based parties that personally engage the citizenry is a global phenomenon”; therefore it challenges their conclusion about the optimistic potential for new democracies to develop partisan ties and stabilize voting behaviour. The case of Lithuania suggests that the chances for building partisan attachments of the citizenry in post-communist societies are reduced both by the post-communist attributes and world-wide developments.

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