The Institutionalization of Electoral and Party Systems in Postcommunist States

Jack Bielasiak

The development of electoral systems and political parties is essential for democracies to function well. Therefore, the institutionalization of viable parties within well-established electoral rules is critical to the consolidation of democracy in the former Communist world. While the need for such institutionalization is widely recognized, there is disagreement on the capacity of the postcommunist countries to entrench electoral systems and parties. This article addresses institutionalization through the analysis of electoral and party systems in East Europe and the former Soviet Union and provides comparison to earlier transitions in western Europe, southern Europe, and Latin America. It evaluates stability and change by placing the development of party systems in the theoretical debate about the maturity of the postcommunist democratic process, examining the regulations that govern elections and party behavior, appraising voter-party alignment in terms of electoral volatility, and assessing party fractionalization in terms of the number of effective parties competing in the new democracies.

Theorizing Party Systems in Postcommunism

Two theoretical perspectives prevail in the assessment of the postcommunist states' capacity to institutionalize competitive party systems. The *tabula rasa* perspective stresses the newness of the democratic experience and the propensity to form weak and fluid party configurations. The structure perspective emphasizes the coalescence of competitive politics around well-defined issues represented by established parties. The distinction involves different evaluations of the Communist past, of transition modes from Communism, and the of saliency of social cleavages' in the new polities.

The *tabula rasa* perspective posits weak party systems as a defining condition of the rapid breakdown of Communism.[1] Several factors give rise to the fragility of political society as it turns to competitive electoral procedures. First, Communism leveled socioeconomic differences and monopolized politics, contributing to an ero-

sion of intermediary infrastructures capable of organizing interests and forging voter-party links.[2] Second, market transformations created uncertainty and dislocations.[3] Individuals could not predict expected outcomes, and political preferences were delayed. Third, economic, social, cultural, and political innovations necessitated multiple tasks that made difficult the selection of most salient issues by the electorate.[4] Inchoate social positions and policy preferences produce weak political identities and contribute to fickle support for parties and to shifting voting patterns.

Beyond this indeterminate sociological picture is a political claim: the supply side of politics is elastic, and entrepreneurs face few barriers to entry into the electoral game. The removal of the Communist monopoly provides opportunities for many aspiring leaders to vie for power. Because existing parties or ideologies have not yet captured segments of the mass public, political opportunities are expansive. Organizations split or regroup to advance new causes; party programs are blurred; and politicians appear from nowhere to try their luck. With so many competing power claimants, voters' choices become even more confusing. Thus, party support is highly indeterminate, with rates of volatility between elections and the number of parties in the polity higher than in institutionalized systems. The fractionalization and volatility contribute to political chaos, which brings experimentation with institutional provisions: electoral rules become susceptible to manipulation in the hope of devising more settled party systems.

The structure perspective, in contrast, sees the postcommunist states as defined party systems. The political and sociological arguments here rely respectively on transition trajectories and policy links between electorates and parties. One political argument concerns a path-dependent process that encompasses Communist regime type, the mode of transition, and regime-opposition balance that affect electoral engineering.[5] Paths vary. Some lead to unstable political outcomes, but others produce well-defined party systems. Other scholars emphasize an electoral "filter," a give and take of competitive politics that funnels the open postcommunist space into a structure defined by political parties representative of constituencies and social divisions.[6]

This view of stable politics is supported by surveys that reveal voters' distinct ideological and policy preferences. Socioeconomic differentiation is well ingrained during the transition phase, taking the form of economic, cultural, ethnic, or demographic cleavages; these social divisions create identities and interests that convert into party preferences.[7] This conversation takes place even if there is no prior history of party identification or if the social capital of intermediary associations is underdeveloped, for socioeconomic positions provide sufficient cues for strategic political behavior.[8] The argument is not that the postcommunist party systems are consolidated but that "citizens and politicians learn to act on well-understood self-interests in new democracies quite rapidly," moving "toward durable features shaping the new polities for some time to come."[9] In contrast to the *tabula rasa* emphasis on uncer-

tain and fleeting patterns, the structure argument stresses that interests are crucial markers for political identities even in the uncertain conditions of postcommunist transformation. These identities form voting preferences that sharpen party systems in a variety of ways, depending on the nature of Communist regimes, path-dependent trajectories, and the strength of political forces during the transition.

These contrasting visions concern the extent of institutionalization in postcommunist politics. In the *tabula rasa* perspective, the electoral and party systems are weak and fluid. In the structure perspective, they are crystallized and consistent. To date, empirical evidence on electoral and party systems is mixed. Surveys suggest that the postcommunist political space is understandable to the electorate, which is able to identify party positions along the policy spectrum. There is also evidence of rapid change in public opinion preferences for parties and of extensive swings in voters' support from election to election.[10] The links between constituencies and parties appear weak, despite the classification of parties along issue positions.

To address the debate requires an examination of institutionalization, the extent to which the process of party formation and electoral competition is "well established and widely known, if not universally accepted."[11] The first aspect of institutionalization looks to the development of the electoral system by focusing on the "set of laws and party rules that regulate electoral competition between and within parties."[12] The emphasis is on the political engineering of rules. These rules influence the mechanical and strategic effects of voting regulations on the expectations and actions of political entrepreneurs and voters. Institutionalization signifies a consensus on the "rules of the game" that endure beyond the initial design of competitive politics, without subsequent tampering in the electoral regulations.[13]

The second factor in institutionalization centers on "patterned interactions in the competition among parties."[14] The focus is not on laws but on political actors and the extent of their support over time. The standard measures used to evaluate party systems in enduring democracies, the extent of electoral volatility and the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP), are employed to gauge party structures in emerging democracies in the decade since the collapse of Communism.[15] This approach also enables comparisons with emerging party systems in prior episodes of democratization.

The Institutionalization of Electoral Systems

The stability of party competition is predicated on political behavior that can count on consistent electoral regulations. Major or frequent rule changes are bound to disrupt strategies of political entrepreneurs, to create uncertainty about future payoffs, and to produce new mechanical and psychological consequences.[16] Mechanical

effects alter the method of translating votes into seats, changing the payoff for parties. Psychological effects shorten the time horizon for political calculations. Furthermore, established rules contribute to political accommodation that fosters stability, while uncertain regulations force more intense rivalry among political actors.[17]

The *tabula rasa* perspective presents an image of institutional experimentation that echoes the chaotic environment of the transition. The expectation is for repeated adjustments in the rules of the electoral game. The structure perspective's emphasis on the stability of postcommunist politics rests on an institutional foundation that remains consistent, with only minor modifications to "the only game in town." Which electoral changes are sufficiently important to alter either the mechanical effect of the vote to seat conversion or the strategic conduct of party leaders and voters? Clearly, revamping the electoral formula elicits new patterns of political competition, especially if change is between single member districts (SMD) and proportional representation (PR). For example, plurality elections in single member districts often lead to two party competition, that is, Duverger's law, while proportional representation fosters multipartism. Changes between single member districts and proportional representation therefore reduce the chances of institutionalizing party competition.

Table 1 outlines electoral rule changes in the democratizing states of East Europe and the former Soviet Union. The time frame begins with the first contested elections, which in some countries took place during the breakdown of the Communist system. These elections allowed the opposition to challenge the ruling parties by reinterpreting existing laws to open elections to multicandidate competition. The breakaway elections facilitated the mobilization of social or nationalist movements opposed to the regime and placed on the political agenda the issue of whether and how to engineer a new electoral system.[18] While contested, the breakaway elections (1989 in Poland and 1990 in the Yugoslav and Soviet republics) were different from the founding elections of the democratic period, which were the starting point for fully competitive politics.[19] The period between the breakaway and the founding elections is an important indicator of electoral engineering during the first gasp of democratization.

Transforming the Electoral Formula For the most important rule alteration, the electoral formula, there is one clear trend: transformations in the direction of proportional representation. There is no instance of movement in the opposite direction, from proportional representation to single member districts. Change occurs by the replacement of either an exclusively single member district formula by full proportional representation, single member districts by mixed electoral systems, or mixed systems by full proportional representation. In the postcommunist states the mixed

Table 1 Changes in the Electoral Systems of Postcommunist States

Country	*Elections*	*Electoral Formula*	*Assembly Size*	*District*	*Legal Threshold*
Albania	1991-92	SMD runoff to Mixed	250 to 140	250 to 100 SMD,1 PR	
	1992-96	Compensation to Hare		100 to 115 SMD and PR 40 to 25	
	1996-97		140 to 155	PR: 25 to 40	4% to 2%
Bulgaria	1990-91	Mixed to PR d'Hondt	400 to 240	PR tier: 28 to 31 MM	
Croatia	1990-92	SMD runoff to Mixed	80 to 138	64 to 28 SMD	
	1992-95		138 to 127	PR: 60 to 80 1 N to 10 MM	3% to 5%
	1995-00	Mixed to PR d'Hondt	127 to 151		5% D
Czech R.	1992-96		Uni- to Bicameral		
					4% to 5%
Hungary	1990-94	SMD runoff to Mixed			
Macedonia	1994-98	SMD,NL to PR Hare			
Poland	1989-91	D: Hare to d'Hondt		37 to 52 MM	0 to 5%
	1991-93	N: StLague to d'Hondt			
			396 to 341	41 to 42 MM	0 to 3%
Romania	1990-92				
					3% to 5%
Slovakia	1990-92			4 MM to N	5% per Party in coalition
	1994-98				
			80 to 90	14 to 8	2.5% to 3.4% (3 seats)
Slovenia	1990-92				
		STV to PR Hare modif.	105 to 101	28 to 12	
Estonia	1990-92			12 to 11	
	1992-95				
		SMD run to PR St Lag	201 to 100		
Latvia	1990-93				4% to 5%
	1993-95				
Lithuania	1990-92	SMD runoff to Mixed			4% to 5%
	1992-96				
			380 to 104		
Moldova	1990-94	SMD runoff to PR	104 to 101		
	1994-98				
			1068 to 450		
Russia	1990-93	SMD runoff to Mixed			
Ukraine	1994-98	SMD runoff to Mixed			

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Electoral Systems: A World-Wide Comparative Study* (IPU, Geneva, 1993) and on line at www.ipu.org, and IFES, *Election Law Compendium of Central and Eastern Europe* (Kyiv, 1995).
SMD: Single Member District; PR: Proportional Representation; MM: Multimember; D: District; N: National; NL: National List.

systems involve parallel rather than compensatory voting. Each subtype operates as a distinct voting contest, and in most cases the single member district vote is not a plurality but a majority runoff. The strategic implications are important, for majority as opposed to plurality formulas do not discourage as extensively party entry into the

electoral arena. Instead, the runoff provides incentives for parties to engage in first-round competition in the hope of attracting sufficient support to enter coalitions in the second round.

The trend from single member districts to proportional representation is explained by the origins of competitive politics, during the breakdown but before the final collapse of Communism. During this phase in 1989–90, continuity with prior practice prevailed: elections under Communism took place in single member districts with majority voting.[20] With the Communist regimes still in place, these rules were maintained, while the process was opened up to candidates other than those affiliated with the ruling coalitions, for example, in the semifree June 1989 elections in Poland and the republican contests of the disintegrating Soviet and Yugoslav federations. The still influential Communist elite preferred single member districts to proportional representation, for it believed that a single member district vote would preserve its dominance through the personalization of the electoral contest.[21] This personalization would play down the negative image associated with the Communist party label, take advantage of the leaders' personal name recognition, and allow political pressures, all thought to be more beneficial in single member districts than under list proportional representation. These calculations account for the persistence of single member district formulas during the breakaway elections in all cases (except Estonia) of the collapsing Soviet Union. The same is true of the 1989 trendsetter, Poland, and of Croatia and Albania in the early 1990s. In other circumstances, where the regimes faced stronger opposition that favored proportional representation, negotiations often culminated in the compromise of mixed formulas, as in Hungary or the Estonian single transferable vote (STV) type.

The second wave of competitive voting, the founding elections, put an end to the prevailing single member district pattern. In Bulgaria, Poland, and Latvia proportional representation was adopted, and Estonia moved from the single transferable vote to conventional proportional representation. Elsewhere mixed systems, in which both single member districts and proportional representation coexisted, were devised, a practice evident in many post-Soviet republics. In this phase of democratization political power favored opposition forces that pushed for proportional representation to gain better representation. In the meantime, the expectations of the Communists to secure their position through single member districts had not been fulfilled. Instead, during the breakaway elections the ruling parties suffered symbolic or real defeats, as in Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania. These defeats were followed by negotiations that revised the electoral code, always in the direction of proportional representation, either as a full or a hybrid formula. Significantly, changes in electoral formula were confined to the period between the breakaway elections (1989–90) and the founding elections (1991–93), with the exception of Ukraine in 1998. Here, the continuing single member district, majority system contributed to a chaotic political

situation that generated pressures for a more viable mixed electoral system.[22]

These patterns testify to the resiliency of established rules. Institutional design is always difficult to change, since incumbent forces are reluctant to tamper with formulas that favor their political standing. Systemwide formula redesign took place early on during democratization but has been largely absent since the early 1990s. Still, attempts to fine-tune election rules through partial reforms have been evident throughout the region over the past decade.

Reforming Election Rules Many regulations govern the conduct of elections. Which are most germane to the stabilization of party systems? Evidence from voting studies shows that the most salient variables are district magnitude, legal threshold, and assembly size.[23] Lijphart has argued that a variance of 20 percent in these properties of the electoral code is sufficiently important to alter the rules of competition so that new mechanical effects or strategic incentives affect the stability of party systems.[24]

Evidence from the postcommunist world confirms that the district magnitude, legal threshold, and assembly size were subject to reform at various times in the past decade (see Table 1). As in the case of electoral formulas, adjustments in the regulations especially for assembly size and district magnitude predominated during the early time period. For assembly size the trend is towards a reduction in size. The abandonment of the large and largely symbolic legislatures of the Communist era for more manageable legislative houses occurred in Russia, Latvia, Moldova, and Albania in the early 1990s. These changes signaled less an alteration in democratic rules than a shift from Communist era to new practices. Adjustments on this dimension at other times are insignificant, falling below Lijphart's 20 percent change criterion. Assembly size is largely constant during the postcommunist period.

Alterations in voting district magnitude followed a similar trend. More important shifts occurred early on, and small adjustments, in the later period. Most experimentation transpired in Albania, a situation explained by the prolonged instability of its democratic solution.[25] Competing political forces there have sought to manipulate voting results by shifting district boundaries from election to election. Another important change took place in Poland between 1991 and 1993; the shift from thirty-seven to fifty-two electoral districts (a magnitude decline from 10.6 to 7.5) was part of the reform to curb excessive fragmentation.[26] Two other cases of district change are evident during this time. In Croatia the number of single member district plurality seats was reduced, while the seats distributed by national proportional representation expanded from sixty to eighty. In Slovakia the four multimember proportional representation districts gave way to a single nationwide constituency. The effect in both cases was to move to higher magnitude, more favorable to proportionality and the representation of more parties. Yet this trend was mitigated by the simultaneous increase in the threshold for party representation in parliament.[27]

Varying the threshold is a prevailing reform in the postcommunist electoral systems. In all cases, with the exception of the 1997 Albanian change, the legal barrier for representation was raised. At times a threshold was introduced where previously there had been none, as in the elections in Romania in 1992, Albania in 1992, and Poland in 1993. In the other cases the minimum requirement for entry into the legislature was increased, in the majority of instances from 4 to 5 percent. Thresholds were increased, for example, in Hungary in 1994, Latvia in 1995, and Lithuania in 1996. Higher increments were evident in Croatia in 1995 and Slovakia in 1992. All the changes in the legal barrier were significant systemic transformations according to Lijphart's 20 percent criterion. They altered the vote to seat conversion sufficiently to affect the parties' prospects for entry into legislative politics.

Most adjustments took place in the initial period of the transition from Communist to democratizing politics, between the breakaway and the founding elections. In many ways, the latter were the true starting points for the new democracies. There was a propensity for the early institutionalization of election codes. There are but three transformations of electoral formulas subsequent to the founding elections. Even the other attempts at reform, involving district magnitude, legal threshold, and assembly size are few in number. They are meaningful primarily for the legal threshold, the easiest institutional mechanism to manipulate. This evidence supports the argument for defined electoral institutions, in place early during the transitions to democracy, rather than the more inchoate election rules associated with the *tabula rasa* perspective.

How does the postcommunist pattern compare to the institutionalization of electoral rules in earlier phases of democratization in other regions of the world? A comparison across transitions from authoritarian to democratic politics in western Europe, southern Europe, Latin America, and subregions of the former Communist countries shows that reforms were more common in postcommunist than in the other cases (see Table 2).[28] Alterations in the electoral formula were on average twice as frequent there than in the other regions (.86 versus .45). Yet this pattern is again due to changes at the very start of the transition, between the breakaway and the founding elections. If founding elections are used as the starting point, the difference between the postcommunist and the earlier cases of democratization is removed (.46 versus .45). For the other reforms, changes in assembly size vary significantly across the regions, with the greatest experimentation in Southeast Europe and Latin America. Changes in district magnitude and legal threshold occurred more often in the postcommunist cases, although many of them were concentrated in the countries of Southeast Europe. The institutional instability of the Balkan countries thus accounts for most of the differences in electoral system between the postcommunist and the other democratizing states.

The data in Table 2 do not provide a clear demarcation between the Communist and noncommunist examples but rather emphasize the importance of regional and

Table 2 Number of Electoral Reforms in Emerging Democracies

Country	Electoral Formula	District Size[a]	Threshold	Assembly Size
Post-war West Europe				
Austria (1945-56)	0	0	0	0
France (1945-56)	1	1	0	1
Germany (1949-57)	0	2	1	0[b]
Italy (1946-58)	1	1	1	2
Region total	2	4	2	3
Region average	.5	1	.5	.75
Southern Europe				
Greece (1974-85)	1	0	1	0
Portugal (1975-87)	0	0	0	0
Spain (1977-89)	0	0	0	0
Region total	1	0	1	0
Region average	.3	0	3	0
Latin America				
Argentina (1983-93)	0	na	0	1
Bolivia (1979-93)	1	0	0	1
Brazil (1982-90)	0	na	NA	2
Paraguay (1983-93)	1	na	0	2
Region total	2	--	0	6
Region average	.5		0	1.5
East Central Europe				
Czech R. (1990-98)	0	0	0	0
Hungary (1990-98)	0	0	1	0
Poland (1989-97)	2[c]	1	1	0
Slovakia (1990-98)	0	1	2	0
Region total	2	2	4	0
Region average	.5	.5	1	0
Southeast Europe				
Albania (1991-97)	2	2	2	2
Bulgaria (1990-97)	1	1	0	1
Croatia (1990-00)	2[c]	2	2	3
Romania (1990-96)	0	1	1	1
Slovenia (1990-96)	0[c]	1	1	1
Region total	5	7	6	8
Region average	1	1.4	1.2	1.6
Baltic States				
Estonia (1990-99)	1[c]	2	0	1
Latvia (1990-98)	1[c]	0	1	1
Lithuania (1990-96)	1[c]	0	1	0
Region total	3	2	2	2
Region average	1	.6	.6	.6
FSU Europe				
Moldova (1990-98)	1[c]	0	0	2
Russia (1990-99)	1[c]	0	0	1
Ukraine (1990-98)	1[c]	0	0	0
Region total	3	0	0	3
Region average	1	0	0	1

[a] To avoid a duplicate count, changes in district size due to electoral formula changes are not counted.
[b] The assembly size in Germany can vary with the size and distribution of the compensation vote tiers.
[c] For these states, the time period begins with the first competitive, breakaway elections.
Sources: Calculations from data in Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Developments* (Geneva: Annuals)) and on line at www.ipu.org; IFES, *Election Law Compendium of Central and Eastern Europe* (Kyiv, 1995); Mark P. Jones, "A Guide to the Electoral Systems of the Americas," *Electoral Studies* 14 (March 1995); and Arend Lijphart, *Electoral Systems and Party Systems* (Oxford UP, 1994).

subregional confluences. The pattern of electoral reforms in the postcommunist states was not unique or significantly distinguishable from the preceding transitions. Prior regimes and transition paths helped to structure electoral systems and in that way to institutionalize competitive politics.[29] On balance, the comparative evidence and the specific pattern of postcommunist adjustments confirm the relative stabilization of election rules.

Electoral Volatility

Does the institutionalization of electoral rules in postcommunism lead to consistent voting behavior and party competition? The linkage between the stability of institutional rules and the consistency of electoral choices remains uncertain.[30] In many instances stable rules and stable party politics go hand in hand, as in the democratizing experiences of postwar western and southern Europe.[31] In the Latin American transitions, however, the relative stability of electoral laws continued to foster inchoate party systems.[32] In light of the mixed evidence, it is imperative to ascertain the stability of postcommunist party systems by examining the shifts in public support for political parties over time, as well as to consider the number of political actors active in the emerging democracies. The first dimension of this analysis relies on the Pedersen index of electoral volatility, which measures net changes in popular vote across consecutive elections.[33]

There are several noteworthy patterns evident in the data on volatility (see Table 3).[34] First, previous democratization periods in postwar western and southern Europe exhibit average electoral changeover of 11 and 16 percent across the initial elections. Austria and Portugal are the most stable party systems, while Italy and Spain are at the other end of the spectrum. Even so, the more volatile countries in the West would place towards the lower end of voting turnover in the emerging party systems of Latin America and the postcommunist countries, where average volatility for both is 28 percent. These states show a more fluid political environment; their volatility is twice that of the earlier democratizers (28 versus 14 percent). Clearly, party system institutionalization is more drawn out in the former Communist states than in their western counterparts.

There are, however, important variations among states previously under Communist rule. Vote switchover is significantly higher in the former Soviet republics than in the bloc countries. The average volatility of the latter is just over 20 percent, while that of the Baltic states is 31 percent and that of Russia and Moldova is 42 percent. The explanation for the difference may be in the more durable and controlling Soviet regime, which precluded political movements outside the Communist party until the eve of its collapse. There were few attachments between political actors and the public, unlike in several East European states with a more

Table 3 Average Electoral Volatility and the Effective Number of Electoral Parties in Emerging Party Systems

Country	Average Volatility	N of Election Periods	Average ENEP	N of Elections
Postwar West Europe				
Austria	7.1	3 (1945-56)	2.6	4 (1945-56)
France	10.4	3 (1945-51)	4.8	4 (1945-51)
Germany	13.9	3 (1949-61)	3.5	4 (1949-61)
Italy	14.1	3 (1945-58)	3.9	4 (1946-58)
Region average	11.4	12	3.7	16
Southern Europe				
Greece	18.4	3 (1974-85)	3.1	3 (1974-81)
Portugal	8.7	3 (1975-80)	3.6	3 (1975-79)
Spain	21.9	3 (1977-86)	3.8	3 (1977-82)
Region Average	16.3	9	3.5	9
Latin America				
Argentina	12.7	5 (1983-93)	3.2	6 (1983-93)
Bolivia	33.0	4 (1979-93)	4.7	4 (1979-93)
Brazil	40.9	2 (1982-90)	6.7	2 (1986-90)
Paraguay	25.8	2 (1983-93)	2.1	2 (1989-93)
Region Average	28.1	13	4.2	14
East Central Europe				
Czech Rep.	12.8	3 (1990-98)	5.2	4 (1990-98)
Hungary	27.4	2 (1990-98)	5.5	3 (1990-98)
Poland	24.6	2 (1991-97)	9.6	3 (1991-97)
Slovakia	17.1	3 (1990-98)	5.2	4 (1990-98)
Region Average	20.5	10	6.4	14
Southeast Europe				
Albania	23.8	3 (1991-97)	2.5	4 (1991-97)
Bulgaria	18.0	3 (1990-97)	3.4	4 (1990-97)
Croatia	18.1	3 (1990-00)	3.7	3 (1992-00)
Romania	19.6	3 (1990-00)	5.1	4 (1990-00)
Slovenia	22.0	3 (1990-00)	6.6	3 (1992-00)
Region Average	20.3	15	4.3	18
Baltic States				
Estonia	25.9	2 (1992-99)	7.2	3 (1992-99)
Latvia	29.0	2 (1993-98)	7.5	3 (1993-98)
Lithuania	39.2	2 (1992-00)	5.5	3 (1992-00)
Region Average	31.4	6	6.7	9
FSU Europe				
Moldova	36.6	1 (1994-98)	4.8	2 (1994-98)
Russia (PR)	47.3	2 (1993-99)	8.3	3 (1993-99)
Ukraine	n.a.		6.6	2 (1994-98)
Region Average	41.9	3	6.6	7

Sources: Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair, *Identity, Competition, and Electoral Availability* (Cambridge UP, 1990); Thomas T. Mackie and Richard Rose, *International Almanac of Electoral History* (MacMillan, 1991); Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Developments* (Geneva: Annuals)); Peter Mair, *Party System Change* (Clarendon, 1997); Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, eds., *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford UP, 1995); and Leonardo Morlino, *Democracy Between Consolidation and Crisis* (Oxford UP, 1998).

visible opposition history. Yet the breakdown of the USSR produced a host of political movements competing for votes. Given the turbulent post-Soviet transitions, the voters' tendency has been to alternate support between incumbent and opposition parties as a means to register dissatisfaction with government policy. Such alternation was true, for example, at various times in the Baltic states, where government parties were renounced by voters in favor of opposition groups from different parts of the political spectrum. This juxtaposition among formerly Communist, nationalist, and populist forces was evident in the first part of the 1990s in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.[35]

The swings between incumbent and opposition parties are the principal reason for the high volatility across all elections in the region (see Table 4). The extreme volatility in Russia is due also to the rapid appearance of new political actors, which accounts for two of the three highest indices (42 percent and 52 percent) for all postcommunist elections. The 1993–1995 pattern reveals the switch in voting support from the liberal to the Communist camp, as well as electoral transfers within the blocs. The 1995–1999 volatility reflects the impact of newly founded "parties of power" that managed to attract almost 37 percent of the 1999 vote; altogether at the time new parties in Russia attracted 45 percent of the electorate.[36] The intrusion of new organized players into politics has made Russia unusually susceptible to the winds of change, even by the high volatility standards of postcommunism.

For most countries in the former Soviet Union and East Europe the volatility index remains high across the past decade. The exceptions are due either to the dominance of one particular movement or to the deployment of a competitive party system around a cluster of parties. Croatia until the 1995 election exemplifies the first trend; the main nationalist party attracted a strong plurality (over 40 percent) of voters' support. The second path was taken by the Czech Republic; its 13 percent average volatility over four elections is the lowest among former Communist states and compares favorably to other emerging party systems. In Romania splinter groups from the establishment National Salvation Front and the opposition attracted similar vote shares, resulting in 12 percent volatility between 1992 and 1996. In both Croatia and Romania the index goes up for the 2000 elections; in all postcommunist cases except the Czech Republic volatility for the latest round of elections remains unusually high.

There is little change in volatility over time, across the three election cycles of the past decade. For the East European countries, there is a slight temporal decline in party system fluidity from 21 percent (n = 8) in the first phase to 17 percent (n = 9) in the second period, while for the Baltic republics there is a slight increase from 30 percent (n = 3) to 32 percent (n = 3). In the seven East European cases that have undergone a fourth postcommunist election the volatility index climbs back up to 22 percent (n = 7). This increase was driven by the high change in 1996–1997 in

Table 4 Elections in Postcommunist States

Country Date	N Party Lists in Election	VOL.	ENEP	Country Date	N Party Lists in Election	VOL.	ENEP	Country Date	N Party Lists in Election	VOL.	ENEP
Albania				**Hungary**				**Estonia**			
1991	11		2.15	1990	54		6.76	1992	38		8.88
1992	11	28.8	2.20	1994	34	26.4 PR	5.54	1995	30	28.4	5.93
1996	24	7.8	2.80	1998	26	28.5 PR	4.30	1999	12	23.4	6.90
1997	23	34.7	2.87								
Bulgaria				**Poland**				**Latvia**			
1990	37		2.75	1991	111		14.69	1993	28		6.04
1991	41	13.8	4.19	1993	35	26.8	9.81	1995	26	33.5	9.62
1994	48	17.5	3.87	1997	21	22.3	4.55	1998	21	24.5	7.03
1997	n.a.	22.8	2.99								
Croatia				**Romania**				**Lithuan.**			
1990	36+		n.a.	1990	73		2.25	1992	25 SM 22 PR		3.83
1992	15	16.9	4.26	1992	83	25.5	7.04	1996	27 SM 25 PR	28.9	7.20
1995	28	10.6	4.07	1996	n.a.	12.4	6.10	2000	n.a.	49.6	5.58
2000	n.a.	26.7	2.94	2000	28	21.0	5.24	**Moldova**			
								1994	13		3.85
								1998	15	36.6	5.79
Czech R.				**Slovakia**				**Russia**			
1990*	22*		3.18	1990*	22*		5.76	1993	13		7.58 PR
1992*	41*	12.5	7.69	1992*	41*	17.9	4.22	1995	43 PR	42.5	10.68 PR
1996	16	18.5	5.33	1994	18	13.3	5.37	1999	26 PR	52.1	6.80 PR
1998	13	7.4	4.73	1998	n.a.	20.1	5.36				
				Slovenia				**Ukraine**			
				1992	25	18.4	8.40	1994	28		2.46
				1996	24	25.4	6.34	1998	30 PR		10.78 PR
				2000	16	22.1	5.10				

* Refers to the Czechoslovak Republic, although the results are for each of the National Councils of the constituent Czech and Slovak republics (with the exception of the number of party lists for 1990 and 1992).
Sources: IPU, *Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Developments* (Geneva, 1990 to 1997 Annuals) and on line at www.ipu.org; Richard Rose, Neil Munro, and Tom Mackie, *Elections in Central and Eastern Europe since 1990* (Glasgow, 1998); Robert G. Moser, "The Impact of Parliamentary Electoral Systems in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 13 (July-September 1997), 284-302; and Vello Pettai and Marcus Kreuzer "Party Politics in the Baltic States: Social Bases and Institutional Context," *East European Politics and Societies* 13 (Winter 1999), 148-189.

Albania, although Croatia, Slovakia, and Romania also showed significant increases in volatility in this period (see Table 4). The exception is the Czech Republic. Its volatility declined from 18 to 7 percent, but its pattern remains unique.[37] For the latest round of elections, thirteen states are at an index of over 20 percent, and only the Czech Republic is below this level. This level of instability is comparable to the

party systems of Latin America.[38] It is considerably higher than the level of western European states during all phases of their postwar development. [39]

Overall, volatility in the voting cycles of the postcommunist states has been high and remains high after a decade of democratization. There is a significant difference between these emerging party systems and equivalent trends in earlier transitions. Postwar West European countries and southern European countries in the 1970s were able to move ahead with the institutionalization of party support faster than many of the states undergoing the third wave of democratization in Latin America and the postcommunist regions. Despite the consolidation of election rules, an open electoral marketplace has persisted. In many states parties lose or gain major voting support from election to election. Such losses or gains are often associated with economic transformation and social dislocation, when voters turn against the incumbent parties in favor of the opposition, as in the Baltic countries, Hungary, and Poland. Cultural factors are also at play, for example, in Poland and Hungary, where the position of the church and the reformist nature of the Communist regime, respectively, have influenced the electorate's choices. Such swings in support are possible precisely because the impact of policy is not mitigated by a strong party system in which voters identify with and are loyal to specific parties. Instead, parties often appear on the political scene or greatly increase previously minor electoral support, and other parties disappear as viable contenders. The resulting volatility and the extensive multipartism of the postcommunist countries signify the lack of an institutionalized party system.

The Effective Number of Electoral Parties

The number of functioning parties is considered critical in the formation of stable party systems.[40] The consensus is that the number of parties helps define political space and party placement along that space, affecting voters' choices at election time. Pedersen, for example, found that the larger the number of parties is, the less distance there will be between them on policy positions, producing a greater likelihood of vote switching between elections.[41] A study of Latin American systems concluded that ideological polarization increased with the number of parties and rendered democratic politics more difficult.[42] These findings confirm that the "effective number of parties" and the extent of fragmentation are important indicators of institutionalization.[43]

On this dimension, too, there is a difference between the former Communist and the other party systems. The average effective number of electoral parties for western Europe, southern Europe, and Latin America is 3.8, while for the four subregions of postcommunism the averages range from 4.3 to 6.7. Thus, the number of actors in the new democratic politics produces a more fractured political scene in the former

Communist states than in prior episodes of transition. Even where political volatility was high, as in most Latin American states, the number of parties in the polity was closer to the West European norm than in the postcommunist countries. High volatility in the latter comes hand in hand with the proliferation of political parties, giving shape to a more fluid political environment where competition for dominance is diffused among several political actors.

Both the high volatility and the high number of electoral parties create tendencies towards party systems characterized by "extreme pluralism."[44] In the absence of an ideological dimension, the classification employed by Sartori is limited here to the number of relevant political actors, which reveals systemic properties facilitating conditions of extreme pluralism. Of the forty-eight elections with data on the effective number of electoral parties, thirty-five show an effective number of parties higher than 4.0, and of these eighteen have more than 6.0 effective parties in the polity. For individual countries, the highest averages across the past decade are for Poland (9.6), Russia (8.3), Latvia (7.5), Estonia (7.2), and Slovenia (6.6), compared to France (4.8), Spain (3.8), and Brazil (6.7) with the highest effective number of electoral parties in prior democratic transitions.

At the other end of the scale, there are few cases that can be characterized as two party systems. There are only three instances with an effective number of electoral parties of less than 2.5 that approximate such a party structure. In addition, six elections in the 2.5–2.99 range and four elections in the 3.0–3.99 range are likely to represent a limited pluralism with several political competitors (see Table 4). The lower effective number of electoral parties are found either in the early phase of the postcommunist period or later in primarily two countries. The former reflects the dominance of a competitive axis between forces associated with the prior regimes and the umbrella oppositions that grouped several anticommunist positions.[45] A typical example was Bulgaria in the 1990 election; the successor Bulgarian Socialist Party won 47 percent of the vote, while the opposition Union of Democratic Forces won 36 percent. Another pattern was evident in the 1990 elections to the Czech council; the opposition Civic Forum won 49 percent of the vote, while three other parties each attracted around 10 percent of the vote, resulting in 3.2 effective electoral parties .

Throughout the region, however, the initial tendency towards limited pluralism was not sustained over time, with two exceptions. In Bulgaria, the effective number of electoral parties declined after the 1991 elections; Bulgaria reflects a limited form of political competition, although the UDF continues as a coalition of several parties. Albania is the only country where the effective number of electoral parties is consistently below 3.0. The Albanian transition reveals a paradox in the nature of postauthoritarian politics: the continuing impasse between the successor party and the opposition creates a condition that would be perceived as stabilizing in established systems, the predominance of two parties. In contrast, elsewhere in the region

the opening of democratization beyond the initial Communist-anticommunist politics allowed for the entry of multiple political entrepreneurs along a wider political spectrum.

This opening has led to party systems with too many competitors for effective strategic behavior by voters, thus producing the extreme indices of volatility and effective number of electoral parties that characterize most postcommunist states. Compared to other party systems around the world, the effective number of electoral parties in the East European and former Soviet states is among the highest ever recorded.[46] The median effective number of electoral parties for the mid 1980s elections in the countries studied by Taagepera and Shugart is 2.8, while it is 5.5 for the postcommunist countries in this study. There is also a marked distinction within the emerging party systems represented in Table 3. The effective number of electoral parties averages 3.7 for countries outside and 6.0 for countries inside the former Communist orbit. These findings reinforce the prior evidence on electoral volatility and establish extensive party fragmentation in the postcommunist cases.

Measures for both volatility and the effective number of electoral parties indicate weak party institutionalization in the former Communist states. For the thirty-four election periods with data on electoral volatility, the majority of cases (twenty-two) are located in the space with volatility above 15 percent and the effective number of electoral parties above 4.0 (see Table 4). The remaining cases are confined primarily to the previously discussed Albanian and Bulgarian elections with a low number of parties. The Czech 1998 election, with low volatility but an effective number of electoral parties of 4.7, suggests a coalescence of voter support among the five major competitors.[47] This case demonstrates that declining electoral volatility does not necessarily lead to a reconfiguration of the political players relevant to the system. Instead, the initial competition among numerous parties gives way to the emergence of several key parties, reinforcing multipartism beyond the initial phase of democratization.

While multipartism is predominant throughout the postcommunist world, there is variation in the temporal trend between the former Soviet republics and the former bloc countries. Among the latter, the effective number of electoral parties declined over time after the founding elections, with the exception of Albania and Slovakia. In both these instances the profound crises associated with the ruling establishment realigned public support away from the incumbents to challengers, splintering votes and increasing the number of effective parties.[48] For the other East European states there is a downward temporal trend in the effective number of electoral parties. The most significant transformation took place in Poland; the highly diversified political scene in 1991 (14.7 effective electoral parties) gave way to a sharp reduction of parties by 1997 (4.5 effective electoral parties). Here, system engineering contributed to a more structured competitive pattern through the mechanical effects of election rules and strategic responses to the reforms. The extensive 1991 fragmentation, facil-

itated by a highly proportional representation system, produced difficulties in governing that led to electoral code revisions to reduce the effects of proportional representation in the earlier law. Fewer parties could then overcome the mechanical effects of the vote to seat count, contributing to electoral strategies that significantly lowered the number of lists at election time, from 111 in 1991 to thirty-seven in 1993 to twenty-one in 1997.

Poland illustrates the importance of strategic behavior in altering party systems. The opening of democratic politics in postcommunist Europe produced a plague of party competitors, often numbering in the dozens, but the evolutionary tendency is towards more manageable party competition. For the former bloc countries a steady readjustment is evident both in terms of the entities seeking entry into the political process and those finding sufficient support among the electorate. There has been a consistent decline in the number of lists presenting themselves to the voters at election time, although there are still too many supplicants, for example, twenty-six in Hungary and twenty-three in Albania. As to the effective number of electoral parties, a decrease over time is also visible, although the index remains unusually high by world standards, even in comparison to earlier periods of democratic transition.

For the Soviet successor states vacillation in the shaping of the party system is evident. In the Baltic republics the effective number of electoral parties (6.9, 7.0, and 5.6) in the latest round of elections was among the highest recorded for the entire postcommunist sample. Russia and Ukraine surpassed these numbers with respectively 10.7 in 1995 and 10.8 in 1998 in the proportional representation portion of their mixed electoral systems. The Russian temporal trend reflects a crisis prior to the 1993 elections, when several parties were declared ineligible due to "irregularities" and could not present their lists at the polls.[49] For the next parliamentary vote regulations allowed for broader participation, increasing the number of electoral aspirants from thirteen to forty-three in 1995, although the number of lists declined to twenty-six in 1999. Still, the dispersal of the vote among several contenders produced a high number of effective parties in all three elections. The change in the effective number of electoral parties in Ukraine reflects the transformation of the electoral system from a single member district runoff type in 1994 to a mixed electoral system in 1998. The switch in formula revealed the existing fragmentation, masked previously by an unusually high number of independent candidates.[50] While the number of competing party lists changed only slightly, the proportional representation portion of the ballot allowed numerous parties to obtain voters' support with more effect than under the exclusively single member district vote. The effective number of electoral parties in Ukraine in 1998 was the highest for the latest electoral round in all postcommunist states.

The overall picture for the former states of the USSR is of extensive fragmentation throughout the decade, both in regard to the high index of electoral volatility and the high number of effective parties. On these measures the former Soviet states

show more electoral fluidity and party fractionalization than their counterparts in East Europe. Still, for all the postcommunist regions the consolidation of party competition is elusive. The rates of volatility are among the highest for all electoral systems around the globe, comparable to the emerging party systems in Latin America. Party fragmentation is even more pronounced: the effective number of electoral parties for the postcommunist states is consistently among the highest for all emerging party systems. Even in comparison to earlier phases of democratic transition, the former Communist states exhibit intense party competition.

Conclusion

The empirical evidence on the institutionalization of electoral and party systems in the former Communist states is mixed. After a decade of democratic politics, conditions have surpassed the chaos and indeterminacy contemplated by the *tabula rasa* argument. Yet there is still no clear coalescence of competitive politics around established parties with strong constituencies, as envisaged by the structure proposition. In terms of the "rules" and "roots" components of party systems, divergent tendencies prevail.[51]

Competition between political parties is well regulated in the majority of postcommunist states. The predominant properties of electoral codes were settled by the time of the second generation elections. There have been few systemwide transformations of electoral formulas since the early phase of democratization. While electoral formula engineering was much in vogue during the period from the breakdown of Communism to the advent of free elections, subsequent reforms touched on more specific components of electoral regulations. Changes in district magnitude or assembly size have not been sufficiently extensive to alter systemic properties. More significant adjustments have been increases in the legal threshold, a response to persistent system fragmentation. Despite these alterations, the prevailing trend for electoral regulations is one of early stabilization.

What has been the effect of regulatory consolidation on voting patterns in postcommunism? Here the empirical record reveals consistently high rates of volatility. Support for political parties continues to shift from election to election, with volatility indices for the postcommunist states remaining among the highest in the world. This conclusion is true not only in comparison to established party systems, but also vis-à-vis earlier episodes of democratization in western and southern Europe. The rates for East European and former Soviet regions are comparable to the transition phase of the Latin American countries, a condition of instability that permeates these third wave democratization cases. The major shifts in party support indicate that, even if the electorate is able to identify party positions on issue dimensions, there is little attachment to specific parties.

The multipartism prevalent in the postcommunist states enhances the tendency to volatility, for voters have many available options among the numerous parties contending for power. Here the division between the postcommunist states and the rest of the world is even more pronounced than on the volatility measure. The effective number of electoral parties for the former exceeds those in all other regions, including Latin America. The high effective number of electoral parties is given additional credence by the continuing large number of electoral lists presenting their candidates for voter approval. There are still many players on the political scene, although some reduction over time is taking place. Nonetheless, political fragmentation and multipartism prevailed for most of the democratization decade.

A fuller account of the variations between the former Communist and earlier democratic transitions and in the subregions of the postcommunist world requires further exploration. Avenues for further analysis center around institutional, identity, and historical perspectives that resonate in the *tabula rasa* and structure perspectives of postcommunism.

The institutional approach posits the critical importance of electoral design on party development. In the former Communist states the commitment to proportional representation formulas, either in systemwide or mixed versions, signaled an opening of politics that was a marked contrast to the closed politics of the Communist monopoly. Proportional representation encouraged numerous political entrepreneurs to enter the political arena, initially facilitated by the absence of legal thresholds or by low legal thresholds. The resulting strategic incentives to test the rules of the democratic process attracted a wide variety of political actors from all corners of the ideological, historical, and policy spectrums.

The identity approach focuses on the nature of the political parties during the transitions. Kitschelt proposes a typology of charismatic, clientelistic, and mass parties, whose profile and composition determine the way parties respond to electoral incentives, including the willingness to compromise and form electoral alliances.[52] Here, the behavior of political entrepreneurs is the product of the interaction between election rules and the nature of political actors. The types of parties, in turn, are a function of the legacy of past regimes and transition modes.

Historical approaches stress path-dependent trajectories that focus on the posttotalitarian Communist past. One party rule in the USSR and East Europe severed party-constituency linkages to a much larger extent than equivalent effects in southern European and Latin American authoritarian regimes or the brief occupation of western Europe by totalitarian forces. As a result, it is more problematic for the postcommunist states to reconstruct the ties that bind citizens to specific political organizations. Similarly, the diversity of posttotalitarian experiences across the postcommunist states accounts for variations in their capacity to institutionalize new party systems.

The institutional, identity, and historical approaches may at first appear far apart. Yet in the context of postcommunist development they may have a reinforcing effect.

In so far as subregional variations in the postcommunist universe are salient, they are reflected in patterns of party system volatility and fragmentation. In that sense, at least, democratizing politics are defined by former regime type, transition mode, and the nature of new political actors. In some instances, the path may lead to a rapid configuration of stable parties supported by well-defined electorates. Other cases require more institutional time to affect the strategic behavior of elites and voters. Still other systems involve transition trajectories and political identities that are more resistant to institutionalization. The different paths, however, should not mask the fact that on balance the transition from Communism towards democracy is characterized foremost by the institutionalization of electoral systems, while the structuring of party systems remains to be fully accomplished in many states emerging from the Communist experience.

NOTES

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16. Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (New York: Wiley, 1954).
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28. The cases in Tables 2 and 3 for earlier transition periods are selected for comparability with the postcommunist states by controlling for time spans after the breakdown of authoritarian regimes.
29. Kitschelt, "Formation of Party Cleavages," pp. 449–55; Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, and Toka, pp. 21–42.
30. Mainwaring and Scully, eds., pp. 1–34.
31. Lijphart, chs. 2, 4; Leonardo Morlino, *Democracy between Consolidation and Crisis: Parties, Groups, and Citizens in Southern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), chs. 1, 4.
32. Compare Mark P. Jones, "A Guide to the Electoral Systems of the Americas," *Electoral Studies*, 14 (March 1995), 5–21 and Mainwaring and Scully, eds., pp. 1–34.
33. The formula for electoral volatility is $V = {}^{1}/_{2} \Sigma| v_{p,t} - v_{p,t-1} |$ where $v_{p,t}$ stands for the percentage of the vote obtained by a party at election t, and $v_{p,t-1}$ for the percentage in the previous election. Mogens N. Pedersen, "The Dynamics of European Party Systems: Changing Patterns of Electoral Volatility," *European Journal of Political Research*, 7 (March 1979), 4–5.
34. Some small discrepancies in the volatility of the former Communist states have been reported, due to the many party splits, unifications, and name changes. See Richard Rose, *What Is Europe* (HarperCollins, 1996), p. 153; Mair, p. 182; and Vello Pettai and Marcus Kreuzer, "Party Politics in the Baltic States: Social Bases and Institutional Context," *East European Politics and Societies*, 13 (Winter 1999), 165. To minimize errors and facilitate duplication of results, I follow the rules provided by Bartolini and Mair, pp. 311–12.
35. Pettai and Kreuzer, pp. 157–58.
36. Central Electoral Commission, March 27, 2000, at www.fci.ru.
37. An anonymous reviewer pointed out that public opinion polls suggest that at the next Czech election the pattern of declining volatility may be reversed.
38. Mainwaring, pp. 71–72.
39. Pedersen, pp. 7–9; Bartolini and Mair, Appendix 2.

40. Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 131–200.
41. Pedersen, pp. 14–15.
42. Mainwaring and Scully, eds., p. 31.
43. Markku Laakso and Rein Taagepera, "Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe," *Comparative Political Studies*, 12 (1979), 3–27. The formula is $N = 1/\sum p_i^2$ where N is the effective number of parties and p_i is the fractional share of votes for the *i*-th party.
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45. Krzysztof Jasiewicz, "Structures of Representation," in Stephen White, Judy Batt, and Paul G. Lewis, eds., *Developments in East European Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 140–46.
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50. The 1994 effective number of electoral parties (2.5) masks the large number of independents that dominated the election. The effective number of candidates per district at the time was 5.4, which is a better indication of political reality. The 1998 proportional representation tier revealed fragmentation of the party system in more striking terms. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this point.
51. Mainwaring, pp. 68–73.
52. Kitschelt, pp. 447–72.