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**University College London
School of Slavonic and East European Studies**

**Potemkin Democracy?
Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Latvia**

**Thesis submitted for the PhD Degree by
Daunis Auers**

2006

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Abstract

This thesis considers political parties in post-communist Latvia and their role in democratic consolidation. It begins with a theoretical discussion of democratic consolidation and political parties, particularly focusing on the contemporary post-communist literature. It argues that a democracy is consolidated when not just the procedural, but the qualitative (behavioural, attitudinal, and democratic skills) dimensions of democracy are established. The next chapter places contemporary Latvia into a historical context by tracing the development of Latvian national and political consciousness from the mid-nineteenth century to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Chapter three discusses the extent of democratic consolidation in post-communist Latvia by examining four dimensions of contemporary democracy: political society, economic society, civil society and ethnic relations. Chapters four and five apply three complimentary theoretical approaches – institutional, organizational, and sociological – to the study of political parties in Latvia. The final chapter analyzes public attitudes in Latvia through the political culture model, and discusses the contemporary model of Latvian democracy.

The thesis argues that Latvia is undoubtedly a procedural democracy, with regular elections, democratic institutions and other, formal, instruments of democratic government. But at the same time, Latvian democracy lacks the informal attitudinal and behavioural dimensions that consolidate democracy as 'the only game in town.' Moreover, while Latvian political parties – which are extremely wealthy, but small in terms of membership, organization and ideology – possess the formal attributes of party, they lack the qualitative dimensions. This 'potemkin' model of both democracy and party is the source of ongoing public disenchantment and disengagement with Latvian democratic political life. The thesis concludes that political parties are the key actors in the democratic consolidation process, and the major cause of the attitudinal and behavioural weaknesses in contemporary Latvian democracy.

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Abbreviations of Latvian political parties

DCP	Democratic Centre Party (Demokrātiskā Centra Partija)
DP	Darba Partija (Labour Party)
DPS	Democratic Party 'Master' (Demokrātiskā Partija Saimnieks)
JC	New Centre (Jaunais Centrs)
JD	New Democrats (Jaunie Demokrāti)
JL	New Era (Jaunais Laiks)
JP	New Party (Jaunā Partija)
KDS	Christian Democrat Union (Kristīgi Demokrātiskā Savienība)
LC	Latvia's Way (Latvijas Ceļš)
LKP	Latvian Communist Party (Latvijas Komunistiskā Partija)
LPP	Latvia's First Party (Latvijas Pirmā Partija)
LSDSP	Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party (Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskās Strādnieku Partija)
LTF	Latvian Popular Front (Latvijas Tautas Fronte)
LuV	For Latvia and Ventspils (Latvijai un Ventspilij)
LVP	Latvian Unity Party (Latvijas Vienības Partija)
LZS	Latvian Farmer's Union (Latvijas Zemnieku Savienība)
PCTVL	For Human Rights in a United Latvia (Par Cilvēka Tiesībām Vienotā Latvijā)
TB / LNNK	For Fatherland and Freedom / Latvian National Independence Movement (Tēvzemei un Brīvībai / Latvijas Nacionālās Neatkarības Kustība)
TKL	Peoples Movement for Latvia: Zīgerists Party (Tautas Kustība Latvijai: Zīgerista Partija)
TP	People's Party (Tautas Partija)
ZP	Green Party (Zaļā Partija)
ZS	Farmers Union (Zemnieku Savienība)
Z/ZS	Green / Farmers Union (Zaļā / Zemnieku Savienība)

Potemkin village:

An impressive façade or show designed to hide an undesirable fact or condition.

(Webber and Feinsilber, 1999. Merriam-Websters dictionary of allusions, p.433)

Introduction

Latvia has radically changed since regaining independence in 1991. Substantial institution-building accompanied reforms to the economy and public administration. This resulted in accession to both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) by mid-2004. Indeed, by 2006 Latvia had the fastest growing economy among the 25 states of the European Union.¹ The dreary and dilapidated Soviet-era architecture is rapidly being replaced with shining glass-and-steel office and apartment buildings, while the magnificent *jugendstil* houses in the centre of Rīga have largely been restored to their former glory. Paradoxically, however, a deep malaise haunts the Latvian polity. Social surveys have continually indicated that the Latvian public is deeply disillusioned with its political institutions, particularly political parties and parliament. Moreover, the Transparency International corruptions perceptions index lists Latvia as the second most corrupt EU-25 country after Poland (Transparency International 2005). Thus two central questions drive this research. To what extent has democracy been consolidated in Latvia? And, what role have political parties played in this process?

The relationship between the Latvian public, democracy and political parties is an intriguing field of study. I first visited Latvia in 1993, as it enjoyed its first fully democratic elections in over sixty years. The run-up to this first post-soviet parliamentary election saw the capital city, Rīga, plastered with party political posters, and both print and electronic media swamped by political advertising. However, the public was curiously disengaged from politics. Rather than enjoying the new freedoms to publicly debate and discuss opposing points of view, as well as the merits and demerits of opposing parties and ideologies, the public was deeply cynical toward both political candidates and parties. As chapter six indicates, this is still the case today. This was in stark contrast to the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the *Latvijas Tautas Fronte* (Latvian Popular Front) swept to power in the 1990 Latvian Soviet Republic Supreme Council elections, and regular political meetings and demonstrations attracted crowds of up to several hundred thousand people. This culminated on the 4th of May 1990, when the Supreme Council passed a declaration of Latvian independence, and the deputies left the chamber to hugs, cheers, and cascading flowers.

However, this popular support rapidly dissipated after 1991. Certainly, Latvia experienced a sharp economic downturn in the early 1990s, and an accompanying social crisis as the decayed Soviet-era social safety net effectively collapsed. Latvians call these years the

¹ The IMF predicted annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 9% for Latvia in 2006 (International Monetary Fund 2006).

'lielais jukums' (the great chaos), and people increasingly focused on their own, rather than group, interests. However, this only partly explains public disengagement from participatory democracy, and does not explain the source of the deeply entrenched public distrust toward political parties, parliament, the judiciary and other political institutions.

This skepticism is not just a feature of the modern Latvian state. I was raised in an émigré Latvian society that was largely contemptuous of the democratic years of the inter-war era, yet favourably disposed to the authoritarian dictatorship of Kārlis Ulmanis. This is at least partly mirrored in contemporary Latvia. Indeed, the long-standing Latvian cynicism towards the political class is perhaps best reflected in the streets of Rīga. Independence in 1991 was accompanied by the renaming of streets and avenues, mostly back to their pre-second world war names. Thus the five principal streets fanning out from the centre of Rīga were re-named: (i) *Krišjānis Valdemārs* (1825-1891) after the publisher and editor of the first Latvian newspaper, *Pēterburgas Avīze* (Petersburg Newspaper) (Ābols 2003, p.102); (ii) *Brīvības* (Freedom);² (iii) *Tērbatas*, the road to Tartu, where Latvian nationalism was first organized; (iv) *Krišjānis Barons* (1835-1923), after the Latvian folklorist who single-handedly collected and codified the 1.5 million Latvian *dainas* that are the backbone of traditional Latvian culture; and, (v) *Aleksandrs Čaks* (1901-1950), yet another Latvian writer. The leafy boulevards that half-circle the old town are also named after cultural leaders.³ Indeed, throughout the centre of Rīga, cultural leaders of the Latvian independence movement, writers, artists and military leaders are celebrated in the grand thoroughfares named in their honour. But there are no streets named after politicians. This thesis investigates the source of this disconnect between parties, politicians and the public, and considers its impact on the consolidation of democracy in Latvia.

Chapter one discusses the contrast between procedural and participatory (qualitative) democracy. Basic electoral participation (such as voting in parliamentary elections) has remained high in post-communist Latvia. However, other forms of political participation

² A stroll down *Brīvības Iela* takes the visitor from the mediaval buildings of the old town, through the grand *jugendstil* architecture of the thriving late eighteenth century centre of Rīga, past the rather blander buildings of the first independence era to the crumbling, decaying concrete 'block house' apartment buildings of the communist era. Scattered along the street is evidence of the new, post-communist Latvia. Shiny new glass and steel hotels and office buildings, shopping malls, car dealerships, and, more recently, huge placards declaring that road construction is partly financed by the European Union. Thus one street manages to capture the convoluted history of Latvia. The name changes of the street also illustrate this convoluted history. The last 100 years have seen the street named Tsar Nicholas Street, then Freedom Street, then Hitler Street, later Lenin Street, and then finally back to Freedom Street (*Brīvības Iela*) again.

³ *Basteja Bulvāris*, *Aspazijas Bulvāris* (a Latvian poet and wife of Jānis Rainis), *Raiņa Bulvāris* (named after Jānis Rainis – who was a social democrat and member of the inter-war Latvian parliament, but best remembered as Latvia's greatest novelist), *Kalpaka Bulvāris* (named after General Oskars Kalpaks, a Latvian military leader in the war of independence).

(union activity, demonstrations, petitions, political party membership etc.) declined radically after 1991, and have remained extremely low. Thus, while Latvia is undoubtedly a procedural democracy, with regular elections, democratic institutions and other instruments of democratic government, it lacks the kind of broad attitudinal and behavioural support for democracy that consolidates it as the only conceivable system of government. Indeed, a significant part of the population continues to support the notion of a non-democratic regime replacing democracy.

I particularly focus on the role of political parties in the consolidation of democracy. It has long been assumed that parties are central to democracy and, by implication, democratic consolidation. Parties shape and consolidate modern democracy through both formal and informal procedures. Formally, they shape the laws and institutions of modern democracy, particularly in the early stages of the transition to democracy, when many laws and institutions need to be created. Informally, the attitudes and behaviour of the political elite in parliament and political office, the most visible actors in the new democratic system, shape the attitudes and behaviour of the public. However, parties can potentially also play a negative role by, for example, crafting laws that suit their own, rather than the public, interest. At the same time, elite-level political corruption can filter down into administrative corruption. Moreover, the new, smaller and more professional models of party that have replaced the old 'mass' parties across Europe (and that have been largely adopted in post-communist Europe) have weakened links with society, and strengthened connections to the state and corporate interests.

I adopt three complimentary approaches to the study of political parties in Latvia – institutional, organizational, and sociological. This focuses the research lens on the legislative and institutional framework that structures parties and the party system, their internal organization, and the extent to which they are rooted in social or post-modern cleavages. Chapter four discusses the Latvian party system and the model of political party that has emerged since 1991. Chapter five is a case study of the leading political party in post-communist Latvia, *Latvijas Ceļš*. The thesis argues that political parties have clearly played a central role in shaping the post-communist Latvian polity. They have set the tone of the Latvian democracy, by crafting legislation that favours small, professional, wealthy political parties with weak links to civil society. These parties only reach out to the public during modern, expensive, media-driven election campaigns. Political ideology and links with civil society organizations (and thus the opportunity of growing roots in society), have been discarded in favour of short-term, populist, personality-driven politics that revolve around an ethnic cleavage. This is the result of coupling virtually unlimited party income and expenditure (and weak auditing) with modern advertising and public relations techniques. Latvian parties,

in what is still the poorest country in the European Union, spent more money per-capita in the 2002 parliamentary elections than American parties in the 2000 presidential election, or British parties in the 2001 general election (Čigāne 2003).

This has resulted in a high turnover of political parties. Indeed, all four parliamentary elections since 1993 have been won by parties formed less than one year before the election. Interestingly, the high turnover of parties has not been accompanied by a high turnover of parliamentary deputies. Rather, there has been a tendency for the political elite to desert an electorally sinking party by forming, and jumping into, a new party. This has maintained some parliamentary continuity, as well as creating an established political class, but at the cost of party cohesiveness and electoral accountability.

Latvian political parties partially resemble their counterparts in Western Europe, which have also seen great changes over the last half century. However, West European parties morphed from large 'mass' parties to smaller 'catch-all' or 'electoral-professional' models after democracy had been consolidated in these states. Thus Eurobarometer surveys reveal that while many Europeans are dissatisfied with the quality of their democracy, they do not contemplate systemic alternatives. This is not the case in Latvia. While Latvian political parties mirror their West European counterparts in terms of formal institutions and regulations, they lack the informal behavioural and attitudinal norms that bring these parties to life. Indeed, this pattern is mirrored in Latvian democracy as a whole.

This thesis used four major sources in addition to the large body of scholarly literature that has shaped the lively contemporary debate on parties and democracy. First, Latvian-language scholarly literature. However, the small amount of original research by native Latvian scholars reflects the recent emergence of the social sciences in Latvia, the lack of an academic research culture, as well as the minimal local financing available to support academic research. I was, however, able to draw on the large number of social surveys and opinion polls carried out since 1991, as well as policy-driven research from organizations such as the Soros Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme.

Second, the Latvian media was the source for much of the basic information on parties and events. However, the Latvian print and electronic media suffer from a number of problems. The shortage of experienced reporters is reflected in the generally low quality of reporting. Also, the Latvian press has become quite polarized and factionalized. Thus much of the 2002 parliamentary election campaign was marked by sniping between Latvia's two most influential newspapers, *Diena* and *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*. Indeed, as Chapter three explains, the media has become progressively more partisan, tendentious and aggressive.

Third, I undertook 29 interviews with leading political actors in 2002 and 2003. I interviewed five of the nine serving prime ministers between 1993 and 2006, as well as ministers, parliamentarians, and party functionaries from all the major parties. On the whole, interviewees were surprisingly open and honest in their assessment of the state of Latvian democracy and the role of parties in the system. Indeed, these interviews largely shaped my perception of the role of Latvian parties in consolidating democracy, particularly in terms of the qualitative aspects of democratic consolidation.

Finally, I spent the 2005-2006 academic year as a Fulbright Scholar at the Institute of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. In addition to being granted access to the extensive library and archive holdings at the university, I also had the opportunity to carry out research at the Hoover Institute based at Stanford University. The Hoover's '*Latvijas Ceļš* (Latvia's Way) collection' was particularly valuable in terms of providing information on party organization, strategy and internal research documents that were unavailable in Latvia.

A decade and a half has passed since Latvia began its systemic transformation. Naturally, a booming economy and accession to the major European and transatlantic organizations has changed Latvia, particularly in terms of its physical appearance. However, the main themes of the thesis – political parties and their impact on the quality of democracy – remain salient.

Note on Language

Throughout this thesis I have used the Latvian spelling, and accents, for Latvian surnames and place-names e.g. Rīga, not Riga. I also use the Latvian acronym for political parties in the text e.g. LC for *Latvijas Ceļš* (Latvia's Way). Financial data is presented in Latvian Lats, which has an approximate one-to-one exchange rate with the British pound.

Chapter 1. Political parties, democracy and democratic consolidation.

Theoretical considerations

'The political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties... The condition of the parties is the best possible evidence of the nature of any regime.' (Elmer Eric Schattschneider 1942, p.1)

Political parties have traditionally been seen as central to the effective functioning of a democracy (Schattschneider 1942; Dahl 1971, 1988; Sartori 1976; Lipjhardt 1984). Moreover, parties have also been considered as crucial to both a successful transition to democracy, and the subsequent consolidation of democracy as the only legitimate system of government.¹ However, in the light of recent post-communist transition in East-Central Europe, as well as the 'decline' of party in Western Europe, their relevance to democracy has been increasingly challenged (Toka 1997; Mair 2002; Rose and Munro 2003; van Biezen 2004).

This first chapter considers the relationship between democracy, democratic consolidation, and political parties. It is structured into three main parts. The first presents a definition of democracy combining elements from the democratic models of Robert Dahl (1971, 1988) and Joseph Schumpeter (1947). This definition is then used to develop a model of democratic consolidation based on the work of Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996). The second part discusses the three primary approaches (institutional, organizational and sociological) to the study of parties adopted in this thesis. The final part reviews the burgeoning contemporary literature on political parties, and particularly their relationship to the consolidation of democracy, in post-communist East-Central Europe.

1.1 Democracy and democratic consolidation

Democracy is the combination of the Greek words meaning 'the people' (*demos*) and 'to rule' (*kratos*). In other words, democracy is a form of government which the people govern. This then leads to two crucial questions that shape each democratic state: Who are the *demos*? And

¹ There are three main parts to the democratization process: liberalization, transition (from non-democratic to democratic), and consolidation (Easton 1965). While the three phases are linked by time and do overlap, they are also quite distinct. This thesis focuses on the latter consolidation phase.

what are the rules by which the *demos* are governed?² The answers to these questions have shaped democratic polities since the emergence of the first classical democracy in the city-state of Athens in the sixth century BC.³ Five hundred and fifty types and sub-types of democracy have been recorded since then (Collier and Levitsky 1997). Chapter three will consider how Latvia has addressed these, and other, key questions. This section, however, will initially focus on constructing a definition of modern democracy, and then use this as the basis for developing a model of democratic consolidation.

The 'third wave' of democracy at the end of the twentieth century led to a rapid growth in the number of democracies in the world (Huntingdon 1991). This led some observers to ask 'why is democracy today the overwhelmingly dominant, and increasingly the well-nigh exclusive, claimant to set the standard for legitimate political authority?' (Dunn 1992, p.239). Or, as Francis Fukuyama (1992) famously asked, is it really the 'end of history?'⁴ John Dunn (1992, pp.245–246) argued that there were two key explanations for the contemporary growth of democracy in the post-communist context. First, the human appeal of the democratic ideal. Second, the perceived connection between democracy and economic and social growth. Certainly, democracy had a huge human appeal in east-central Europe in the 1980s, following four decades of stifling communist party political domination. But perhaps the perceived connection between democracy and economic growth was even more attractive. Thus democracy served as both a cut-off point from the previous, now discredited regime, and as a vehicle for creating the type of affluent socio-economic system prevalent in neighbouring, prosperous Western Europe. Moreover, the frequently

² Modern mass democracy is associated with the nation-state, as opposed to the smaller self-governing communities of its original meaning in Greece. Indeed, some scholars insist that 'democracy is a form of governance of a state. Thus, no modern polity can become democratically consolidated unless it is first a state' (Linz and Stepan 1996, p.7).

³ Different periods of history have offered differing models of democracy. David Held (1993, p.15) divided these theories into three basic models: (i) direct or participatory democracy; (ii) liberal or representative democracy; and (iii) one-party democracy. The first model is based on a system involving citizens directly in the political process and originally found in ancient Athens, but is impossible in the modern world where the franchise typically encompasses the majority of the adult population, and where, in any case, most people are involved in full-time work and other activities restricting the extent of their political participation. The second, liberal model involves elected officials acting on behalf of, and in the interests of those that have elected them. The third model is based on the one-party system developed in the Soviet Union following the 1917 revolution, and which was subsequently exported around the globe. However, this latter model is democratic in name only as the *demos* were denied the opportunity to rule in any substantive way. As a result, the second model of liberal-representative democracy has been presented as the only type of democratically sustainable form of government in the modern world.

⁴ Francis Fukuyama's 1992 book claimed that liberal-democracy was the only legitimate form of government remaining after the fall of the authoritarian European communist regimes.

stated aim of a 'return to the west' implied the consolidation of both a democratic state and a functioning market economy.⁵

At the same time, however, there has been a debate on the gradual systemic decline, or change, of democracy in the western democracies (Dahl 2000; Ostrom 2000). Elinor Ostrom (2000) argued that democracy is rather like a family firm in that the first generation builds it up, but subsequent generations neglect and, ultimately, undermine it. However, the new post-communist democracies had, prior to the 1989 and 1991 revolutions, generally experienced just a few unsuccessful years of democracy in the inter-war period. The contemporary character of the older democracies, which acted as demonstration models for the newer democracies, inevitably influenced how both the elite and public shaped their democratic systems. Thus the new European democracies largely developed their political systems through a balance of past democratic experience, democratic and constitutional theory, and contemporary conditions.

The post-communist states initially had to tackle the dichotomy at the very heart of democratic theory – the problem of limiting individual freedom for the collective good while still maintaining individual liberty. Equality and liberty are difficult to reconcile as the quest for equality inevitably deprives people of elements of individual liberty by coercing them into acts with which they may disagree (e.g. the payment of taxes). However, liberal-representative democratic theory has traditionally recognized that an individual must concede certain individual rights to the state for the wider good (Mill 1958/1859). This argument then inevitably leads on to the potential dangers of majority rule and the protection of minority rights. The ideal way of protecting these rights is to ensure that all people living in a given territory should be granted equal democratic rights.⁶ Thus even if a minority is permanently disadvantaged in the political arena, it would still have a legally guaranteed voice.

Modern scholarly debate has focused on two particular features of democracy. The procedural (Schumpeter 1947; Downs 1957), and the participatory / qualitative (Dahl 1971, 1998). Three key elements of democracy can be identified by combining these approaches. The first element is political equality in the democratic process (Dahl 1998). This entails counting all votes as equal, ensuring that all members of the *demos* have an equal opportunity to vote, and that all

⁵ Indeed, this was clearly spelled out in the June 1993 Copenhagen criteria, which made a functioning market economy and democracy pre-requisites for the accession of east-central European countries to the European Union.

⁶ With certain exceptions. At different periods of history, different categories of people have been excluded from the *demos*. In the modern era, those that are excluded are usually people who are not permanent residents of a territory (transients) or people who have been excluded from society (prisoners - but the issue of whether ex-prisoners should continue to be denied the franchise is more divisive).

qualified adult permanent residents of a given territorial unit should share these rights. While Robert Dahl lists these as separate points, they are here grouped together as sharing the same core characteristic of equality. Moreover, there are two aspects to operationalizing equality. First, there must be appropriate legislation to allow equality to exist. Second, the public must be sufficiently aware of their rights. Thus equality has both legislative-institutional and qualitative-participatory aspects.

Second, a democracy requires guaranteed civil and political liberties through freedom of expression and association, as well as a free press, thus creating the framework for a functioning civil society. The resulting political freedom ensures 'meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organized groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power' (Sorensen 1993, p.13).

Equality and freedom require appropriate frameworks, mechanisms and procedures. The procedural approach developed by Joseph Schumpeter (1947, p.269) states that democracy is 'that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the peoples vote'.⁷ Thus Schumpeter saw democracy primarily as a mechanism for choosing the elite leadership to be vested with political power. He distanced this procedural arrangement from the resulting formation of a government that would, he believed, guarantee the rights of the individual. In other words, he regarded the means, not the ends, as central to democracy.⁸

This leads to the following definition: A democracy is a system of national government that guarantees the political freedom and equality of its citizens through regular competitive elections and functioning legislative-constitutional procedures that foster vigorous and structured political competition through a functioning civil society.

Democratic consolidation

David Easton (1965) has expressed consolidation as the final stage of a three-stage process of democratization: Liberalization → Transition → Consolidation / Persistence. At this final stage democratic processes and habits become rooted in society and the likelihood of a return to

⁷ Schumpeter's peer and friend David M. Wright (1991, p.243) described Schumpeter's approach as mechanistic. It has also been called an elite or realist theory of democracy (Nagle and Mahr 1999, p. 9).

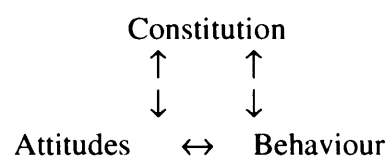
⁸ Chantal Mouffe (2000, pp. 6-8) argued that conflict is a necessary part of politics, and that the decline of this adversarial dimension to politics in Western Europe and North America, coincided with a weakening of democracy.

authoritarianism is diminished. When, simply put, democracy becomes ‘the only game in town’ (Di Palma 1990, p.43).

However, there is little agreement on a more detailed definition of consolidation. Indeed, ‘the aspiring subdiscipline of “consolidology” is anchored in an unclear, inconsistent, and unbounded concept, and thus it is not anchored at all, but drifting in murky waters’ (Schedler 1998, p.92). This theoretical inconsistency has made evaluation of democratic consolidation problematic (Schedler 2001; Whitehead 2002; Plasser, Ulram and Waldrauch 1998).

Nevertheless, there have been attempts to operationalize measures of democratic consolidation. They can be divided into two broad approaches: negative and positive (Pridham 1995). Negative approaches focus on the absence of factors that block or hinder democracy. Thus Isaiah Berlin (1969), the Rīga-born political philosopher, argued for a minimalist interpretation of democracy, emphasizing the distinction between ‘negative liberty’ (freedom from tyranny) and ‘positive liberty’ (direct citizen participation in government), with the former sufficient for a democratic consolidation. In contrast, positive definitions concentrate on the achievable objectives required for a democracy to be consolidated. At its most basic level, this is a one or two turnover of government test (Huntingdon 1991; Przeworski 1994). More detailed examinations focus on the strength and influence of civil society, or the prevalence of democratic attitudes in a state. Thus the positive approach allows for a more rigorous evaluation of consolidation.

Figure 1.1 - Dimensions of democratic consolidation



Source: Linz and Stepan 1996, p.6

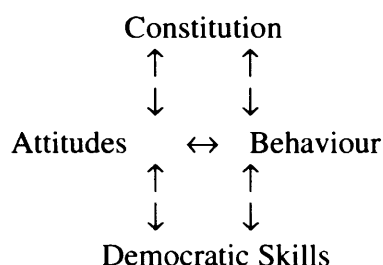
Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996) offered a model of democratic consolidation that focused on three separate dimensions that combine both procedural and qualitative aspects (Figure 1.1).⁹ They argued that behaviour and attitude, combined with constitutional rules, were the essence of consolidation. Thus, in behavioural terms, consolidation has been achieved when actors confine their activities to democratic means and methods. Attitudinally, democracy is consolidated

⁹ Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino (2004) offer an even more detailed model of eight dimensions.

when the majority of the public support it as the primary tool of politics. Finally, a democratic regime is consolidated when all conflicts are resolved through the procedures and laws structured by the constitution.

However, this model lacks an essential component that feeds into all three dimensions – the democratic skills needed to bring them to life. Indeed, the concept of democratic skill was implicit in Joseph Schumpeter’s (1947) background conditions for democracy, and in the attitudinal and behavioural dimensions above.¹⁰ Thus I add it as a fourth dimension (see Figure 1.2).¹¹

Figure 1.2 - Four dimensions of democratic consolidation



While this fourth dimension is related to both attitudes and behaviour it is also quite distinct. Behaviour relates to the overwhelming majority of political actors accepting democracy as ‘the only game in town’, and suitably adapting their behaviour. Attitude refers to political culture. However, democratic skills are the core tools political actors and participants need to qualitatively participate in the democratic system. Indeed, writing in the nineteenth century John Stuart Mill (1859/1958), emphasized the importance of both an educated electorate (having the ability to analyze and choose the right candidate) and educated politicians (who shape national policy).¹² These skills are of critical importance in a newly democratizing state where both the

¹⁰ Joseph Schumpeter (1947, pp.284-289) claimed that there are five basic background conditions supporting the development and consolidation of democracy. They are: (i) politicians of high competence (ii) the restriction of competition to a few questions that do not threaten the overall direction of a national programme (iii) a strong, independent and intelligent bureaucracy to assist politicians in forming and administering policy (iv) ‘democratic self-control’ ensuring that all participants in a democracy follow the basic rules of the game, and (v) the ability of society to accept differing opinions.

¹¹ In a comparative study of democracy, the Transformation Research Initiative adapted the Linz and Stepan (1996) paradigm of consolidation by adding a fourth ‘historical memory’ dimension (van Beek 2005). However, in this study I argue that the historical dimension is a part of the ‘attitudes and behaviour’ dimensions, which are largely shaped by memories and experiences from the recent communist past.

¹² Although Mill took his argument to the extreme by claiming that better-educated people should have more votes than less-educated.

electorate and political elite have little experience or education in the democratic system. However, this 'skills' dimension has been largely ignored in the contemporary debate on consolidation. However, democratic attitudes and behaviour must be underpinned by appropriate democratic skills.

These skills are needed at a number of different levels. For example, at the elite level, actors involved in drafting legislation must understand the aims, needs, impact, legal, and administrative structure of legislation. These skills can be acquired through the education of existing, or the recruitment of new well-educated cadres, international assistance or cumulative experience (although the latter will inevitably take time).¹³ As for the *demos*, research indicates that civic education, in education institutions and through the media, can raise participation rates (Finkel 2003). Thus democratic skills are a key dimension of a consolidated democracy.

The resulting definition of democratic consolidation is: A democracy is consolidated when the attitudes and behaviour of democratically skilled political actors, and the public, accept the constitutional rule of law, fostering a market-based multi-party democracy and functioning civil-society. The following section will now consider the three major theoretical approaches that structure the empirical investigation of political parties in this thesis.

1.2 Institutional, organizational, and sociological approaches

Organized political parties first appeared in the nineteenth century in response to the introduction of competitive elections involving ever larger numbers of voters. Even at the early stages of their development they were not universally popular – Alexis de Tocqueville (1835 and 1840/2001) argued that they were merely a necessary evil in democratic government. Nevertheless, as the electoral franchise enlarged, political groups claiming to represent the newly enfranchised social groups mushroomed. At this point parties began to differ to other organizations in that they became the only social organizations claiming to be capable of governing a state (Schonfield 1983). Parties also began to pool and aggregate diverse interests into popular policies, in contrast to social organizations that concentrated on single or narrow issues. Giovanni Sartori's (1976, p.63) definition of a 'party as any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections candidates for political office' still serves as the most useful. The competitive or cooperative interaction between different political parties is

¹³ The United Nations Development Programme, Soros Foundation, and European Union have been particularly active in funding education programmes for politicians, administrators, judges and educators in democratizing countries.

known as the party system (Sartori 1976). Regularized and reasonably predictable relations between political parties lead to the ‘institutionalization’ (or consolidation) of a party system (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). However, while this thesis does occasionally touch on party systems, the research focus is on the analysis of political parties and their role in the consolidation of democracy.

Parties are examined through three different, albeit complimentary, theoretical approaches: institutional, organizational and sociological.¹⁴ These approaches structure the discussion of Latvian parties in chapters four and five, and are also used in the analysis of Latvian parties in the inter-war era in chapter two.

The first, institutional, approach focuses on the role of political institutions in shaping parties and the party system. Early institutionalist arguments were encapsulated by ‘Duverger’s law’ which stated that ‘the simple-majority single-ballot system favours the two-party system’ while proportional representation systems lead to multi-party systems (Duverger 1954, p.217).¹⁵ Further research has revealed a correlation between different electoral systems and the distribution of seats between parties (Lipset 1968; Katz 1980; Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Elster et al 1998). Thus electoral laws have a direct impact on public satisfaction with democracy, because the laws elect parties, and party performance influences public satisfaction (Anderson 1998). This causal chain has been expressed as: electoral system → party system → political parties (Sartori 1976). Therefore laws can have both positive and negative effects on democratic consolidation. For example, Elizabeth Kiss (1996, p.74) argued that ‘exclusionary or unrepresentative’ election laws can harm a democracy by endangering ‘democratic values’. Indeed, empirical research has indicated that the electoral system is more important than the form of government in democratic consolidation (Karvonen and Anckar 2001).

¹⁴ A fourth, competition, approach was not adopted. This approach argues that parties adopt the ideology that they believe will prove most popular with the electorate. Anthony Downs (1957) developed a spatial model of party competition. Downs makes four major assumptions about political parties: (i) that they set out to maximize their vote; (ii) parties have a limited movement up and down the political spectrum, being constrained by parties on either side; (iii) they concentrate on ideology as a way to mobilize the electorate, as this is easier to convey than complicated policy issues; and (iv) that voters are located in specific parts of the political spectrum and that the location of these voters determines the number of parties represented in a legislature. Thus parties are seen as relatively powerless with most influence lying in the hands of the electorate. Patrick Dunleavy (1991) disputed Downs’ theory, arguing that parties in both government and opposition have a number of additional strategies for shaping voter preferences and thus attracting voters.

¹⁵ However, recent research by Josep M. Colomer (2005) has turned ‘Duverger’s Law’ upside down and argued that the number of political parties shapes the electoral system. Certainly political parties, through their control of the legislature, have the opportunity to shape and influence electoral laws and mechanisms, and are likely to adopt legislation protecting their own interests.

Party lists versus individual candidate lists further illustrate this point. If the order of candidates in party lists can be influenced by voters (by crossing out or supporting a particular name on an 'open' list, thus giving that name the possibility to rise up, or down, the list), then internal competition between candidates may be enhanced, and party cohesion undermined in the hunt for individual votes. Thus closed list electoral arrangements support programmatic parties while open lists support individualism. While the party organization is important in providing access to media, the party itself can be undermined by individual competition between deputies. Of course, this must be balanced by the knowledge that if the list is set in stone, and there is little possibility for candidate mobility, then the candidates at the bottom of the list may not be fully committed, knowing that they have little opportunity to be elected, and this itself can undermine party unity.

Party financing laws and mechanisms also shape parties. Indeed, the character of this legislation could be a key influence on the success of the consolidation process (Burnell 1998). Parties need increasing amounts of money to fund their organizations, advertise, compete in elections and otherwise fund their activities. Modern campaigning methods using both established (TV, newspapers, radio) and newer (internet, wireless) media are increasingly expensive, and less people-intensive. Indeed, party financing needs are now greater than ever before following the decline of mass membership (and thus member fees as income and free labour from party campaigners). Moreover, the tendency to professionalize party organizations has put increased strains on party finances.

The constitutional framework of the state also influences parties. A presidential system encourages a 'winner-takes-all' attitude among parties (as well as undermining parties at the expense of personalities) while proportional-representation parliamentary systems encourage moderated competition and coalition building (Sartori 1994; Linz 1994; Linz and Stepan 1996). Thus institutional choices clearly impact the shape and size of both parties and party systems.

The second, organizational, approach focuses on internal party structures. Robert Michel's (1911) 'iron law of oligarchy' argued that a political party can never be faithful to its programme and its original constituency because each party needs full-time leaders, and the interests and values of these leaders will inevitably diverge from those of its members. Leaders will moderate their positions in order to make the parties more popular, or in order to cooperate with their

enemies, against the wishes of the rank-and-file membership.¹⁶ This implies that there are different layers of party. Indeed, Howard Scarrow (1967, p.779) differentiated ‘between party as a non-parliamentary “outside” organization, and party as a group of “inside” elected officials.’ Anthony King (1969, p.114) further argued that there are three different elements existing within successful political parties: the party in the electorate; the party organization; and the party in government. He went on to argue that each grouping has its own, diverging, goals and interests.

However, there are inherent difficulties in studying party organizations. Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1990, p.4) reflected that ‘we know much less about the internal management and the organizational functioning of political parties than we do about their socio-cultural base, and their external history of participation in public decision-making.’ Certainly, while it is possible to gain statistics on party membership, party financing, as well as access to the statutes that outline internal procedures, it is more difficult to investigate how far these rules are enacted.

The sociological approach argues that parties form as a result of the institutionalization of social conflict (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). However, once the parties are formed, they themselves control which cleavages appear on the political agenda (Schattschneider 1975). These social cleavages provide ‘the roots of electoral stability, without which political systems are susceptible to the swings and volatility associated with personality politics and authoritarian populism’ (Evans and Whitefield 1993, p.526). The sociological approach has seen two main phases of development: the social cleavage-based model of Lipset and Rokkan that emerged in the 1960s, and the post-material model developed by Ronald Inglehart in the 1970s.

Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967) argued that political parties are historically rooted in divisions in society that have developed over a number of stages, particularly the pre- and post-industrial eras. Individuals identify with one or more of the four major cleavages (class, religion, rural/urban, and centre-periphery) and vote accordingly (Lipset 1960; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Bartolini and Mair 1990). Thus political parties institutionalized social conflict as the electoral franchise expanded. This explains the stability of party systems in Western Europe, where parties are anchored in society. Moreover, the sociological approach argues that parties survive precisely because of these roots in society, not the strength of party organization, or institutional arrangements.

¹⁶ Robert Michels (1911) also argues that party elites are more skilled and expert than ordinary members – indeed, he argues that rank and file members tend to be apathetic and willing to accept subordination from leaders of the party

In the 1970s Ronald Inglehart (1977) steered discussion away from social cleavages towards emerging post-material 'values'. These post-material values first appeared in the 1960s as the post-war boom years in Western Europe and North America left people materially sated and increasingly concerned with their quality of life (such as gender and environmental issues rather than social conflict). Two main hypotheses attempted to explain the emergence of these new values: scarcity and socialization. The scarcity hypothesis argued that 'prolonged periods of prosperity tend to encourage the spread of postmaterialist values; economic decline tends to have the opposite effect' (Inglehart 2000, p.221). As a result, the lack of individual security that accompanies economic decline leads to 'xenophobia, a need for strong decisive leaders and deference to authority' (ibid, p.223). The second, socialization hypothesis, argued that personal values reflect the condition of pre-adult years, and that they therefore take a considerable amount of time to develop and become politically salient.

Moreover, modernization led to mass education and, combined with economic advancement, the barriers between different social groups were worn down. Thus 'we are moving from cleavages defined by social groups to value cleavages that identify only communities of like-minded individuals... the shift from class politics to value politics marks a transformation from social group cleavages to issue group cleavages' (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984, p.474). And because these new values are relatively shallow, they will be difficult to structure and institutionalize, and are thus less likely to endure. This is likely to have an impact on the stability of both parties and party systems because 'political divisions that build on identifiable socio-economic or cultural groups and populations sectors may be more durable than parties and divisions confined to the level of political opinion without grounding in distinct social groups' (Kitschelt 1999, p.262).

Thus institutional, organizational, and sociological factors have influenced party change over the past half-century. Indeed, Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond (2003) identified up to fifteen current 'species' of political party.¹⁷ However, half a century ago the mass party (a large membership organization structured over a clear social group defined by a cleavage) dominated party politics in Western Europe (Duverger 1954). The mass party excelled at mobilizing its members for elections, financial resources (dues) and other political activity, as well as maintaining close links with the organized interests of civil society. Mass parties played a key role

¹⁷ Classified by three criteria: (1) the type of party organization; (2) the programmatic orientation of the party; and (3) whether the party is democratic or anti-system.

in consolidating the party systems of Western Europe. However, they declined as the importance and role of the mass media increased. For example, the importance of door-to-door canvassing declined as TV, radio and the internet have become more direct (albeit increasingly expensive) means of reaching voters. As a result 'the business of winning elections has become more capital-intensive and less labour intensive, making political donors matter more and political activists less' (The Economist 1999).

Thus, from the 1960s onwards theoretical debate centered on analyzing the demise of the mass party, considering its emerging alternatives, and discussing the declining relevance of party itself. Changes in the social structure, prompted by the growth of economic prosperity led parties to drop their ideological baggage and develop a 'catch-all' model of party that strengthened the role of leadership and special interest groups, while downgrading the role of members (Kircheimer 1966).¹⁸ This increasing top-down organizational management of parties was also reflected in the 'electoral-professional' model of party (Pannebianco 1988). The abandonment, or loss, of a core social group as the base of the party made party systems more volatile and thus less predictable. Moreover, the key role in party organizations was increasingly played by professionals rather than volunteer-members.

In the 1990s Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair (1997) described the emergence of the cartel party. This model marked the virtual eradication of party's relationship with civil society, and closer links with the state. Indeed, increasing financial reliance on the state meant that parties had almost become a part of the state. These elite-oriented models were accompanied by claims that parties were declining in importance and relevance (Kircheimer 1966; Pannebianco 1988). Others rejected this claim, arguing that the opposite was actually true, and parties were growing more powerful due to their increasingly strong, centralized, professional organizational structures (Selle and Svasand 1991). Moreover, Peter Mair (1994, pp.2-6) adopted Anthony King's three-level model of party and argued that there was only evidence of the decline of the party on the ground, with the two other components of party organization actually growing in influence. While these discussions focused on the established western democracies, they do point towards party organization models – the mass party – that are conducive to party institutionalization and democratic consolidation.

¹⁸ Juan Linz (2000, p.259) has argued that catch-all parties have had a positive impact on democracy because they have 'eliminated ideological and social polarization... and facilitated alternation of governments with considerable continuity in policies and a climate of consensus.'

Having considered the three major approaches to the study of political parties, the next part of this chapter will focus on the specific role that political parties and party systems play in democratic consolidation.

1.3 Political parties, democracy and democratic consolidation

Political parties are traditionally seen as central to a successful democratic transition and consolidation (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Burnell 1998; Wightman 1998; Lewis 2001a; Randall and Svasand 2002; Rose and Munro 2003; Gladstone and Ulfeder 2005).¹⁹ Indeed, the minimalist Schumpeterian definition of democracy implies that a democracy is consolidated when it features regular party competition for political power. Paul G. Lewis (2001a, p.1) argued that not only are competitive political parties crucial for a 'functioning representative democracy', but also act as a measure of democratization.²⁰ Thus, 'the *consolidation* of democracy entails, above all, the institutionalization of parties and party systems' (Sandbrook 1996, p.76). However, while parties have been studied in great depth over the last half century (indeed, Maurice Duverger (1954) suggested a specific name for the study of parties – stasiology – derived from the Greek word for faction, *stasis*), scholars have only recently begun to consider the specific role that parties play in democratic consolidation (van Biezen 2004, 2005; van Biezen and Katz 2005; Mair 2002, 2005).²¹ As Ingrid van Biezen (2004, p.3) wrote: 'notwithstanding their importance to one another, the literatures on parties and democratic theory have developed in a remarkable degree of mutual isolation.'

Indeed, some scholars have argued that parties can play a negative role in the consolidation process, because they can 'distort and erode democracy even as they preserve and consolidate it' by creating 'nominal or hollowed out forms of democratic life' that deprive democracy of any real quality for the citizen (Kiss 1996, pp.74-76).²² Thus parties that only assume the external appearance of party in order to participate in elections, can undermine popular democracy. It has

¹⁹ Bartolini et al (1998) claim that 11,500 books, articles, and monographs on parties and party systems have been written in Western Europe since 1945.

²⁰ Lipjhardt (1984, 1994) gave political parties a central role in guaranteeing the quality of democratic procedures in democratic systems. It has also been argued that a competitive party system, with strong political parties, is at the heart of the process of democratic consolidation (Duverger 1954).

²¹ For example, the *Journal of Democracy* (2004, 15(4)) published a special issue on the 'quality of democracy', without touching on the role of political parties.

²² Kiss (1996, pp 74-76) lists four structural (exclusionary or unrepresentative systems; sham parliamentarism; illiberal parliamentarism; and a tendency for parties to attempt a 'colonization' of civil society) and three attitudinal ('violation of norms within civil society'; 'extremist and socially polarizing rhetoric'; and 'imperious behaviour towards citizens') dangers.

even been questioned if there are any causal links between all that is good in democracy, and political parties (Stokes 1999). Moreover, Gabor Toka (1997) argued that the post-communist democracies of east-central Europe had already become consolidated by the late 1990s despite having weak and fragmented party systems. Thus, he argued, parties are important in developing the quality of democracy, rather than consolidating it. However, these two stages are inter-related, because a qualitative democracy is also a consolidated one, and vice-versa. Nevertheless, it is clear that the unique role that parties play in democracy needs to be considered in more depth.

Political parties and democracy

The first step in addressing the relationship between political parties and democracy is to revisit the extensive scholarly debate. Parties have traditionally been seen as a central part of democracy. Thus ‘the political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties’ (Schattschneider 1942, p.1).

Angelo Pannebianco (1988) argued that political parties have three primary roles: (i) expressive / integrative; (ii) the selection of candidates for office; and (iii) the formulation of public policy. Peter Mair (2002, pp.7-9) further deconstructed the role of parties, arguing that parties perform two core functions: procedural and representative. These tie in with the two core elements of democracy (procedural and qualitative) discussed earlier.²³ Procedural functions include elite recruitment, presenting candidates for potential election to public office, as well as socializing (or building their democratic skills) them for office. This is especially important in new democracies where parties must consolidate the ‘behavioural’ aspect of democracy discussed in the previous chapter, as well as provide the fourth ‘skills’ function (Linz and Stepan 1996). Moreover, parties are needed to sustain politicians in office through disciplined and organized parliamentary support for the elected government. The primary representative functions are social integration, mobilization and interest articulation. Thus political parties not only mobilize the population, they also act as agents of socialization (through clubs and social events), and political education (developing the skills dimension). This also serves to mobilize the electorate for elections and other political activities. Parties articulate and aggregate the interests of various

²³ Howard Scarrow (1967) provided a more detailed list of the primary functions of a political party. While his model is based on the American party system it can serve as a useful starting point for the study of political parties. He lists: selecting of official personnel; formulating public policy; acting as conductors or critics of government; providing a political education (and nationalization of opinion); intermediating between the individual and government; conducting elections; injecting coherence into government; simplifying electoral choice; democratizing the election of presidents; aggregating and mediating the clash of interests.

diverse groups in society, thus balancing competing interests into a manageable package. Indeed, electoral turnout is lowest in the countries where the role of parties has been marginalized (Wallenberg 2000).²⁴

Parties can also potentially play an important role in nation-building, creating a national sense of community and constructing ties of communication and cooperation across territorial and ethnic populations (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). This is of particular significance in the three Baltic States which undertook extensive nation-building activities after independence, having been constituent parts of the Soviet Union for over forty years. Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967) also emphasized the importance of party moderation and cooperation, stressing the importance of inclusiveness through the ability to co-operate with potential political opponents.

However, public confidence in political parties has declined in recent decades (Dalton 2004). This has been partly prompted by the fall in political participation and membership of political parties over the last fifty years. While mean turnout in national elections in Western Europe was 84.3% in the 1950s, 84.9% in the 1960s, 83.9% in the 1970s and 81.7% in the 1980s, by the 1990s it was just 77.6% (Mair 2002, p.4). Party membership in Western Europe has also fallen (Mair and van Biezen 2001). Indeed, Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther (2001a, p.ix) argued that in both old and new democracies 'no single institution is held in greater disrepute than the political party'. As a result, Peter Mair (2002) argued that parties have shifted from representative to procedural functions all across western democracies. In other words, parties have moved from representing society to governing it. Thus representative – or what could also be called qualitative – functions have been undermined. And as parties moved away from society, they forged closer links with the state e.g. through the state financing of parties. This 'has far-reaching implications for the nature of modern democracy' not least because civil society organizations are replacing political parties as the channels of representation (van Biezen and Katz 2005, p.4).

Two opposing arguments (victim and perpetrator) attempt to explain this decline. The first sees parties as the helpless victims of long-term changes in society. The second sees parties as perpetrators, largely responsible for these changes. In terms of seeing parties as victims, Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther (2001a, p.xi) claim that mass detachment has been caused by three

²⁴ It has fallen particularly sharply in the USA and France, where personality politics based around the presidential office are strongest, while turnout was still high in the Nordic countries where the party system is still largely cleavage based.

factors: social, cultural, and historical. The social and cultural changes have seen traditional class and economic cleavages (on which traditional 'mass' parties were founded) replaced by cross-cutting post-material issues such as the environment and gender. Furthermore, the historical impact of non-democratic regimes has left citizens in new democracies with inherently negative attitudes to the idea of 'party', and anti-democratic instincts fostered by the previous regime. These factors led to growing popular cynicism towards political parties. Thus, parties can be criticized for failing to react to the changes that have taken place in society, but they themselves have not directly initiated these changes.

The perpetrator argument states that parties adopted modern campaigning methods, dropped their ideological baggage and restructured their organizations. This led to citizens feeling increasingly isolated from political parties and questioning their utility. In actual fact, a combination of both arguments presents a fuller explanation of this decline in legitimacy. Democratic society has certainly changed over the last fifty years as it has become wealthier, better educated and modernized. Inevitably, these changes have also had an impact on political parties, particularly in terms of organizational structure and campaigning. After all, parties do not live in a bubble isolated from changes in society. As a result, this has been a 'mutual withdrawal' – parties from society, and society from parties. Thus society is not so much distrustful as indifferent and disinterested (Mair 2005, p.11).

In either case, it is clear that parties now 'occupy an ambiguous position in modern democracies, which is in part a product of the tension between the centrality of political parties as key institutions of modern democracy and their increasing inability to perform many of the functions seen as essential to the healthy performance of democracy' (van Biezen 2004, p.20). Moreover, it has been argued that this change in the role of parties has led to the gradual failure of popular democracy: 'By going beyond parties, democracy also manages to get beyond popular involvement and control' (Mair 2005, p.8). This is particularly relevant to new post-communist democracies because all three representative functions – integration, mobilization and interest articulation – are important in democratic consolidation. First, integration is important in societies atomized by the economic, social, and, in some cases, nationalist strains of the triple-transition. Second, mobilization is needed to increase political participation outside the mere mechanics of voting, and to develop civil society. Third, parties still have a hand to play in interest articulation while civil society remains marginalized and ineffective. Moreover, in terms of democratic consolidation, all these points are important in establishing popular goodwill towards the

democratic political system and contributing to the legitimacy of democratic regimes (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). As a result, it is important for democracy that parties in new democracies should perform these functions.

These developments have led scholars to question whether there are possible alternative mediation structures that could replace political parties. Indeed, three major modern developments further undermine parties (Ouyang 2000). First, developments in the media, such as the internet, cable television, and SMS messaging on mobile phones, now make it possible for individual politicians or small interest groups to launch very direct appeals at the electorate.²⁵ Second the continued development of civil society organizations and interest groups offer alternative sources of interest representation. Third, modernization has meant that parties have converged ideologically, marginalizing policy and ideological competition. Nevertheless, despite these changes, political parties still continue to monopolize the political process in both Western and East-Central Europe. Indeed, the models of parties, party systems and democracy in the west have been mirrored in the east, even though the social, economic, political, and historical basis for parties in post-communist Europe is very different to that in Western Europe. Most importantly, the post-communist states were democratizing, not consolidated, states. This, then, leads onto the next question. What role do parties play in consolidating democracy?

Political parties and democratic consolidation

A number of scholars have argued that political parties are central to the consolidation process (Pasquino 1990; Costa Lobo 2001; Espindola 2001; Karvonen and Anckar 2001; Randall and Svasand 2001). For example, writing about the Latin American democratization, Roberto Espindola (2001, p.1) stated that parties are 'essential anchors of the process of democratic consolidation'. In terms of the southern European transitions, Gianfranco Pasquino (1990, p.53) noted that 'not all the processes of transition have been party dominated: but all processes of democratic consolidation have indeed been party dominated.' Further, Marina Costa Lobo (2001, p.651) argued that in post-dictatorship Portugal 'political parties were obviously at the centre of the stabilization of the party system, and thus the consolidation of democracy.' Thus there has been an assumption that parties are critical for consolidation, because they are central to the functioning of democracy. But what specific tasks do parties perform?

²⁵ I regularly receive spam emails from *Jaunais Laiks* (New Era). Indeed, during election campaigns, Latvian citizens are bombarded by party advertising on TV, radio, and Latvian internet web sites, as well as their post-boxes.

The perception that parties are needed in consolidated democracies, has been accompanied by an implicit assumption that parties perform the same functions at the consolidation phase. However, this is not the case. Rather, in the early stages of consolidation parties have a particularly crucial role to play in both procedural and qualitative terms. First, they are the primary agents drafting legislation to provide the institutional framework for democracy. Second, they must behave democratically in order to establish the behavioural and attitudinal norms of democracy. There are three important factors here – moderate behaviour, obeying the rule of law, and respecting political opponents – all of which set the initial tone of the new democracy. As Guillermo O’Donnell and Phillippe Schmitter (1996, p.57) wrote: ‘If there is ever a “heroic” moment for political parties, it comes in their activity leading up to, during and immediately following the “founding elections”, when for the first time after an authoritarian regime, elected positions of national significance are disputed under reasonably competitive conditions.’

Indeed, the role of political parties is particularly important in newly established democracies rather than consolidated democracies where ‘disaffection [with democracy] does not translate into delegitimation, because the values of democracy are so deeply rooted’ (Diamond and Gunther 2001, p.x). These democratic values – the qualitative dimension of consolidation – are the key ingredient in making democracy the ‘only game in town’. Indeed, distrust of political parties in new democracies can potentially lead to the whole democratic system losing its legitimacy and the opening up of systemic alternatives to democracy.

The party system is particularly central to democratic consolidation because it controls the ‘structure and interaction of parties’ (Elster, Offe, and Preuss 1998, pp.110-111). Indeed, developments in party evolution at an early stage of transition influence the development of the party system as a whole, and thus the stability of the democracy (Sartori 1976; Pannebianco 1988). However, Radoslaw Markowski (2001) argued that there is little evidence to connect an institutionalized party system to institutionalized parties. Thus institutionally weak parties may well occupy a structured party system. In the early years of democratization a party system is likely to see a high number of parties competing for political power.²⁶ Samuel Huntington (1968) argued that such a polarized party system is actually welcome in the early stages of consolidation, because it encourages the development of programmatic parties that will educate an

²⁶ Alan Ware (1996, p.171) describes this as ‘atomized multipartism.’ Although this leads to the question of what exactly is an ‘early stage’ of democratization. The 2002 Latvian parliamentary (and 4th since independence) saw 20 parties compete for votes, similar to the number of competing parties in each of the previous three.

unsophisticated electorate in the connection between democratic votes, parties and outcomes. This, in turn, promotes participation, and will gradually evolve into moderated party competition. However, it can also work the other way, encouraging a brand of populist, zero-sum political competition, where the most important thing is to win office at an early stage of the transition, and thus, at least partly, control the process. This, in turn, can destabilize democracy.

Thus the type of parties operating within the system is important, particularly because support for anti-system parties can undermine the democratic order (Duverger 1959; Sartori 1976; Huntington 1991). Political parties need to meet two aims in order to be classified as being part of a party system (Sartori 1976). First, a party must be considered as a potential and realistic coalition partner. Second, a party must also have ‘blackmail potential’, in that it can affect the coalition tactics of parties that do have the potential to be coalition partners. Thus parties must have a certain level of credibility and durability that can be achieved by a stable voter base and solid organization. However, parties that do not meet either of these criteria can still influence a party system, in that a large number of fragmented parties can result in a weakened opposition and resultantly weakened horizontal accountability. Indeed, it has been argued that a stable and constant supply of parties from one election to the next is the minimum requirement for a party system to have been institutionalized (Rose and Munro 2003).

As a result, political parties, and the party systems which they occupy, are central to the consolidation of democracy. Parties play the leading role at both procedural and qualitative political levels. At the procedural level, parties are charged, among other tasks, with structuring the legal and institutional infrastructure of a state, developing the general orientation of the state in international affairs, and fostering economic development. At the qualitative level, parties involve civil society in the policy process, build vertical links to the *demos*, fight corruption and thus consolidate the rule of law.

Table 1.1. Dimensions of party institutionalization

	Internal	External
Structural	Systemness	Decisional autonomy
Attitudinal	Value infusion	Reification

Source: Randall and Svasand 2002, p.13

Vicky Randall and Lars Svasand (2002, p.12) proposed that party ‘institutionalization should be understood as the process by which the party becomes established in terms both of integrated patterns of behaviour, and of attitudes or culture.’ They organized this into structural and attitudinal components, as well as distinguishing between internal (within the party itself) and external (the party’s relationship with society) aspects. Their four-cell model is represented in table 1.1.

Systemness, is the ‘increasing scope, density and regularity of the interactions that constitute the party as a structure’ rather than the formal organizational aspects of membership and party structure. Value infusion is the extent to which party actors and voters identify and commit to the party outside of any personal motivations. Decisional autonomy refers to a party’s independence in formulating policy and making political decisions. Finally, reification is the extent to which the public see the party as a ‘taken for granted feature of the political horizon’ (Randall and Svasand 2002, pp.13-14). This model essentially adopts a qualitative approach, considering parties to be institutionalized when they are internally and externally cohesive, predictable, and permanent organizations. Chapters four and five will return to this model when considering the extent of party institutionalization in Latvia.

The final part of this chapter will consider the development of political parties in post-communist East-Central Europe, initially through the institutional, organizational and sociological approaches discussed above.

Parties and democracy in post-communist East-Central Europe

Both political parties and party systems in post-communist Europe have been discussed in great depth since 1989.²⁷ However, much of the research has excluded the Baltic States and focused on the Visegrad states of Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia. This is for a number of reasons. First, geographically, the Baltic States do not fall into the traditional definition of ‘east’ or ‘central’ Europe. They have also had a different historical trajectory, having been constituent republics of the Soviet Union rather than satellites. Nevertheless, the literature on post-communist Europe is certainly of relevance to Latvia. For example, the legitimation of political parties is made difficult, in both Latvia and elsewhere in post-communist Europe, by the poor

²⁷ Published research on parties and party systems in East-Central Europe that does not feature the Baltic States includes Agh 1994, 1998a, 1998b; Kitschelt 1992; Kostalecky 2002; Lewis 1996; Roskin 1993. Comparative works that do include the Baltic States include Berglund and Dellenbrant (eds.), 1994; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Lewis 2000, 2001a; Rose and Munro 2003.

economic and social performance of the former regime as well as psychologically negative connotations attached to the word 'party' (Burnell 1998). This section will consider the contemporary literature on parties and party systems in post-communist Europe.

The twentieth century historical experience of the post-communist states continues to shape contemporary political parties. First, in the early years of the transition it was argued that the developing parties and party systems in post-communist Europe bore startling resemblances to the post-first world war parties and party systems (the 'Rip Van Winkle' effect), and that this could have a negative influence on democratic consolidation, as in the inter-war period (Roskin 1993). Similarly, path dependency theorists argued that the preceding type of communist party and regime influenced the type of political parties and party system that emerged in the democratic era (Kitschelt et al 1999). Thus, countries with a more liberal communist regime (e.g. Hungary) could expect to develop similarly liberal political parties. Also, the economic, social and psychological impact of both the inter-war and communist eras largely shaped the public perception of democracy.

Attila Agh (1994) conceptualized four stages of party evolution in post-communist Europe: (i) emerging multi-partyism within the one-party system; (ii) emerging legalized multi-partyism before the first post-communist founding elections; (iii) parliamentarization of the major parties (while the minor ones disintegrated), accompanied by fragmentation of the party system; and (iv) initial party negotiation with major interest groups. Although in many countries (including Latvia) the first stage was not really the emergence of multi-partyism, but rather the development of large umbrella social movements (in this case George Schopflin's (1993) 'conglomerate party' – a movement concentrating all its forces on pushing for a change in regime – is a more suitable description), this has proved a durable model of post-communist party evolution, and will structure the first part of this section. The second part will focus on institutional, organizational, and sociological discussions of post-communist parties.

The communist countries of east-central Europe were essentially single-party systems.²⁸ As a result, party politics and elections lost their substance and meaning, because the result was a foregone conclusion. Lipset and Rokkan (1967, p.4) described totalitarian elections as serving 'legitimizing functions' being 'rituals of confirmation' in a continuous campaign against the 'hidden opposition, the illegitimate opponents of the established regime.' The dominant

²⁸ Although some east-central European countries did contain small parties, these did not provide real competition to the communist parties

communist parties themselves were organized as a pyramid, with a great number of small party organizations in workplaces, followed by ever expanding regional parties leading, in the case of the Soviet Union, up to the Republic, and then the Soviet all-Union level. Naturally, membership was high, but this was not so much through political identification or conviction, but rather for the professional and personal benefits that could be accrued through party membership. Indeed, of the various functions of party discussed earlier in this chapter, the communist parties only fulfilled those of recruitment and training (Kostalecky 2003, p.153). As a result, the population of post-communist Europe had little qualitative experience of party democracy in the communist era. This psychological inheritance has been used to explain weaknesses such as low party membership (Mair and Van Biezen 2001).

The mid 1980s saw the development of large popular movements in East-Central Europe. The primary catalyst was Mikhail Gorbachov's accession to the position of General-Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the resulting retreat of Soviet influence in east-central Europe. This led to a slackening of the repressive instruments of power and the subsequent flowering of social organizations. Green movements were often at the forefront due to their ostensibly non-political nature, and their obvious appeal due to the environmental inefficiency of the Communist regimes. Eventually large popular movements developed across the region.²⁹ While these movements had the rudimentary attributes of party, they usually contained one single policy aim – opposition to the communist regime. Inevitably, the movements fragmented when this aim had been achieved.

While some semi-competitive elections were held in the dying days of the communist regime, the actual 'founding' elections came after their collapse. Although Paul Lewis (2001a, p.6) argued that the founding elections in east-central Europe are of less importance than they have been in other democratizing regions, because, with the exception of Hungary, they have tended to be a simple choice of opposition vs. regime, they are nevertheless significant as the first stage of competitive multi-party politics in the region.

The post-election period (Agh's third stage) saw many parties exit the political stage, as the media (understandably) concentrated on covering the successful parties and programmatically

²⁹ 'Solidarity' in Poland, the 'Democratic Forum' in Hungary, 'Civic Forum' in the Czech territories, and 'Public Against Violence' in Slovakia and the Peoples Front in the 3 Baltic States.

similar parties amalgamated (Kitschelt 1999, p.110).³⁰ Parties also had initial problems in terms of identity (moving from anti-communist to pro-something). Moreover, political leaders in the anti-communist movements had to shift from a system of cooperation within the umbrella movements to one of competition. Thus the founding elections tended to produce fragmented parliaments (particularly Poland, where there had been no minimum threshold), and fluidity between deputies and continued fragmentation and collapse of political parties. The fourth stage, of emerging societal involvement in politics, is still on-going.

In institutional terms, the post-communist countries of East-Central Europe have adopted parliamentary or semi-presidential constitutions, and electoral mechanisms that are either solely proportional-representation, or mixed-systems. Thus all these states can be classified as multi-party systems. In terms of party financing, most states have also followed the lead of Paul Lewis (1998) who specifically argued for state-financed funding of political parties in post-communist countries where membership levels, and thus income from member dues, are typically low and thus the possibilities for corruption are high.

In terms of party organization, 'the development of institutional structures and the establishment of organizational linkages have been the weakest aspects of party development in eastern Europe' (Lewis 2000, p.94). Indeed, James Toole (2003) stated that the biggest difference between parties in East-Central and Western Europe was in terms of party organization. Attila Agh (1998a, pp.107-108) identified three major tendencies in East-Central European party organizations: (i) the dominance of elderly people in party memberships, due to their greater levels of free time; (ii) the 'law of small numbers' that sees party organizations dominated by small cliques that act as a disincentive for others to join; and connected to this (iii) an elitist top-down structure that weakens the role of party members and thus discourages party membership. However, some parties in the region can certainly claim a significantly sized membership e.g. Sean Hanley (2001) details membership of the Czech People's party in the 1990s of up to 100,000 members, and around 20,000 for the Civic Democratic Party and Czech Social Democrats, although these numbers have been shrinking rather than expanding. The comparatively small membership and weak ties to civil society has been partly explained by the previous communist party model that focused on the mass recruitment of members. This may have caused an automatic

³⁰ An extreme example could be found in Poland in the 'Beer Lovers Party' (PPPP) founded in December 1990, and winning 16 seats in the Polish *sejm* in the 1991 election. As happened to many parties in the early years of post-communist democracy, the party split into two groups" The 'Big Beer' and 'Little Beer' parties, and disappeared off the political scene.

distaste against this kind of model from both the new liberal political elite and general population. Indeed, Barbara Geddes (1995) has described the weak organizations as a 'Leninist legacy' of parties to which neither leaders nor followers feel much loyalty.

Scholars have paid particular attention to the social bases of parties in the post-communist region. However, the sociological approach is difficult to apply to post-communist Europe. The lack of social bases, such as churches and trade unions (the 'missing middle') have led to weak parties and party systems in the early years of democratization (Evans and Whitefield 1993). Thus the *tabula rasa* argument stated that communism succeeded in destroying socio-economic differences and civil society, thus removing links between politicians, parties and the general population. Indeed, the communist era is also accused of distorting or destroying the traditional bases of society through the uprooting and dislocation of both urban and rural populations, the church and other social bases. After all, Marxist political theory saw class as the predominant cleavage in industrialized, capitalist nations, and one of the primary aims of communism was the eradication of these differences. As a result, it is argued, post-communist party systems are inevitably open, fluid, volatile and inherently unstable, and thus institutionalization will take a long time. Thus George Schopflin (1994) argued that political parties in post-communist Europe were the 'relatively remote constructs of the intellectuals' with no base in society. Moreover, the creation of cleavage-based parties in east-central Europe was hampered by the fast pace and complexity of the transition, the differences in the type of party ('charismatic and clientelistic' rather than programmatic), and a 'mediatized' type of campaigning (Rommele 1999, p.12). The lack of roots in society has led some observers to suggest that the speed of party system consolidation 'might be closer to the rates of party formation during the nineteenth century than to the rates in other new democracies near the end of the twentieth' (Parrott 1997, p.17).

In contrast, other scholars argued that the post-communist states did not begin their democratic experience from a blank slate (Tworzecki 2003). Indeed, while 'the Stalinist and neo-Stalinist system of government did set out to eliminate diversity and pluralism... the ruling communist parties had to be content with something short of complete success... with communism on the way out, some of the old cleavages reasserted themselves in Eastern Europe' (Berglund and Dellenbrant 1994, p.239, 248). In other words 'the "act" that was interrupted forty years ago with

the transition seemed to have resumed, as if nothing had happened in between' (Szeleyni and Szeleyni 1991, p.123).³¹

Attila Agh (1998a, pp.114–122) argued that there were three stages of cleavage development in post-communist Europe. The first saw a division between regime and non-regime parties, although Roskin (1993, p.48) called this 'an opposition so lopsided that it can hardly count as a "cleavage"' and which rapidly lost salience with the collapse of the regime and the development of the new democratic system. The second stage saw a divide develop between 'new' and 'old' parties. However, the 'old' parties rapidly faded from the political scene. Agh argues that it is the third cleavage that has taken firmest root – the ethnic or nationalist cleavage. Value-oriented cleavages have been slow to emerge, largely because of relatively low levels of economic development in comparison to west European countries as well as the short amount of time that has passed since the introduction of competitive politics. Indeed, Ronald Inglehart (2000) argued that the low levels of subjective well-being in post-communist countries meant that value-based cleavages were unlikely to develop in the region in the near future.

The first decade and a half of competitive politics showed that while parties representing the major cleavages of the inter-war period (agrarian parties, social democrats, Christian democrats, ethnic parties etc.) did emerge with the introduction of competitive elections, their success was rather short-lived. They discovered that 'their constituencies [had] changed almost beyond recognition by more than half a century of dictatorship' (Berglund and Dellenbrant 1994, p.249). The most successful parties in post-communist Europe have been new creations (van Biezen 2005, p.154).

Party systems in the region have been volatile and fragmented. Although it has been argued that there are clear patterns to the instability and that this could be evidence of party system institutionalization, this volatility is hardly conducive to democratic consolidation (Pettai and Kreuzer 2003). Richard Rose (1997) convincingly argued that parties are weak in East-Central Europe because weak civil society leads the population to focus on short-term factors, primarily economic, thus leading to high voter volatility. However, in a new democracy, flexible parties with weak organizations may actually be more conducive to consolidation as they are better able to respond to the rapid changes and strains of the transition period (Markowski 2001). But at the

³¹ Michael Roskin calls this the 'Rip van Winkle effect' (Roskin 1993: p.60).

same time, these small, elite parties are unlikely to gain the type of popular support needed for them to be institutionalized.

Nevertheless, despite these perceived weaknesses in political parties and party systems, the East-Central European countries have remained functioning democracies since the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989, and joined the European Union in 2004.³² However, this does not mean that political parties have a marginalized role in democratic consolidation. Rather, as Paul Lewis (2001d, p.486) argued, post-communist parties are ‘slimmed down’ versions of their western counterparts that ‘sustain the operation of modern liberal democracies, albeit at a fairly basic level.’ Thus qualitative democratic consolidation requires institutionalized parties.

Conclusions

This chapter discussed democracy, democratic consolidation and political parties. It argued that a new democracy can only be consolidated when the qualitative aspects – behaviour, attitude and democratic skills – are regularized by both elite and public. Political parties have a key role to play in this process, guaranteeing and embodying not just the procedural, but the qualitative aspects of democracy. The chapter then discussed the three major approaches to the study of parties: institutional, organizational, and sociological, and outlined the continuing debate on parties and party systems in the post-communist states of east-central Europe. The political parties that have emerged in East-Central Europe are very different – smaller, ideologically weaker and with few social bases – to those in Western Europe. However, this is unsurprising given that the parties have developed in both a different time-frame and circumstances. Nevertheless, post-war parties in Western Europe do provide a template for party institutionalization in democratically consolidated states.

³² It has been argued that the conditionality imposed by foreign policy has negatively affected party system institutionalization. EU accession particularly constrained public debate on policy issues to the extent that ‘the political party systems in the region have thus offered electoral accountability but not policy accountability’ (Grzymala-Busse and Innes 2003, p.66). They argue that this has contributed to voter volatility and disenchantment with democratic politicians and parties. However, while debate on policy issues has certainly been inhibited by EU accession, the pressure that the European Union has exerted on the post-communist states in terms of fighting corruption, stabilizing the rule of law and strengthening democratic institutions (not to mention the financial investment through financial assistance mechanisms), has helped to ensure a democratic infrastructure for policy debate.

However, before this thesis turns to examine Latvian democratic consolidation and political parties, it will trace the historical development of political parties and democracy in Latvia from the 1800s to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Chapter 2. A political history of Latvia

'Political parties must be destroyed!' (Title of book written and published by anonymous author in Latvia in 1934)

'Ceplis' is a popular Latvian novel (later made into a film), first published in 1929, caricaturizing the rise of a grotesquely crooked and egotistical Latvian businessman, Edgars Ceplis, his politician friends, and the extreme multi-partyism, cronyism and corruption of 1920s Latvia.¹ Perhaps inevitably, Latvians have long argued that the setting of the book could be seamlessly moved to post-communist Latvia. This reflects not just a popular cynicism towards contemporary corporate-political links, but also a keen sense of historic parallels between the inter-war era of democracy in Latvia, and the contemporary post-communist period.

Both democracy and political parties have had a comparatively short history in Latvia. Indeed, the idea of a Latvian nation is just a century and a half old, and by 2006, democratic political competition has existed for a cumulative total of less than thirty years. Nevertheless, this short, but eventful, history – particularly the inter-war years – partly explains the type of democracy, and political parties, that have emerged in contemporary Latvia. Indeed, Latvia has largely modeled its post-communist democracy on the inter-war era because of a 'lack of any other tradition' (Lieven 1994, p.55).

The concept of national awakening (*atmoda*) connects nineteenth century and modern Latvia, and is an important theme running throughout modern Latvian history. It was initially used to describe an emerging Latvian identity among the first university-educated ethnic Latvians in the mid-nineteenth century. The choice of word was significant – awakening implies that the nation was at some point already awake before falling into a slumber. Thus in its original meaning, it was used primordially, consciously attempting to connect nineteenth century Latvians with the symbols and stories of an often imagined past.² However, when the term was revived in the 1980s to describe Latvian nationalist opposition to the Soviet regime, it was linked to the Latvia of the inter-war era, rather than that of the distant past, or the nineteenth century.³ Thus awakening has

¹ Written by Pāvils Rozītis in 1929, and republished in 1998.

² For example, the ancient Latvian tale of *Lāčplēsis* (Bear-slayer) was turned into a national epic in 1888 by Andrejs Pumpurs.

³ By the 1980s all three of Miroslav Hroch's (1996, p.79) key 'objective relationships' were in place among the Latvian nation: (1) a 'memory' of some common past, treated as a 'destiny' of the group - or at least of its core constituents; (2) a density of linguistic or cultural ties enabling a higher degree of social communication within the group than beyond it; (3) a conception of the equality of all members of the group organized as a civil society.

been used in different ways, but to serve the same purpose of legitimizing the construction of a Latvian nation and state.

Latvian nationalism in both eras was the result of what Ernest Gellner (1983) described as the dual modern processes of increased educational attainment (initially stimulated in Latvia by rural Lutheran German clerics encouraging the reading of the bible in the nineteenth century, and the later expansion of higher education within the Soviet Union, as well as the maintenance of the Latvian language at the 'Republic' level) and socio-economic change (liberalizing nineteenth century laws gave Latvian peasants the opportunity to become landowners and earn a profit, while the Soviet era saw the rapid urbanization of Latvia). At the same time, the Latvian 'ethnic' group was also strongly defined by language (Smith 1998). This made the borders of Latvia relatively easy to draw (the Lithuanians, Estonians and Russians having very different languages), and allowed contemporary Latvian politicians to introduce a definition of Latvian citizenship based on Latvian culture and history. Thus Latvian nationalism is central to understanding Latvian politics, both past and present. Nationalism was the initial trigger for the development of the first political groups in the nineteenth century, and was the key political cleavage in both inter-war Latvia, and its contemporary post-communist successor. Indeed, it was also the primary organizing idea driving the Latvian push for independence in 1917 and again in the 1980s.

This chapter draws on a number of general histories of Latvia (e.g. Balodis and Tentelis 1938; Balodis 1991; Bērziņš 2000 and 2003; Ābols 2003) and a burgeoning number of other relevant monographs (e.g. Missiunas and Taagepera 1993; Hiden and Salmon 1994; Lieven 1994; Plakans 1995; Dreifelds 1996; Eksteins 1999; Nissinnen 1999; Norgard and Johannsen 1999; Pabriks and Purs 2001).⁴ However, there are few texts that deal with the issue of Latvian political party development in any depth. The notable exceptions are Ādolfs Šilde (1976) who authored a masterly account of the parliamentary politics of the inter-war era (although he focused on the

⁴ However, many texts are rather subjective in their approach to Latvian history. Histories from the inter-war era tended to be revisionist, seeking to undermine the historic role of the Baltic Germans in Latvia, and justify the existence of a Latvian state through emphasizing and exaggerating the uniqueness of the Latvian nation (e.g. Birkerts 1920; Balodis and Tentelis (eds.) 1934). Following the Soviet occupation, historical texts were highly politicized, and primarily aimed at primary and secondary schools (e.g. Galkin 1952; Dambe 1964). At the same time, post-war histories published by émigré Latvian historians were often written to simply further the cause of Latvian / Baltic independence. As a result, these books skip over the years of authoritarian rule, the role of Latvian execution squads in the holocaust, and the creation of Latvian Waffen-SS units (e.g. Bilmanis 1951; Spekke 1952). The recently re-published single-volume 'History of Latvia' (Spekke 2003) is typical of this era. Originally published in Sweden in 1948, it focused on the ancient and medieval history of Latvia, dedicating less than twenty of its three hundred and fifty pages of text to the inter-war era – and this mostly descriptive data showing the success of the Latvian state. Nevertheless, while the historical interpretations offered by these texts may be questionable, many do at least provide valuable data.

party system rather than the structure, social base and organization of political parties) and Oskars Freivalds' (1961) valuable, albeit pithy, descriptive review of the historical development of political parties in Latvia from the nineteenth century onwards.

This chapter traces the historical development of Latvian political parties, and particularly their institutional roots, organizational structure, and social base in the inter-war period. It is structured into three parts. The first looks at the development of Latvian national identity and political parties beginning in the nineteenth century and culminating with the years of independence from 1920-1940. The second considers political parties in more detail and attempts to place their role in the democratization of this era in more detail. The third covers Latvia in the Soviet Union, and the emergence of the independence movement leading up to 1991, particularly focusing on the role of political parties in this process. The conclusion considers the impact of history on contemporary Latvia.

2.1 Serfdom, independence, occupation: 1800s-1940

By 2006 Latvia had experienced 37 years of independence, just 29 of which have been under a democratic regime. The reason for this somewhat short history of national independence can be found in the geographical location and small size of Latvia. Located on the edge of the Baltic Sea in the north of Europe, Samuel Huntington identified the Latvia-Russia border as the 'eastern boundary of western civilization' (Huntington 1996, p.159). While this is an overly simplistic vision of a complicated and bitter cultural history, it does capture the geographic vulnerability of the small Latvian nation, located in a sparsely populated borderland that has been fought over by more powerful neighbours since the end of the twelfth century. Indeed, apart from its geographical location, Latvia has few other attractions, being largely flat, wooded and with little rich farmland or natural resources.⁵

This first part of the chapter structures Latvian political development up to the Soviet occupation in 1940 into four key stages. First, the awakening of Latvian national identity between the mid-nineteenth century and the First World War, encompassing the first vestiges of an organized Latvian civil society, and the emergence of the first Latvian political parties. Second, 1914-1920, when Latvian leaders formed a number of organizations and institutions claiming

⁵ The one natural resource that can be found in large quantities in Latvia is amber. However, as Modris Eksteins (1999, p.9) points out, it may well have been sought after in the age of the Greeks and Romans, but in the modern age has little monetary value.

political leadership of the Latvian nation. The third stage follows the *de jure* and *de facto* formation of the Latvian state and the first competitive elections in 1920, and ends with the Ulmanis authoritarian coup in 1934. The fourth stage, from 1934-1940, covers the six years of authoritarian rule. While this latter phase obviously had a destructive impact on political parties and democracy as a whole, it is significant largely because many contemporary Latvians see it as a golden age of economic development and social contentment.⁶

From national awakening to independence: 1800s-1914

The territory that makes up modern Latvia was first invaded by German crusaders in the late twelfth century.⁷ The Teutonic Knights had three primary aims: to protect the clerics, missionaries and merchants that accompanied them; to protect the new native converts to Christianity; and to eradicate the pagan practices still practiced by the indigenous people (Urban 1998). In later years, the Swedish, Polish, and Russian Empires also occupied the Latvian lands, which, as the central part of the Baltic provinces (southern Livonia and Courland), were of both strategic and commercial importance (Lieven 2000, p.262). However, throughout these different eras of empire the effective governors of Latvia remained the Baltic Germans, often the direct descendants of the first Crusaders. Latvian peasants remained enserfed to the German barons until the early nineteenth century. However, they maintained a very distinct identity based largely on the Latvian language, as well as pagan rituals and traditions which the Christian crusaders never entirely eradicated, despite the great mass of Latvian peasants having been converted to Christianity (the Catholic Church in Latgale, the eastern-most territory of Latvia, and the Lutheran church elsewhere).⁸ This distinct cultural identity was the basis for the Latvian political nation.

Miroslav Hroch (1985, p.23) studied the development of national movements in small European countries (although Latvia was the only Baltic State that did not merit a separate

⁶ For example, in 1993 the Latvian Farmers Union, which had been the party of the authoritarian dictator Kārlis Ulmanis, successfully based their campaign on linking the contemporary party with the achievements of Ulmanis in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, after the election Kārlis Ulmanis' nephew, Guntis Ulmanis (a nondescript mid-level Soviet-era industrial manager, whose only distinguishing feature was an uncanny likeness to the former dictator) was elected, by parliament, as the Latvian President. At this time the public often optimistically talked of the new 'Ulmanis era' (*jaunie Ulmaņa laiki*).

⁷ In figure 2.1 these territories are labeled *Livland* (known as Livonia) and *Curland* (spelt *Courland* in the modern era). Livland was a shared territory of both Latvian and Estonian speakers, while Curland was Latvian-speaking.

⁸ The most significant celebration being the midsummer celebrations (*Jāņi*) which are still celebrated en-masse by the Latvian population – indeed, it is a national holiday. The most important tradition was the telling of *dainas* – short peasant folk songs and poems. Krišjānis Barons is lauded by Latvian history as the man who methodically collected over 200,000 quadrains over the course of his life. The current Latvian President, Vaira Vīķe Freiberga, dedicated her academic career in Canada, at the University of Montreal, to the study of these traditions.

chapter), conceptualizing three phases in their development: 'Phase A (the period of scholarly interest), Phase B (the period of patriotic agitation) and Phase C (the rise of a mass national movement).' This is a largely useful framework for examining the development of Latvian identity. While there was certainly a first phase of scholarly interest, as small groups of ethnic Latvian students in Tartu and, later, St. Petersburg University began to discuss the concept of a Latvian nation, and a second phase of patriotic agitation marked by a flurry of Latvian language newspapers and new social organizations, there was no third stage of a single mass organized national movement, possibly because of the dislocations caused by the first world war, which led to Latvian refugees spreading across the eastern part of the Russian empire as German forces invaded the Latvian territory.⁹ Nevertheless, the first two phases set the groundwork for the eventual appearance of the Latvian state.

The national awakening is thus named for political rather than historic reasons. After all, in contrast to neighbouring Lithuania, there had never previously been a cohesive Latvian national state. As a result, this nineteenth century period is better conceptualized as a period in which all the necessary elements of a nation – language, culture, history and a shared territory – were gathered and, in some cases, constructed from a number of disparate parts. The Baltic Germans played a key role in the development of Latvian national identity. Lutheranism had taught that the bible is better understood in the native tongue, and this convinced a succession of Lutheran Ministers to take an interest in native Latvian culture and promote the national language e.g. Baltic Germans wrote and published the first Latvian language grammar book in 1761 (Hiden and Salmon 1994, p.17). Also, the German cleric and intellectual Johann Gottfried Herder lived in Rīga from 1764-1769 and developed a fascination with peasant Latvian folklore traditions, arguing that they revealed a distinct Latvian national culture (Lieven 1994, p.113). This prompted other Lutheran Ministers to submerge themselves in Latvian culture. Nevertheless, it required the emergence of native Latvian leaders to further develop this national consciousness.

Two key factors combined to further the simultaneous development of the idea of the Latvian nation and Latvian political awareness: peasant emancipation and urban industrialization. Each of these factors also emerged as the basis for the two competing political ideas – agrarianism and socialism – that were to dominate Latvian politics (and form the two largest political parties) until the Soviet occupation of 1940.

⁹ Hroch (1993) later claimed that Latvia had reached stage C in 1905. However, the 1905 uprisings in the Latvian lands, while aimed at the dominant Baltic Germans, were not nationalist in character.

Map 2.1 –The Baltic Territories in 1809



Source: Bury 1903

As map 2.1 shows, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Latvian territory was divided between three provinces of the Russian Empire – *Courland* (Kurzeme), *Livland* (the southern half of which was to become central Latvia, while the northern formed Estonia), and *Vitebsk* (where the ethnic Latvian region of Latgale was based).¹⁰ Latvian peasants (barring those living in Latgale) were first emancipated in 1817 and 1819, well before the rest of the Russian Empire. However, the first significant changes in their social structure began in the 1840's and 1850's when legislative reforms gave ethnic Latvians the possibility to buy agricultural land and move to urban areas (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.2). A state mortgage bank lent money to peasants in order to ease the purchase of land (Ābols 2003, p.94). A number of Latvian peasants seized this

¹⁰ Latgale was very different to the rest of Latvia as it had been in the hands of the Polish Empire for much longer, and was largely Catholic rather than Lutheran. Moreover, at the turn of the twentieth century it was much more agricultural, less modernized, and had a larger, long-standing ethnic Russian community.

opportunity, and by 1918, 63.5% of all agricultural land in Latvia was owned by ethnic Latvians (von Rauch 1974, p.6).

The second important development was the rapid industrialization of Rīga and other Latvian cities. The population of Rīga rose from 75,000 in 1860 to 500,000 by 1910 (Ābols 2003, p.97). A significant part of this growth was caused by Latvian migration from rural to urban areas – in the 1867 census Latvians made up 23.6% of the population of Rīga, but by 1897 this had risen to 45% (Ābols 2003, p.98).

The opportunity to purchase land also meant the possibility to turn a profit and for upward social mobility. The first and second generation of university educated Latvians, who were to initiate the national awakening, were the sons of successful independent Latvian farmers, and were able to find professional work in Rīga and other urban areas. Moreover, by the mid-nineteenth century there was no longer a need to assimilate with the Baltic Germans in order to progress socially, and with the creeping liberalization of political activity in the Russian Empire, ethnic Latvians began to form social organizations guarding their own interests.

The only university-level institution in the Livonia administrative region was the University of Dorpat (now Tartu), and this was the institution that the first group of middle-class Latvians attended. Krišjānis Valdemārs, a Latvian studying in Tartu, began organizing ‘Tartu Latvian student evenings’ that gathered fellow Latvian students to discuss Latvian culture. In 1862 part of the same group, but based in St. Petersburg, began publishing the first Latvian language newspaper, *Pēterburgas Avīze*, reaching a circulation of 4,000 within a few years (Page 1949, p.25). This group, which came to be known as the *Jaunlatvieši* (Young Latvians¹¹), was to prove the catalyst for the rapidly increased output of Latvian literature, which found a welcoming audience in a Latvian population that was 80% literate by the mid nineteenth century, as well as the first Latvian elite-level organization, the student fraternity *Lettonia* (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.4).¹² In terms of politics, the *Jaunlatvieši* did not seek independence or even autonomy within the Russian Empire for the Latvian nation, but rather sought to ensure that Latvians had cultural rights and were not oppressed by the Baltic Germans (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.4).

¹¹ A term coined by contemporary Baltic Germans, and intended in a belittling way, rather like, in the modern era, ‘new Russians’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘new Latvians’ are the wealthy new post-communist elite mocked for their gaudy, but expensive, style.

¹² The first Latvian newspapers to appear were *Mājas Viesis* (1956) and *Pēterburgas Avīze* (1862). The first daily newspaper, *Rīgas Lapa*, appeared in 1877. By 1897 literacy in Livonia was 92%, as compared to an overall rate of 30% in the Russian Empire (Hiden and Salmon 1994, p.18).

Socialist ideas eventually spread to Latvians studying in St. Petersburg. This social-democrat supporting group came to be known as the *Jaunstrāvnieceki* (New Current), and identified with the new working class that had emerged with the industrialization of Latvia, rather than the Latvian middle-class. The *Jaunstrāvnieceki* presented a new vision of Latvianness based on shared working-class interests across the different nations of the Russian Empire, rather than the Latvian nationalism of the *Jaunlatvieši*. The *Jaunstrāvnieceki* did support cultural rights for Latvians, but believed that the common rights of the working class superseded these rights. In other words, national or cultural rights were secondary to class interests. Eventually, rather like the leaders of the Russian social democrats, the *Jaunstrāvnieceki* leadership was forced to work from abroad (primarily London and Zurich) largely because they were perceived to be a direct political threat to the Tsarist order, unlike the *Jaunlatvieši* who focused on cultural, rather than political, autonomy (von Rauch 1974, p.11). Andrejs Plakans (1993, p.103) has pointed out that the emergence of the *Jaunstrāvnieceki* was of particular significance to the political development of Latvia because it 'demonstrated that the Latvian intelligentsia could sustain deep cleavages without diminishing the Latvian presence in the Baltic littoral'. Moreover, this meant that the existence of a Latvian nation was conceded by both major Latvian political movements, and this was also reflected in their political platforms in years to come.

The political ideas of the *Jaunstrāvnieceki* spread quickly, and by the turn of the century Latvia (both urban and rural) was dotted with small, illegal groups of social democrats, who were active not just in discussing socialist literature, but also organizing demonstrations and even festivities (Bērziņš 2000, p.281). The *Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskās Strādnieku Partija* (Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party – LSDSP) was finally formed in June 1904 in Rīga, and quickly claimed around 2,500 members (Bērziņš 2000, p.283). A branch of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party was also set up at the same time, as was the Jewish Bund (which in the inter-war era was a branch of the LSDSP). The key difference between the Latvian and Russian socialists at this time was one of nationalism – in contrast to the Russians, the Latvian social democrats supported the creation of an autonomous Latvia within the Tsarist state.

The second half of the nineteenth century also saw a rapid expansion in the number of Latvian social organizations (a fledgling civil society): 'funeral savings groups, friendship associations, cultural associations etc.' began to mushroom, and associations of farmers, Latvian teachers and other social groups were set up (Freivalds 1961, p.26). A key Latvian social organization at this time was the *Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība* (Latvian Association of Rīga) founded in

1868. It represented the conservative urban middle class that considered both the *Jaunlatvieši* and the *Jaunstrāvniki* far too confrontational. Rather, the *Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība* concentrated on developing Latvian culture, organizing the first Latvian theatre in 1868, and publishing a series of books on topics ranging from popular science to fiction (Ābols 2003, p.106). Its most significant initiative was the first Latvian song festival in 1873, which gathered together Latvians from all regions, and acted as a highly visual demonstration of a wider Latvian nation.¹³

Future political leaders emerged from these different movements.¹⁴ For example, Jānis Pliekšāns (better known as the writer Jānis Rainis) and his brother-in-law Peteris Stucka were *Jaunstrāvniki*. Their newspaper, *Dienas Lapa*, published socialist literature smuggled into Latvia from Germany by Rainis (Ābols 2003, p.111). In 1897 both were deported from the Russian Empire. Political parties also developed from these three movements. More specifically, LSDSP emerged from the *Jaunstrāvniki*, *Latvijas Zemnieku Savienība* (Latvian Farmers Union – LZS) from the nationalist *Jaunlatvieši*, and the *Demokrātiskā Centra Partija* (Democratic Centre Party – DCP) from the *Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība*.

As well as the growth of political parties and other organizations, the nineteenth century also saw wealthier Latvians experience their first contact with democracy. 1866 saw local elections in which landowners, now including Latvians, were allowed to participate, and 1877 saw the first municipal elections, initially based on tax contributions but later on property ownership. While only 3.4% of the Latvian population voted in these elections, and only two of the 72 elected deputies in 1877 were Latvian, by 1906 this had risen to 26 from 80 (Freivalds 1961, p.27).

The turn of the century witnessed a growing Latvian middle-class, creating a professional educated elite to staff the public administration, as well as political actors, and a business elite. The number of Latvian university graduates in medicine, law and other professional programmes rose steadily, as did the population of the area that was to become Latvia – from 1.9 million in 1897 to 2.5 million by 1914 (Plakans 1995, p.112).

The revolutionary year of 1905 was central to the development of Latvian political parties. Indeed, Latvian historian Ādolfs Šilde (1976, p.64) wrote that the Latvian nation became a ‘living political organism’ in 1905, having finally been mobilized at a national level. The LSDSP played a

¹³ A tradition that is still maintained. The last song festival was in 2002. They also achieved a great political significance in the Soviet era when it was one of the rare opportunities that the Latvian nation was able to gather together and publicly celebrate the language and culture that binded them together.

¹⁴ James D. White (1994, pp.21-22) referred to all three of these movements as ‘Young Latvians.’ However, they represent three very different strands of the nationalist movement, and are here differentiated as three different (albeit interconnected) groups.

key role in organizing strikes and disturbances in the cities, and dominated the political agenda (Kirby 1995; Kiaupa et al 2000). It was less influential in the countryside where ‘the peasants rose with savagery against their former masters’ (Hiden and Salmon 1994, p.21). These acts of aggression against the Baltic Germans, followed by acts of repression against the peasants by the Tsarist regime, were critical in terms of binding the Latvian peasantry into a nationally, and perhaps even partly politically, aware unit. Artis Pabriks and Aldis Purs (2001, p.9) have argued that the 1905 revolution showed the limited extent to which the different political movements in Latvia were united. Most particularly, the October Manifesto, which introduced constitutional monarchy and increased civil rights in the Russian Empire, met all the demands of the moderate Latvian nationalists, while the Latvian left-wing dismissed it as irrelevant, and pushed for revolution. In the long-term this also led to a key division between the nationalists and the social democrats – the nationalists continued to work within the Tsarist system while the left-wing agitated for radical systemic change.

The October Manifesto led to the rapid formation of political parties to compete in the first *Duma* election. Unsurprisingly, the wealthier, better educated, and more experienced Baltic Germans reacted particularly quickly, forming the monarchist *Baltische-Konstitutionelle Partei* (Baltic Constitutional Party) just ten days after the publication of the October Manifesto. It claimed a membership of 6,200 by 1906 (Bērziņš et al 2000, p.357).¹⁵ A Latvian Constitutional Democrat Party (based on the liberal Russian Constitutional Democrat Party – *Kadet* – party) was formed by ethnic Latvians, followed shortly thereafter by a Latvian branch of the Russia-based Constitutional Democrat Party (Bērziņš et al 2000, p.358). The latter two parties shared the same basic policies (voting rights for all tax-payers, increased political freedoms etc.), only differing on the centrality of the Latvian and Russian languages.

The *Latviešu Demokrātu Savienība* (Latvian Democrat Union) was formed in November 1905. It was more radical than the Latvian *Kadets*, calling, amongst other things, for free elections, autonomy (rather than independence) for Latvia, the separation of church and state, and an eight hour working day (Freivalds 1961, p.41). It differed from the LSDSP in being more supportive of Latvian nationalism. Indeed, Latvian independence was the central tenet of its programme. The LSDSP, in contrast, had an anti-nationalist programme, favouring ‘proletarian solidarity over bourgeois nationalism’ (Kirby 1995, p.234).

¹⁵ It managed to poll 38% in the first Duma election (Freivalds 1961, p.33).

The democratic reforms that followed 1905 allowed a small group of Latvian proto-politicians to gain valuable democratic experience – there were five Latvian representatives in the first and second Duma while, following the reduction of non-Russian nationality seats in 1907, there were four Latvians in the third Duma and two in the fourth. As von Rauch (1974, p.15) wrote, ‘the Duma [...] provided a training ground for parliamentary debate and procedure, which stood many of the non-Russian delegates in good stead at a later date.’ Certainly, this democratic and organizational experience was to prove invaluable as the First World War opened up the possibility for Latvia to seize its political independence.

Fighting for independence: 1914-1920

The Latvian territory was rapidly drawn into the fighting of the First World War. German forces entered Latvia in May 1915, and occupied the Latvian territory until February 1918. Then, following the failed revolution in Germany and the end of hostilities on the western front, German forces withdrew from Latvia and Soviet forces invaded led, ironically, by the communist Latvian General Jukums Vāciētis, and the Latvian ‘red riflemen.’¹⁶ These years saw two important developments for Latvian national political identity.

First, the German attack led, in 1915, to the formation of the first Latvian military unit, (von Rauch 1974, p.26). While it was initially part of the Tsarist army, its language of operation was Latvian and it was the first organized Latvian military force. Moreover, many of the soldiers and officers from the unit were to play a key part in the wars for independence and the subsequent construction of the Latvian military in the independent state.

Second, a large part of the Latvian population fled from the Latvian German-occupied territories to Russia. At the same time the Russian Empire was fighting a war, dealing with revolutionary impulses and suffering from financial implosion, and the needs of these refugees were inevitably neglected by the authorities. As a result, there was a vacuum that an organization looking after the interests of the Latvian refugees – some 800,000 people or 60% of the entire ethnic Latvian population – could step into. Indeed, a number of organizations sprung up, eventually uniting under the Central Refugee Committee. This Committee proved to be a valuable training ground in political coordination, executive and public management as well as giving a

¹⁶ The red riflemen (*sarkanie strēlnieki*) were the elite troops of the Red Army, composed of ethnic Latvians. There is a statue commemorating their deeds in the old town of Rīga. It is one of the few statues built in the years of Soviet occupation not torn down after 1991.

number of politicians the opportunity to come to public prominence.¹⁷ Indeed, the personal links and traditions of political cooperation on the committee would later be carried into the Latvian National Council which declared independence in November 1918, and governed Latvia until the 1920 Constitutional Assembly elections (Ābols 2003, p.136).

This experience proved critically important as the Russian empire collapsed in 1917, and the Latvian territory found itself in a power vacuum, fought over by a combination of White (pro-Tsarist) forces, the Red Army, German mercenaries, and Latvian nationalists. The Latvian forces were fighting for an independent Latvia. The Red Army (including a sizeable unit of the Latvian Red Riflemen) was fighting for the incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union.¹⁸ A bewildering number of German mercenary forces were battling for the federation of the Latvian lands with a greater Germany, as well as simply against the Bolsheviks and independence-seeking Latvians. Finally, White Forces were battling against the Bolsheviks and for the reinstatement of the Russian Empire on the pre-1914 lines.¹⁹ Walter Clemens (1991, p.33) lists eight different forces fighting on Estonian and Latvian soil.²⁰ This combination of forces led to destruction on a huge scale. Writing about the independence battles of the three Baltic States, Modris Eksteins (1999, p.59) argued that 'these states were created neither by the foresight of their own leaders nor by any vision of the victorious western allies. They were the product of ruin and disintegration, and only secondarily of positive effort'. However, writing in 1924, Hugh Temperley (1924, p.292) took a rather different position, arguing that 'it may be confidently asserted that when the full story comes to be told, the epic of the Estonian and Latvian struggle for independence will rank high among the world's records of such performances'. In fact, it was a combination of both confusion and skilful political maneuvering that gave Latvian politicians the opportunity to snatch independence.

Equally bewildering was the flurry of new democratic activity as a series of regional and local councils, congresses and other potential governing authorities formed and disintegrated in an attempt to fill the vacuum caused by the to and fro of the battling armies (Šilde 1976). However,

¹⁷ Interestingly, one of the key figures in the committee was Janis Čakste, who had previously also been a Duma deputy, and was to become the first president of independent Latvia – he had utilized all the political training opportunities available to him.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Swain (1999) recounts the Latvian Riflemen's growing disillusionment towards the Soviet regime in 1918, and the great impact that this had on the growth of anti-Soviet feeling in the Latvian territories from 1919 onwards.

¹⁹ This confusion is reflected in the *Brāļu Kapi* (Brother's Cemetery) in Rīga, which is dedicated to the fallen in the Latvian wars of independence. Latvian Red Riflemen are buried next to soldiers from the self-defence forces, although at some stage they could well have been fighting against each other.

²⁰ Baltic nationalists, Baltic communists, Red Army, Latvian Riflemen, White Russians, British navy, Finish volunteers, and Polish forces (Clemens 1991, p.33).

the only significant organized political force was the LSDSP, and this primarily in urban rather than rural areas. The LSDSP did extremely well in the municipal elections held in Latvia on the 26th August 1917, winning 41% of the vote in Rīga, and 64% in Valmiera (von Rauch 1974, p.34).

However, in 1917 it was by no means clear that Latvia would emerge as an internationally recognized independent state within three years. Indeed, Latvian leaders initially had relatively limited ambitions, calling for an autonomous Latvia within a larger Russian federation. Moreover, there was little international support for an independent Latvia.²¹ However, a year later Latvian political leaders were calling for an independent Latvia. How can this turnaround be explained? The provisional government that had assumed control of Russia in February 1917 ceded increased autonomy to the Baltic provinces, recalling the Russian Governors and replacing them with 'Government Commissars' who were not Baltic-Germans, but ethnic Balts (von Rauch 1974, p.27). This encouraged a March 1917 Provincial Assembly convened in the central Latvian town of Valmiera to call for the establishment of an administrative region based on the Latvian ethnic nation, encompassing southern Livonia, Courland and Latgale (von Rauch 1974, p.28). This initiative was eagerly adopted by the swathe of newly established Latvian political parties and other organizations attending the Provincial Assembly.

There were initially two unelected organs claiming to represent the Latvian nation in 1917. The Provisional National Council, which held meetings in north-east Latvia (which was controlled by the Red Army) and Russia, and the Democratic Bloc which operated in Rīga and the western region dominated by the White Armies.

The Provisional National Council invited eight parties to participate in its first session. This indicates that there were at least eight reasonably organized parties in the Latvian territory at this time. These parties were: the Revolutionary Socialist Party, LSDSP-Bolshevik wing, LSDSP-Menshevik wing, Latvian Farmers Union, National Democratic Party, Democratic Party, Radical Democratic Party, and the Latgallian Peoples Committee (Šilde 1976, p.209). At its opening meeting in November 1917 the Provisional National Council declared that Latgale was part of the Latvian territory and declared the whole of the Latvian territory to be autonomous. This was the same territory that would form *de jure* Latvia in 1920. At the same time, the Democratic Bloc was formed in German-occupied Rīga by seven political parties: Latvian Farmers Union, the

²¹ Indeed, Latvia was hardly recognized internationally. Arnolds Spekke (1952, p.18) recounts that the 1919 twenty volume 'The Times History of the World War' makes no mention of Latvia in its pages, although it does mention the Russian regions of Courland and Livonia.

Democrat's Union, the Radical Democratic Party, the National Democrats, the Independents Union, Revolutionary Socialists, and the LSDSP.

Six of the seven parties in the Democratic Bloc were also represented in the Provisional National Council, and this certainly eased the two institution's merger into the Latvian National Council in 1918. It declared Latvia's independence on the stage of the Latvian national theatre on November 18th 1918, and then called elections for a popularly elected Constitutional Assembly (Plakans 1995, p.117). Eight parties participated in the Provisional National Council, with the number of mandates based on the perceived size of the organizations in terms of both membership and popular support: LZS (13 mandates), LSDSP (10), Latvian Democratic Party (5), Latvian Radical Democrat Party (5), Latvian Revolutionary Socialist Party (3), National Democrat Party (2), Republican Party (1), and the Latvian Independence Party (1) (Šilde 1976, p.257).²² Seats in the Council were allocated to parties, rather than individuals. This ensured that many different interests were represented in the Constitutional Assembly, and also assisted in the institutionalization of parties, because potential leaders would have to be a member of one of the eight parties in order to sit on the council. The membership was quite fluid. While there are insufficient documents available to precisely chart the membership of the Constitutional Assembly, historians put the figure between 245 and 297 different members (Saeima 2005). However, by 1919 the Red Army had forced the Provisional Government, whose army was composed of 'a handful of patriotic students and former Latvian Tsarist junior officers' (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.9), to retreat to the Baltic port city of Liepāja. At one point the entire government was working from a British ship in the port of Liepāja, but, with international assistance, eventually the Soviet forces were pushed out of Latvia. The peace treaty between Latvia and the Soviet Union, signed in Rīga in August 1920, signaled the end of hostilities, and the beginning of the reconstruction (or, in political terms, construction) of the Latvian state.

This was a crucial phase in the development of political parties in Latvia. First, parties had the opportunity to serve in coalition government, gaining valuable political and administrative experience.²³ Second, the parties involved in this process had the opportunity to form political relationships that could be carried over to the future Latvian legislature. Third, parties were given

²² However, not all parties could fill the seats allocated to them. The LSDSP could only fill five of their ten seats and the Radical democrats four of their five (Šilde 1976, p.257).

²³ Indeed, the Latvian National Council had major work to do, not just physically reconstructing the infrastructure of a devastated nation, but also in the diplomatic world in gaining international recognition for Latvia (Latvian independence was not recognized *de jure* until the 26th of January 1921), and in the symbolic construction of a nation – agreeing on a national flag, anthem and so on.

an opportunity to develop their internal cohesion – to form party organizations that would govern the work of party representatives in the Council, evaluate candidates for office, and prepare for the forthcoming elections. Finally, the parties involved in this process had the opportunity to develop their political identity through the Latvian media. The most important legislative contributions of the Council were the provisional citizenship law, and electoral law, for the first competitive national elections to elect the Constitutional Assembly in 1920.

By 1920 Latvia had acquired a distinct national identity, primarily based on the Latvian language and culture, that allowed for the creation of an independent state. The reforms of the Tsarist system in the nineteenth century had allowed for the emergence of an educated Latvian intelligentsia as well as an urban business class and rural property-owning class. This had also led to Latvian literature and other forms of national culture, as well as organizations that aimed to discuss and promote Latvian interests. Finally, political parties emerged and by 1920 had assumed centre stage. The following twenty years saw an initial flowering of Latvian democracy, followed by a sudden jolt into authoritarianism.

Competitive democracy: 1920-1934

The 1920 Latvian Constitutional Assembly authored the Latvian constitution which was later restored in 1992. However, this was a ‘rump constitution’. Delegates had few difficulties reaching agreement on the first part of the constitution elaborating the institutional framework of the Latvian state. However, the second part, detailing the rights of individuals, was defeated in a 68 to 62 vote, and deferred indefinitely (Šilde 1976, p.363). Indeed, this second part was not accepted until 1998. Thus contemporary Latvia is built on the same constitutional foundations as inter-war Latvia. However, the inter-war era was marred by the collapse of democracy in 1934. How far were the seeds of authoritarianism sown between 1920 and 1934?

Political parties began to organize in the run-up to the Constitutional Assembly elections in 1920, the first national election in Latvian history. An election law was passed on August 19th 1919, giving the vote to all Latvian citizens over the age of 21. A total of 150 seats were to be contested in elections over two days on the 17th and 18th of April 1920, with the country divided into five electoral districts.²⁴ The number of deputies elected from each district was based on the population declared in the last census of the Tsarist era in 1897 which, despite the extreme

²⁴ Rīga had 22 seats, Vidzeme 37, Kurzeme 26, Zemgale 26, and Latgale 39.

dislocations of the Latvian public during the First World War and subsequent wars of independence, provided the only available data on the population. The turnout was high at 84.9%. Sixteen of the competing 57 groups won seats in the Constitutional Assembly, with the LSDSP being the most successful with 57 seats, followed by the LZS with 26 and the regional Lattgalian New Era with 17. The other 13 parties won only between one and six seats each, with minority parties winning a total of seventeen (see table 2.1).

The Constitutional Assembly is best conceptualized as the first Latvian legislature rather than some kind of transitional body. The Assembly passed a number of important laws (particularly the law on agrarian reform and the parliamentary election law) as well as the Latvian constitution.²⁵ The Constitutional Assembly also initiated a number of trends that have blighted all subsequent Latvian elections. First, a large number of political groups competed in the election, only 25 of which were registered as political parties. Moreover, only three of these 25 parties competed in all five electoral districts.²⁶ This was largely because very few parties decided to compete in the Latgale district, anticipating strong support for Lattgalian regional parties. Some of these political groups were absurdly small – the Jekabmiesta Labour Group won a mere 87 votes in total (Šilde 1976, p.344). Even the interests of ethnic minorities were fragmented – there were four separate Jewish candidate lists.

Table 2.1 – Parliamentary elections in Latvia: 1920-1931

Election Year	Turnout	Competing Lists	Winning Lists	Losing Lists
1920 ²⁷	84.9%	57	16	41
1922	82.2%	88	20	68
1925	74.9%	141	27	114
1928	79.3%	120	24	96
1931	80.0%	103	21	82

Source: Saeima 2005

The two dominant parties in the democratic era were the LSDSP and the LZS. While the LSDSP controlled parliamentary office, LZS dominated the executive branch, being a coalition

²⁵ A total of 205 laws and 291 regulations (Saeima 2005). The constitution that was adopted by the Assembly was fairly typical of those written in central Europe in the inter-war era, with most power lying in the hands of a unicameral parliament.

²⁶ The LSDSP, the Labour Party and the Democrat Union

²⁷ 1920 saw the election to the Constitutional Assembly, not a full blown parliamentary election. The main difference was in the number of seats up for election – 150, against the 100 contested in parliamentary elections in 1922, 1925 etc).

partner in eleven of the thirteen coalition governments, and providing ten of the thirteen prime ministers, as well as three of the four presidents (including, of course, Kārlis Ulmanis, who was to lead the coup against the parliament in 1934).²⁸ The LSDSP participated in only two government coalitions. However, the post of parliamentary speaker (a largely symbolic position, although officially the second ranking statesman in Latvia after the President) was held by the LSDSP throughout the inter-war era.²⁹ Why was there so much tension between LZS and the LSDSP? The roots of the conflict can be found in the revolutionary period when a majority of LSDSP members supported a vision of Latvia as a Republic within the Soviet Union. The more nationalist LZS never trusted the LSDSP after this.³⁰

The period from 1922 to 1934 saw four parliamentary elections and the formation of thirteen government coalitions. Table 2.2 shows the parliamentary parties (68 in total) represented in the five parliaments.³¹ The sheer size of the table (spilling over two pages) reveals the political fragmentation of this era.

Social organizations (NGO's) flourished in the early years of independent Latvia. The 'law on social and political organizations' passed in July 1923 allowed anyone over the age of 18 to form or join an organization. The minimum number of members needed to register a political party or social organization was five (Bērziņš 2003). Ādolfs Šilde (1976, pp.544-545) observed that by 1928 Latvia had well over 6,000 different independent organizations. Many of these organizations had ties to the larger political parties, particularly LSDSP, LZS, and the ethnic minority parties. Some even competed in local and parliamentary elections. Trade unions were relatively small and fragmented, but closely affiliated to the LSDSP and the Communist Party.³² Perhaps the most influential NGO's were the student fraternities, but in a very indirect, untransparent way because while many deputies and ministers were members, their affiliation remained hidden from public view (Šcerbinskis 2005).

²⁸ Janis Čakste, Alberts Kviesis, and Kārlis Ulmanis.

²⁹ Fricis Vesmanis (1922-1925) and Pauls Kalniņš (1925-1934).

³⁰ This division even extended to the emigre community after 1945. The LSDSP was the only party that maintained some sort of organized structure and membership. However, the nationally minded emigre community could not reconcile itself with the LSDSP.

³¹ Latvian parties formally sit in 'fractions' once elected to parliament.

³² In 1921 the Latvian Trade Union Central Committee had 40,000 members. Although the Central Committee split as a result of the different political factions battling to control it, by 1933 there were 50,000 people registered as members of several hundred different trade unions (Šilde 1976, p. 560-562).

Table 2.2 – Parliamentary parties in Latvia. 1920-1931

	1920 ³³	1922	1925	1928	1931
Latvian Farmers Union	26	17	16	16	14
Latvian Social Democratic Worker's Party	57	30	32	25	21
Lattgalian Farmer's Party	17	-	2	-	-
German Party	6	-	-	-	-
Democrat Union	6	-	-	-	-
Labour Party	6	-	-	-	-
Lattgalian Christian Farmer's Party	6	6	-	-	-
Non-Party Citizens Group	6	-	-	-	-
Christian National Party	3	-	-	-	-
Landless Peasants Agrarian Union	3	-	-	-	-
Russian Citizens Group	4	-	-	-	-
Jewish Bloc	5	-	-	-	-
Non-party Landless Peasants	2	-	-	-	-
<i>Ceire Cion</i>	1	1	1	1	-
Lattgalian People's Party	1	-	-	-	-
United Polish Party	1	-	-	-	-
United SD Menshevik Party and Rural Worker's Union	-	7	4	-	-
Democratic Centre and Non-Party Social Worker's	-	6	5	3	6
Latvian Baltic German Union ³⁴	-	6	5	6	6
Non-party National Centre	-	4	-	-	-
Christian National Union	-	4	2	-	-
Lattgalian Labour Party	-	4	-	-	-
Latvian New Farmers Union	-	4	3	-	-
Russian National Democrat Party	-	2	-	-	-
<i>Agudas Jisroel</i>	-	2	2	1	2
United Jewish National Bloc	-	2	-	-	-
Latgallian Peoples Union	-	1	-	-	-
Zemgallian Catholic List	-	1	-	-	-
Old Believers Central Committee	-	1	-	-	-
Polish Union	-	1	-	-	-
Jewish Bund	-	1	1	1	-
Catholic and Christian Farmers Party	-	-	5	6	8
Non-party Social Workers Fraction	-	-	3	-	-
Latvian New Farmers and Smallholders Party	-	-	3	4	8
National Union	-	-	3	2	-
United Lattgalian Labour Party, Smallholder and Landless Farmers Union	-	-	2	-	-
Lattgalian Democrat Party	-	-	2	-	-

³³ The 1920 Constitutional Assembly had 150 seats, as opposed to 100 in the parliamentary elections from 1922 onwards.

³⁴ Latvian historians (e.g. Šilde 1976) have also called this a Baltic-German 'party'. However, it was a committee coordinating five different parties representing the interests of Baltic Germans (Hiden 2004: pp.63-64)

Peace, Order and Production Union	-	-	2	-	-
Orthodox Voters and United Russian Organization Bloc	-	-	2	2	-
Polish-Catholic Latvian Polish Union	-	-	2	2	-
Old Believers Fraction	-	-	2	-	-
Non-party	-	-	1	-	-
Destroyed region Congress and United List	-	-	1	-	-
Zionist Organization <i>Mizrachi</i>	-	-	1	2	1
Russian Regional Social Workers United Fraction	-	-	1	-	-
Lattgalian Non-party Union	-	-	1	-	-
National Farmers Union	-	-	1	-	-
National Bloc	-	-	-	8	-
Workers and Farmers Fraction	-	-	-	6	7
Lattgalian democratic Farmers Union	-	-	-	3	-
Progressive People's Union	-	-	-	3	-
United Old Believers Fraction	-	-	-	2	-
Latvian Regional Authority Russian Workers Union	-	-	-	2	1
Progressive Union	-	-	-	2	3
Bank Depositors and Other Aggrieved Party	-	-	-	1	1
Christian Labour people's Union	-	-	-	1	-
Lattgalian Social Democrat Workers and Farmers party	-	-	-	1	-
Latvian Labour Union and Peoples Union	-	-	-	1	-
Latvian independent Socialist Party	-	-	-	1	-
Christian labour Bloc	-	-	-	-	6
Lattgalian Progressive Farmers Union	-	-	-	-	5
New Farmers Union	-	-	-	-	2
Russian Old Believers Peoples Labour Fraction	-	-	-	-	2
Latvian Polish-Catholic Fraction	-	-	-	-	2
United Orthodox and Old Believer Voters and United Russian Organization Fraction	-	-	-	-	2
Russian Farmers Union and Russian Social Workers Fraction	-	-	-	-	1
Peace, Order and Production Union	-	-	-	-	1
Professor Kārlis Balodis' Labour Party	-	-	-	-	1

Source: Šilde 1976, pp.708-717

One of the first steps taken by the Constitutional Assembly was a radical land reform. There were three main reasons for this (von Rauch 1974, p.87). First, the land reform created a more equitable society. Second, it created a new class of stakeholders to support the new regime. Third, the reform undermined the social and economic status of Baltic Germans in favour of ethnic Latvians.³⁵ The land reform saw Baltic-German land confiscated (with no compensation) in

³⁵ By the mid 1920s only 50 hectares of agricultural land remained in Baltic German hands, compared to over 2 million before 1920 (Hiden 1970, p.296).

September 1920. This land was pooled and could be purchased by Latvian citizens wishing to become smallholders. Military veterans were given priority in choosing the best pieces of land. By 1935 there were 237,500 farming units in Latvia, and farming consistently accounted for 40% of national income (Eksteins 1999, p.98). Farming had also grown more efficient, by 1933 producing around 50% more than between 1909-1913 (Puisāns 2000, p.50).

The definitive text on the inter-war Latvian economy is 'A history of the Latvian economy: 1914-1945' (Aizsilnieks 1968). Aizsilnieks identified four phases of economic development: (i) economic construction (1920-1923); (ii) economic flowering (1923-1929); (iii) economic depression (1930-1933); and (iv) economic restructuring (1934-1940). As this division implies, the sharpest period of economic growth occurred in the mid 1920s, although Latvian popular memory remembers the authoritarian years as the golden era of the Latvian economy. Indeed, economic development in general was rapid in the inter-war years. This is a significant achievement bearing in mind that Latvian industry had been dismantled in 1915 and moved eastwards, and the Latvian lands then ravaged by civil war. Indeed, Ole Norgaard and Lars Johannsen (1999, p.40) argued that the loss of this industry actually had a positive long-term impact on the Latvian economy, because it made the Latvian economy less reliant on Soviet raw materials, and also reduced ethnic tensions (a great number of Russian industrial workers left with the factories).

As with the economic transition of the early 1990s, trade was redirected away from the Soviet Union, where, of course, Latvia had long-standing economic ties as a former constituent part of the Russian Empire. As in the 1990s, this was done for primarily political reasons – the wish to build closer ties to the west through economic relations, as well as the practical reality that the Soviet Union simply did not want to trade with the Baltic States in the 1920s and 1930s.

By the late 1930s, Latvia's economy was closely integrated with the west. Its biggest trading partners were the UK and Germany, which swallowed up over 70% of Latvian exports, and made up almost 60% of Latvian imports. In contrast, trade with the Soviet Union ran at 3.5% of imports and 3% of exports (Spekke 1952, p.33). Latvian exports were mostly agricultural products, as well as textiles and timber (much as in contemporary Latvia). Perhaps the most significant difference between the two eras is that inter-war Latvia also had a small, but flourishing, production industry making radios, cameras and even airplanes (all produced by 'VEF' – a company name that the Soviet Union maintained). In 1920, following the devastation of the First World War, there were only some 21,000 workers in industrial enterprises in Latvia,

compared with 93,000 in 1910. However, by 1938 the figure had reached 99,000 (Puisāns 2000, p.52).

Inter-war Latvia was not an ethnically homogenous country. Ethnic minorities, primarily Russians, Germans, Byelorussians, and Jews, represented around a quarter of the population (Plakans 1995, p.132). Although the failure to adopt the second part of the constitution in 1922 meant that the specific rights and freedoms of the minorities were not elaborated, the 1919 schooling law laid the basis for a thriving minority culture by granting autonomy and state funding to minority schools (Bērziņš 2003, p.311). There were also accredited German- and Russian-language institutions of higher education, albeit privately financed (ibid, p.312).

Political corruption was a major issue throughout the parliamentary years. Political scandals, particularly inappropriate relationships between politicians, government Ministers and the private sector were frequently uncovered by the press. Ādolfs Šilde (1982, p.268) argued that all parties in this era had 'grey wallets' (illegal or hidden income), but that the smaller parties, especially the parties with just a few or even just one deputy, were the most open to corruption (particularly selling their votes, or lobbying private interests). While studies of political corruption by Latvian academics in the 1920s tended towards generalization and hearsay, they do reflect the general spirit of the late 1920s and early 1930s – a distrust of the political establishment and political parties in particular.³⁶ And this skepticism certainly seems to have had some basis. Alfreds Bērziņš (1963, pp.124-125), a deputy in the final parliamentary calling, recounted his experience in constructing the final Latvian government coalition before the 1934 coup:

'In forming the final Ulmanis government in March 1934, I had the opportunity to talk with the single-deputies about the vote approving the new government. The deputy representing the 'Bank Depositors and Other Aggrieved Party' asked for 60,000 Lats in cash for his vote.'

Political corruption certainly contributed towards the malaise that made the 1934 authoritarian coup possible. However, there were also a number of additional factors that hastened the coup.

First, by the early 1930s Latvia was facing a crisis of confidence in the political system. LZS had proposed a series of sweeping reforms to the constitution in November 1933, all of which

³⁶ For example, Jānis Mežaraugs (1928) article on 'How the left-wing government fought political corruption' was published by the Latvian Academy of Sciences, but is more of an angry diatribe against the perceived corruption of the civic parties than an academic investigation of political corruption.

were aimed at strengthening the presidency and weakening the parliamentary system.³⁷ In contrast, LSDSP was opposed to strengthening the presidency, largely because it realized that there was very little possibility of a left-wing presidential candidate garnering the two-thirds parliamentary majority needed to elect the president. The LSDSP proposed more minor changes to the election law, including the introduction of a minimum threshold for parties to pass in parliamentary elections. However, neither of these changes was likely to be approved by the two-thirds majority needed, because parliament contained only two parties with more than ten seats, and these changes would see the influence of these smaller parties undermined.

Second, the global economic crisis reached Latvia in the early 1930s, and led to a radical fall in exports, the exit of foreign capital and a rise in unemployment (von Rauch 1974, p.147). Combined with continuing political instability, this created an air of malaise and dissatisfaction which allowed the Ulmanis coup to be met with very little protest by the general population. This was partly because political parties were disbanded and the press censored (Plakans 1995). However, there is little doubt that the democratic regime had little popular support by the early 1930s. Indeed, one pamphlet written by Vilis Kanasts in 1931 directly blamed political parties for the economic crisis engulfing Latvia, while another, anonymous, pamphlet from 1934, accused political parties of profiteering. It was pithily titled 'Political Parties Must Be destroyed' (Anonymous 1934). Indeed, political parties were frequently implicated in corruption scandals that undermined public support for parties and the democratic system (Zirnis and Veveris 2005, p.9).³⁸

Ulmanis himself argued that he had suspended parliament and banned parties because of a fear of a radical coup by the extreme right-wing *Pērkoņkrusts* (Thundercross) organization. However, the coup was also caused by frustration among the centrist civic parties as their position in the parliament (in terms of electoral performance) was gradually undermined, and they were increasingly being pushed into compromises with the minority parties (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.21). The LZS share of the vote had also significantly declined since the 1922 election. Thus the fear of losing their virtual monopoly of political power in inter-war Latvia must have been a powerful motivating factor for the coup, particularly as Latvia's neighbours (Lithuania in 1926 and Estonia in 1933) had already slipped into authoritarian rule. Indeed, Latvia was one of the last

³⁷ The major changes included reducing the amount of parliamentary seats from 100 to 50, while increasing the term from three years to four; creating a popularly elected, 5-year presidency (with a two term limit) and granting the president increased legislative powers as well as the ability to dismiss parliament (Bērziņš 2003, p.213).

³⁸ Indeed, the American-Latvian political scientist Rasma Kārklīņš has claimed that her distinguished historian father Ādolfs Šilde, believed that the Ulmanis coup was carried out because the press was about to break a string of compromising corruption stories concerning Ulmanis and his LZS (Zirnis and Veveris 2005).

central European countries to fall under authoritarian government. Thus the loss of democracy did not come with the international negative connotations, or sanctions, that would inevitably arise today.

Authoritarian government: 1934-1940

Kārlis Ulmanis, the incumbent Latvian Prime Minister, executed a coup on the 15th of May 1934. He combined the offices of Prime Minister and President in 1936. The coup itself was executed quickly. It was supported by the army as well as the National Guard (*Aizsargi*). A state of emergency was decreed, public meetings and demonstrations banned. Newspapers unfriendly to the regime were not published, while others were censored. All 109 registered political parties were banned (Bērziņš 2003, p.596). Domestic politicians responded passively. Indeed, a number of leading politicians, even from opposition parties (including LSDSP and the Democratic Centre), took up cabinet positions under Ulmanis. Moreover, the Latvian government's claim that it was a 'necessary preliminary to the establishment of a genuine democracy' was largely accepted, and a favourable American article described it as a 'determined stand against the kind of fascism that stems from Berlin' (Thompson 1934, p.499).

Indeed, it has been argued that the era of authoritarian rule was actually quite benign in comparison to other authoritarian regimes in East-Central Europe.³⁹ Andrejs Plakans wrote that 'there were no mass killings or settling old political scores through violent action, no mass-long term imprisonment of political opponents, or intimidation through the systematic use of state coercion' (Plakans 1995, p.133). However, 300 politicians, primarily communists, social democrats, and members of *Pērkonkrusts*, were interned in prison camps for up to two and a half years (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.21). Even the wives and children of leading opposition politicians were detained or placed under house arrest (Stranga 1991).

The Ulmanis era destroyed political party organizations. All parties and political movements were banned. A few moved their operations underground (indeed, the Communist party had been operating underground for many years), but this effectively meant the end of any organized channels of representation. The LSDSP, which had about 2,000 of its 12,000-plus membership arrested for a few days following the coup in 1934, joined the communists in fighting

³⁹ Indeed, the harshness of the Ulmanis regime is still a valid issue in modern Latvia. For example, the commissioning of a statue to commemorate Ulmanis in the late 1990s divided Latvian society.

the authoritarian regime underground (Kalniņš 1956).⁴⁰ Other parties simply faded away, revealing weaknesses in both organization and deep-rooted popular support. The main opposition to the Ulmanis regime came from the anti-systemic *Pērkoņkrusts*, although its influence was limited by its small membership and the arrest of its leadership in the early days of the coup. It should also be noted that Ulmanis did not create a new national party or movement as other authoritarian leaders across central Europe had done (e.g. Konstantin Pats in neighbouring Estonia).

The Ulmanis authoritarian government was structured along the lines of previous governments, albeit without a parliament to ratify laws. All ministerial appointments were made by Ulmanis himself.⁴¹ Ulmanis had intended to replace political parties with social organizations as the voice of the people. In a 1938 speech he outlined his vision of a parliament that would represent the people directly, without political parties as mediators (Freivalds 1961, p.140). Indeed, he initiated this process by creating a series of ‘chambers’ (*kameras*), each with 90-150 members (with one-third of the membership rotated annually), appointed by the ministry that they were affiliated with, beginning with the Economics and Culture Ministries. However, the ministries were not accountable to the chambers, nor did the chambers fulfill anything more than a strictly formal, procedural function (Balodis 1991, p.248). Indeed, the chambers had no oversight functions, no independent powers, and were manipulated by the authoritarian regime. Certainly, there is little evidence to support Kristian Gerner and Stefan Hedlund’s (1993, p.58) argument that all three Baltic States were well on the way to re-democratization by 1938.

This period also saw increased state intervention in the economy. The state monopolized certain parts of the economy – heavy industry, food processing, tobacco, brewing and alcohol production– and was significantly represented in all other manufacturing sectors (Dreifelds 1996, p.28). Because this increase in state-capitalism coincided with an upward swing in the Latvian economy, Latvian historians have written approvingly of the economic policy of the Ulmanis era (Bilmanis 1951; Spekke 1952). Indeed, by 1936 Latvia began a period of full employment (von Rauch 1974, p.127). By the late 1930s, Latvia was 16th of 23 European countries in per-capita income (Spekke 2003, pp. 321-322). This comparative economic success, certainly when compared to the early 1930s, meant that the Ulmanis regime was not seriously challenged.

⁴⁰ Although the party’s central committee leadership was arrested for up to two and a half years (Balodis 1991, p.250).

⁴¹ Laws were passed under the 81st article of the Latvian constitution which gave the Cabinet of Ministers the power to pass laws while the parliament was not in session (Balodis 1991, p.246).

Treatment of minorities also changed in the Ulmanis era. Many of the liberal minority laws and regulations of the democratic era were overturned. For example, restrictions on the use of the Russian and German languages were introduced in the private and state sectors, and minority publications were censored. Moreover, all ethnic Latvian children, even those with only one Latvian parent, were forced to attend a Latvian-speaking school. Juris Dreifelds (1996, p.29) has generously argued that 'even after the establishment of these restrictions Latvia provided far more state support for its minorities than most countries of the world'. However, the minorities suffered economically under Ulmanis, as certain parts of the economy, which pre-1934 had been under minority ownership, were nationalized because Ulmanis believed that they should be under Latvian ownership (Smith 1996, p.150).⁴²

Nevertheless, the authoritarian era is remembered with a great deal of affection in the collective Latvian psyche. This is largely because, by 1934, the worst of the economic depression was at an end, the post-war reconstruction of Latvia was largely finished, and the standard of living continued to rise. Moreover, the Ulmanis years stand in stark contrast to the 'Terrible Year' that followed the Soviet occupation in 1940-1941. Thus, as we will see in chapter six, authoritarianism (in contrast to communism) is not a totally discredited system for a significant number of ethnic Latvians. How far can this be explained by the character of the inter-war parties?

2.2 Political parties and democracy in the inter-war era

The most striking feature of political parties in the inter-war era is their organizational weakness, as evidenced by their inability to pose a coherent challenge to the authoritarian coup of 1934. This section will address the organizational weakness of these parties by first looking at the origins of the major political parties, and then adopting the institutional, organizational, and sociological approaches to the study of political parties.

Inter-war Latvia had many parties. On the eve of the 1922 parliamentary election, the then President, Jānis Čakste, wrote in a newspaper that 'there are 74 lists competing in the election. Without a doubt this is too many. Many of these groups could have united in one list' (Čakste, 4th October 1922). Table 2.2 showed that the number of competing party lists and parliamentary fractions actually grew with each election. Only the LSDSP and the LZS competed in all five

⁴² These restrictions on cultural and economic freedoms may have contributed to the migration of one of the most significant Latvian minorities, the Baltic Germans, 80% of whom responded to a call from the National Socialist government to return to Germany between 1939-1940.

national elections in the inter-war era, and the electoral support of both parties declined drastically over the years of democratic elections.

While the LSDSP is typically recognized as the first organized Latvian political party, *Tautas Partija* (Peoples Party) was actually the first Latvian political party, with a manifesto published in Leipzig in 1883 laying out its political platform (Freivalds 1961, p.33).⁴³ Although the party 'did not have an organization in the modern sense', it gathered like-minded conservative figures from the *Rīgas Latviešu Biedrība* (ibid.). Moreover, Freivalds argued that the LSDSP was not even the first socialist party, as a reading group in Liepāja in 1892 published a manifesto calling for the break up of Russia into national republics and called itself the *Latviešu Socialdemokrātu Savienība* (Latvian Social Democratic Union – LSDS).

However, the LSDSP was the first organized Latvian party with a substantial membership. The first LSDSP congress took place in June 1904, but the roots of the LSDSP can be found much earlier. Jānis Rainis claimed to have personally introduced the socialist movement into Latvia by smuggling socialist literature from Switzerland into the Latvian territories in 1893 (Freivalds 1961, p.29). However the *Jaunstrāvnīeki* preceded Rainis's trip. Thus there was a several decades long tradition of social-democracy among part of the Latvian elite, that was then structured into a political party in 1904. The first LSDSP congress produced the party's first programme, which, in contrast to the programme of the LSDS, sought to defend all workers in the Russian Empire, not just Latvians. However, while the LSDSP maintained close links with Russian socialists, it 'kept a certain distance from Lenin and his fractional disputes' (Swain 1999, p.668). Nevertheless, the link between Latvian and Russian social democrats was the source of on-going conflict between the LSDSP and other centrist and right-wing Latvian parties throughout the inter-war era. Indeed, it echoes to the modern day, as centre-right parties continue to avoid cooperating with the modern incarnation of the LSDSP.

Despite its distance from the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, the LSDSP did split into rival factions supporting the Mensheviks or the Bolsheviks. Indeed, the two leading Latvian social democrats (who were also brothers-in-law) were divided: While Pēteris Stučka supported Lenin and the Bolsheviks, Jānis Rainis supported the Mensheviks (von Rauch 1974, p.12). In the inter-war era the Mensheviks controlled the LSDSP, placing the LSDSP on the right of the international socialist movement, and in conflict with the Soviet party. The minority

⁴³ Although this *Tautas Partija* is not connected to the contemporary *Tautas Partija*.

Bolshevik supporting social democrats largely settled in the Soviet Union, returning only after the Soviet occupation of Latvia in 1940. Inevitably, there were a number of other left-wing parties in Latvia, most particularly the Revolutionary Socialists, the Bund and so on. However, these parties did not have the organization or the electoral success of the LSDSP.

The LZS was formed much later, on May 12 1917. However, it was based on a constituency just as broad and significant as the industrial workers of the LSDSP – Latvian agricultural workers. Moreover, as an agrarian party LZS reflected not just the central role of agriculture in the Latvian economy, but also ‘epitomised’ the roots of Latvian nationalism (Kirby 1995, p.319). From the moment of its formation, to the banning of political parties in 1934, it was dominated by Kārlis Ulmanis, an American educated agronomist. However, despite its electoral success LZS did not monopolize the representation of agrarian interests. In 1925 a Smallholders Party was created to specifically look after the interests of the new, smallholding farmers that had benefited from the land reform. And in 1931 the LZS splintered as the *Jauno Zemnieku Partija* (New Farmers Party) was formed, and appealed to the same basic constituency.

Figure 2.1 – 1928 campaign poster for the Democratic Centre party



Source: www.lettonika.lv (2005)

The other parties typically described as being on the centre or right of the party system, have collectively been described as civic parties. They were also deridingly called couch parties, because all their members could be seated on just the one piece of furniture. The Latvian National Democratic Party was formed by the Latvian intelligentsia that had settled in Moscow during the First World War. In 1922 it merged with the three other main centrist parties, the Democratic Party, the Radical Democratic Party, and the People's Party, to form *Demokrātiskais Centrs* (Democratic Centre – DC). DCs constituency was the urban middle-class, particularly civil servants – a small group in inter-war Latvia, bearing in mind that the Russian and Baltic-German middle class had their own political parties. It addressed its appeal to ethnic Latvians, as well as urban Russians and Baltic Germans (see the DC campaign poster in illustration 2.1, in Latvian, Russian and German), and attempted to position itself at the political centre in order to maneuver between left and right and be an essential part of government coalition formation. Initially a liberal party, by the 1930s DC had moved to the right and become strongly anti-minority (von Rauch 1974). For example, in the 1931 election it declared that it would 'end the employment of foreigners in Latvia – jobs for Latvians!' (Jaunākās Ziņas, 1931). While DC did not fare well at the polls, it was extremely influential through its control of Latvia's largest newspaper *Jaunākās Ziņas* (Kirby 1995).

Regional parties from Latgale are typically also included in the civic party spectrum.⁴⁴ The Lattgalian Working Party founded in St. Petersburg in 1916. A left-wing party that sought autonomy for the Latgale region, it competed in the first parliamentary election, but won only one seat and collapsed. Other major regional parties included the Party of Christian Peasants and Catholics and the Progressive Peasants Association of Latgale.

Finally, minority parties represented the major ethnic minorities in Latvia – Germans, Russians, Jews and Poles. Minority parties had a firm urban constituency (primarily in Rīga), consistently winning 15-17 deputies in each parliamentary election, and forming a cohesive bloc in supporting pro-minority policies. However, this was primarily on an *ad hoc* basis. There were two attempts, in 1920 and again in 1926, at uniting minority interests through the creation of a 'minority committee' (Bērziņš 2003, p.315). Nevertheless, these efforts proved short-lived because it was difficult to create a unified minority policy in areas outside the narrow sphere of minority rights.

⁴⁴ Latgale was the only region that had its own successful regional parties largely because it was very distinct from the rest of Latvia in being overwhelmingly Catholic, rural, and with a large Russian-speaking minority.

Two anti-systemic right-wing groups emerged in the early 1930s, in addition to the long-banned Communist party.⁴⁵ The largest of these groups (uniting several smaller ones under one banner) was initially known as *Ugunskrusts* (Firecross) after it was formed in January 1932, but was rechristened as *Pērkoņkrusts* after its earlier incarnation was banned in April 1933.⁴⁶ In terms of organization, uniform and symbols it modeled itself on the fascist parties of central Europe and Italy.⁴⁷ It was fiercely anti-Semitic and anti-Russian (Erglis 2004, p.10). However, it only registered as a party in 1933, and was then promptly banned, so never contested a parliamentary election. In contrast, the Latvian Nazi Party remained small and confined to the Baltic German community (Balodis 1991).

Latvian scholars have long debated how to structure the inter-war party system. Ādolfs Šilde (1976, p.396-400) argued that there were five core ideological blocs: (i) socialists (dominated by the LSDSP); (ii) centre-left parties (led by DC); (iii) centrist Agrarians (dominated by LZS); (iv) the right-wing (primarily Christian parties); and (v) minorities. However, this creates an overly convoluted party system. In actual fact there were very few differences between the centre-left, the agrarians and right-wing parties. Indeed these were the groups at the nucleus of most of the government coalitions at this time.

The Baltic-German historian Georg von Rauch (1974, p.29) suggested a simpler model of a three bloc system: nationalist liberals (whom he also calls 'bourgeois' parties, but others call 'civic'); agrarian conservatives; and social democrats. However, this ignored the minority parties which played an important role in coalition-building. It also created an artificial division between national-liberals and agrarians, who actually shared a great number of policies and cooperated closely in a number of government coalitions.

Thus perhaps the best conceptualization of the inter-war party system is the one used by contemporary newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s. Three core blocs: civic, minority, and socialist.

The civic bloc contained all the centrist and agrarian parties that supported Latvian independence, and maintaining the status quo. The socialist bloc was dominated by the LSDSP, but also other left-wing parties mostly in the opposition. Finally, minority parties cooperated closely on ensuring that favourable minority policies were adopted by government (Goldmanis

⁴⁵ Which was supported by the Soviet Union and based in Pskov, just across the Soviet-Latvia border.

⁴⁶ Kasekamp (1999) compares the interwar radical right-wing movements in Latvia, Estonia and Finland.

⁴⁷ Modris Eksteins (1999, p.116) writes that: 'members wore gray shirts and black berets and adopted a Nazi-style salute accompanied by the greeting 'Hail Struggle!' The movements slogan was 'Latvia for the Latvians' (Eksteins 1999, p.106).

1994). Table 2.3 shows that the Civic Bloc hovered around 50 deputies (51 votes were needed to elect a government), and that the support of the minority bloc parties was often needed to elect a government.

Table 2.3 – Party blocs: 1920-1931. (%)

	Civic Bloc	Socialists	Minorities
1920⁴⁸	51	39	10
1922	47	37	16
1925	48	37	15
1928	46	36	18
1931	55	28	17

Source: Freivalds 1961, p.81

The inter-war Latvian election law allowed parties winning just 1% of the vote to win seats in parliament, and a mere 100 citizens to form a candidate list for the parliamentary elections. Thus narrow interests could compete, and were often represented in the parliament. For example, in the 1925 election the *J. Salmins Atbalstītāju Saraksts* (the J. Salmins Supporters List) polled 182 votes (Šilde 1976, p.393). The 1928 election saw the participation of a single-issue party that sought to defend the ‘health of the nation’ (723 votes), while a party competing in the 1931 election stood for the rights of tenants (and polled 1,806 votes) (Freivalds 1961, p.84). There were so many of these single-interest groups that a 1931 law was passed limiting the name of a party to 23 words (Freivalds 1961, p.85). Changes were made to the election law in the run up to the 1928 election, and competing lists were required to make a deposit of 1,000 Lats, to be refunded only in the event of that party being elected to parliament. However, this did not reduce the number of competing parties.

The constitution created a single-chamber parliament of 100 seats, which in turn elected the president as well as the prime minister and the cabinet. A simple majority vote of no-confidence could recall the Prime Minister. Bearing in mind the fragmented nature of the parliament, this meant that governments were constantly concerned with maintaining a majority in parliament.

The laws governing parties and parliament were designed to be inclusive of all interests within the territory of Latvia. However, they resulted in a fractured parliament and a party system that allowed individuals to freely form new parties and be reasonably confident of winning seats in

⁴⁸ There were 150 seats in the 1920 legislature. Those seats are presented as a percentage in this table to make them more easily comparable.

parliament. There was little motivation for different interests to band together in larger parties for fear that those interests would be lost. Indeed, the long-term tendency was for the two largest parties to see a decline in their support at the expense of smaller parties.

In organizational terms the LZS and LSDSP were the only parties with large memberships and significant organization. However, even without a large membership and organizational structure, the small parties still managed to play a crucial role in cabinet formation, and win votes in parliamentary elections. As a result, there was very little motivation for party's to develop more significant organizations.

There is particularly detailed data for the LSDSP, largely because it maintained an organizational base among the émigré community after 1945. Indeed, a great number of publications by LSDSP members from the inter-war period provide information about the party organization. LSDSP party membership grew steadily from 2,400 in 1904 when the party was founded, to 6,000 in June 1905 and to 18,200 by November 1905 (Ābols 2003, p.120). However, following the 1905 revolution the party was banned and its leadership scattered around Europe. War and the general dislocation of the Latvian population at this time further fragmented the membership. As a result, in 1917, after the February revolution allowed it to re-emerge into the open, the party could claim only 1,000 members in Latvia, although by July 1917 this had rapidly risen to 7,672 (Šilde 1976, pp. 139 and 141). In 1922 it had 6,000 members, rising to 12,089 by 1933 (Kalniņš 1956).⁴⁹ Moreover, in 1933 the LSDSP had 287 party branches, 56 more than in 1922 (Kalniņš 1956). The party also maintained very close links with Latvian trade unions, being affiliated with the Trade Union Central Office which united 25 trade unions with approximately 25,000 members (Kalniņš 1956). The LSDSP also had a youth wing, organized summer camps for children, book clubs and other activities.

The LSDSP maintained a rigorous organizational structure after 1917. Indeed, just a few months after the February revolution it had already developed a branch structure across Latvia. After its re-legalization in 1917 the party regularly held party congresses and other organizational meetings, in order to discuss policy, strategy and organizational matters. The Latvian archives contain all the LSDSP annual reports from the inter-war era, detailing party finances. For example the 1931 report (an election year) reveals that the major source of income for the party was from donations from deputies in the Latvian parliament (64,496.72 Lats), while only 1.452 Lats came

⁴⁹ There was also a fall in membership in the mid twenties. The full LSDSP party membership data is: 1922 – 6,000; 1924 – 2,773; 1926 – 3,611; 1928 – 6,127; 1930 – 10,635; 1932 – 12,525; 1933 – 12,089 (Kalniņš 1956).

from donations and 880.76 Lats from general membership. The party's biggest expenses were in support of its newspapers and magazines (in 1931 the LSDSP published 13 different regular periodicals) and salaries for its central office employees – a secretary, assistant to the secretary, office manager, book-keeper and eight 'propagandists' (LSDSP Annual Report 1931, p.38).

Despite being formed much later than the LSDSP, LZS also saw a rapid growth in membership after 1917. On May 12th 1917, just two months after it had been founded, it had a membership of 17,188 people and 137 branches (Šilde 1976, p.155). Indeed, it was the largest party in the inter-war era, with Latvian historians generally agreeing that its membership hovered between 32,000-39,000 (Freivalds 1961; Balodis 1991). As with the LSDSP, LZS was also active in a number of social organizations, particularly the Scout movement as well as organizations based in rural communities.

Other parties had much smaller membership. The Latvian National Democratic Party, which was the creation of the Latvian intelligentsia that had fled to Moscow, had 1,400 members in July 1917 (Šilde 1976: p 149-151). On the other hand, the National Democrat Party had only a few dozen members as did the Latvian Republican Party (formed by a small group of Latvian lawyers), and the equally small Latvian Radical Democrat Party and the Latvian Democrat Party (Šilde 1976, p 151). The only other popular movement with a significant membership in the inter-war era was the fascist Thunder Cross which claimed a membership of 6,000 at its peak in 1933 (von Rauch 1974, p.153).

The major parties published newspapers. While some were published irregularly and were blatantly factional, other newspapers were published daily and had a wide readership. For example, LZS published *Brīvā Zeme*, a daily newspaper that had one of the highest circulations in Latvia. Indeed, all the major newspapers supported (or were owned by) certain political parties, and adopted extremely opinionated political positions in the run-up to both parliamentary and local elections. Thus on the eve of the 1922 election *Jaunākās Ziņas*, one of the most popular daily newspapers in Latvia (supporting DC), wrote a personal attack on the leader of the LZS: 'In 1905 did Ulmanis defend Latvian farmers? No, he took his precious person to America leaving his comrades to their destiny. As soon as he was no longer under any immediate threat, he returned to Latvia' (*Jaunākās Ziņas* 1922). In contrast, *Brīvā Zeme*, a paper published by LZS had a headline declaring that 'The Democratic Centre presents a programme for idiots' (*Brīvā Zeme* 1922).

There were three major cleavages in the inter-war era: urban vs. rural, civic vs. socialist, and Latvian vs. non-Latvian. The independence cleavage (between those who had supported or

acted against the independence movement) rapidly lost salience after 1920, although it remained at the elite level in terms of the animosity between LZS and LSDSP political leaders.

The urban vs. rural cleavage emerged from both long- and short-term trends: the long-term migration of workers from rural areas to Latvian industrial centres, and the post-war break-up of the Baltic-German baronial estates into smaller farms. These two different trends also meant that Latvian farmers were not a homogenous unit, but rather formed two very distinct groups: Latvian farmers from the Tsarist era, and the new farmers who had benefited from the land reform of 1920 (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.17). By 1931 the *Jauno Zemnieku Partija* (New Farmers Party) was seriously challenging the political dominance of the LZS by garnering strong support from the newer Latvian farmers. At the same time urban voters were represented by a combination of the LSDSP (working class and progressive intellectuals) and the smaller centrist parties (urban intellectuals, professionals and civil servants).

The Latvian/non-Latvian cleavage was inevitable in multi-ethnic Latvia. Minority rights were not specifically enshrined in the Latvian constitution, and thus served to mobilize minority parties. However, in contrast to the modern era, the Russian-Latvian cleavage was marginalized because 'when the Russian Empire retreated from the Baltic in 1915-1917 it took much of the 'imperial industries (those dependant on the Russian hinterland) and their workforces with it' (Lieven 1994, p.61). Rather, the salient ethnic cleavage was Baltic Germans vs. Latvians. The Baltic Germans were a distinct group that was wealthier and better educated than the Latvians. While Latvians dominated the legislature, the minority parties were crucial in the formation of government coalitions, and used their negotiating position skillfully in ensuring that minority rights were largely maintained throughout the democratic era.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the minorities were often outvoted by a united ethnic Latvian vote – such as on the agrarian reform law passed on the 16th of September by the Constitutional Assembly, when all Latvian parties, of both left and right, voted in favour of the law while the Baltic Germans opposed it (Spekke 1952, p.30). However, this was a rare example of left-right unity. However, after the authoritarian coup Baltic Germans, and other minorities, lost many of their rights.

Why did Latvia slip so meekly into authoritarianism in 1934? The institutional framework encouraged a profusion of small parties, with no regulations for financial disclosure, and an unstable party system that fermented corrupt practices. This undermined public faith in the

⁵⁰ In the 100 member parliament, ethnic Latvians always had at least 80 seats: 1922 – 84; 1925 – 84; 1928 – 80; and in 1931 – 83 (Saeima 2005).

democratic system. However, the lack of inter-war social surveys means that it is difficult to capture the popular mood. Nevertheless, the long-term decline in support for the two largest parties, and continuing electoral support for small parties reveals a certain alienation from political institutions. There were also outside factors. The global economic crisis led to an economic decline in the early 1930s. Moreover, democratic regimes were being replaced with authoritarian dictators all across Europe. In any case, the Ulmanis regime was mild compared to the harshness of the Soviet and German occupations that followed.

2.3 Occupation and the Soviet era: 1940-1991

1940-1991 saw radical change in Latvia. The Second World War once again devastated the Latvian lands and dislocated the Latvian population. The following years of Soviet occupation redirected and integrated the economy into the Soviet Union. Agriculture was collectivized, and cities and towns rapidly industrialized. The demographic of Latvia drastically changed as the German and Jewish minorities virtually disappeared, and Latvia saw an extensive influx of Russian-speakers from other parts of the Soviet Union. Moreover, the social composition was altered by the departure of the Latvian intelligentsia and the middle-class through a combination of death, emigration and deportation. As a result, the Latvia that emerged as a newly independent nation in 1991 was very different to that of 1918.

This section briefly discusses the three occupations of Latvia during the years of the Second World War, and then considers the impact of the Soviet occupation on Latvia in more detail. Finally, it looks at the development of the independence movement in the 1980s. While political parties (except the Communist party) were illegal throughout this period, there was plenty of political activity.

Three occupations: 1940-1944

Latvia was occupied three times between 1940 and 1944. First, the Soviet Union occupied Latvia between 1940 and 1941; next, the German army pushed the Soviets out and controlled the Latvian territory until 1944; finally, the returning Soviet forces occupied Latvia until August 1991.

All three occupations were marked by the violent repression of sections of Latvian society. The first Soviet occupation saw the deportation of 34,200 people, largely middle-class, ethnic Latvians, to the Soviet camps in Siberia (von Rauch 1974, p.228). The German occupying forces detained and executed the Jewish minority in Latvia, beginning with the Jewish population in the

most distant part of Latvia – Latgale – before moving on to the larger Jewish population in the capital city Rīga (Eksteins 1999, p.147-150). The second Soviet occupation carried on from the first and targeted ethnic Latvians, particularly potential opponents to the regime. As a result, the German occupation, in which ethnic Latvians were not the focus of German terror, has been more fondly remembered by Latvians.

The first Soviet occupation resulted from the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, signed on August 23rd 1939, which sliced East-Central Europe into two spheres of influence, the Baltic States falling into the Soviet sphere. The Soviet Union acted quickly, calling on the Latvian government to sign a mutual assistance agreement allowing the Soviet Union to position military bases on Latvian territory. The subsequent agreement saw 25,000 Soviet troops placed into Latvia (Spekke 1952, p.41). Then, on June 16th 1940 Soviet tanks rolled into Latvia, after the Soviet Union had claimed that Latvia had broken the terms of the mutual assistance agreement.⁵¹ The Latvian government was paralyzed with inaction.⁵² Its inter-war foreign policy of neutrality and accommodation meant that it had no allies to turn to for support, and its foreign policy at this time largely consisted ‘of hoping against hope’ (Plakans 1995, p.142). Moreover, the eyes of the world were fixed on Paris, which German troops entered on the 17th of June.

The following twelve months have gone down in Latvian history as ‘The Terrible Year’ (*Baigais Gads*), in contrast to the German occupation which is simply recalled as the “German era” (*Vācu Laiks*). This is largely because one of the final Soviet acts was the deportation of 34,250 people (including 4,016 children), primarily from the professional elite (Spekke 1952, p.51).⁵³ This year has left scars among the Latvian population that still echo in the modern day. Indeed, Romuald Missiunas argued that the ‘Terrible Year’ as well as the almost 50 years of Soviet occupation, turned the focus of Latvian national enmity away from the Baltic Germans and towards Russians (Missiunas 1994, p.98).

In 1940 the Soviet Union swiftly appointed a new government in Latvia, headed by Augusts Kirhensteins, an academic from the University of Latvia, and active member of the Latvia-Soviet Union friendship society. One of the first acts of his government was to dismiss

⁵¹ Andrejs Edvīns Feldmanis (2002) provides a detailed account of the border incident that provoked the Soviet Union into invading Latvia.

⁵² However, the Latvian government had been expecting an occupation, and in mid-May 1940 the Latvian Ambassador to the UK, Kārlis Zariņš, had been granted plenipotentiary powers over all Latvian possessions abroad in the event of Soviet invasion (Eksteins 1999, p.115).

⁵³ Robert Raid (1989), an American born in Estonia gives a detailed and emotional account of the Soviet takeover of Estonia from 1940-1941. The events in Estonia were mirrored in Latvia and Lithuania.

sixty leading civil servants and all newspaper editors, thus ensuring a pliant administration and controlled press. Over the course of the year, industry was nationalized, personal property over 220 square meters confiscated and larger farms broken up into smaller units. The election of 14-15th June 1940, had only one competing list. Another list formed by a number of Latvian politicians representing several different parties was declared invalid, and the politicians later arrested. Turnout was 94.7% (significantly higher than previous parliamentary elections), and the communist list received the support of 97.6% voters. Bearing in mind that in the spring of 1941 the Latvian Communist Party had a peak membership of only 2,700, these results are questionable.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, by August 1940 the newly elected Latvian parliament sent delegates to Moscow to successfully apply, in conjunction with Lithuania and Estonia, for membership of the Soviet Union.

Thus began the era of *Latvijas Komunistu Partija* (Latvian Communist Party – LKP) dominance. Its small membership was initially swelled by the migration to Latvia of ethnic Latvian communists that had settled in the Soviet Union after the 1917 revolution. While a number of leading Latvian communists had been killed in the Stalin purges of the 1930s, there were still sufficient numbers to take up leading positions in the state.

All other parties and independent NGOs (even the boy scouts) were banned by July 1940 (Missiunas and Taagepera 1993, p.24).⁵⁵ Moreover, the future organizational abilities of Latvian parties took a huge blow when the Soviets deported all non-communist party leaders to the *gulag*.

Erwin Oberlander (2003, pp.52-54) identified seven elements of ‘sovietization’ in the Baltic States during both Soviet occupations. All seven phases were carried out between 1940-1941 to some extent, but absolutely, and swiftly, after 1944: (i) military occupation; (ii) control of the political system through rigged elections; (iii) the Communist party became the only legal political organization; (iv) an in-migration of Soviet cadres (often of ethnic Latvian origin in the case of Latvia); (v) nationalization of the economy; (vi) expropriation and collectivization of agriculture; (vii) control of education and culture. As a result, the Soviet Union rapidly dominated all political, economic and social aspects of Latvia.

The first year of Soviet occupation virtually eliminated all vestiges of the independence era Latvian state. The German occupation further advanced this destruction. Within fourteen days of

⁵⁴ Modris Eksteins (1999, p.116) simply states that the ‘July elections were rigged’.

⁵⁵ Even though on 26th June 1940 Kirchensteins rather puzzlingly told an audience of foreign Ambassadors that ‘all political parties will be allowed, although in practice there would probably only be one’ (Oberlander 2003, p.50).

hostilities commencing between Germany and the Soviet Union, the entire territory of Latvia had been captured by German forces, and plans were afoot to create *Reichskommissariat Ostland*, an administrative unit composed of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Belarus. Indeed, despite the initial enthusiasm with which the German forces were greeted by ethnic Latvians, the ultimate ambition of National Socialist Germany was to move the Latvian population eastwards, and settle the Latvian lands with ethnic Germans, with the Latvian territory eventually becoming an integral part of Germany (Spekke 1952, p.58).⁵⁶

The German occupation was no less brutal than that of the Soviet Union. About 90,000 Latvian citizens lost their lives, more than in the 'Terrible Year'.⁵⁷ The Jewish population was particularly targeted by the German authorities, with groups of Latvian *Einsatzgruppen* (often former members of the extremist *Pērkonkrusts* organization) carrying out the executions.⁵⁸ During the three years of German occupation the Latvian 'self-government' was ostensibly led by Oskars Dankers (a former head of the Latvian armed forces), but the Baltic-German Alfred Rosenberg's *Ostland* administration pulled the strings. Indeed, a number of Baltic-Germans returned to the Baltic States in administrative positions, many 'with grudges against the Latvians' (Eksteins 1999, p.135). The years of the German occupation are well documented in a book published by the Historical Institute of the University of Latvia (Ezergailis, 2002). A great number of primary sources, translated into English, reveal the extent to which the German administration dominated all aspects of life in Latvia – cultural, economic as well as political – during its occupation. Indeed, in many ways the German occupation mirrored the Soviet one.

One report written by Fēlikss Cielēns (1944, p.430), a leading inter-war Latvian social democrat and former Foreign Minister, for the American Embassy in Sweden in 1944, outlined the work of the underground Latvian Central Council composed of leading political parties from the democratic era, under the chairmanship of Konstantīns Čakste, the son of the first Latvian President Janis Čakste.⁵⁹ The four parties were the LSDSP, and the three leading civic parties of the inter-war era: the LZS, the DC and the Latgallian Christian Farmers (Ērglis 2004, p.220). The

⁵⁶ Arveds Spekke (1952, p.58) quotes from Alfred Rosenberg's files that 'With regard to the process of Germanizing or resettling... in Latvia the section capable of being assimilated is considerably smaller than in Estonia. In this country stronger resistance will have to be reckoned with, and banishment on a larger scale will have to be envisaged.'

⁵⁷ 70,000 Jews, 18,000 ethnic Latvians and 2,000 gypsies (Latvian Institute 2004)

⁵⁸ Andrew Ezergailis (1996) provides a detailed account of the plight of the Jews in the second world war, and meticulously lists the acts of the Latvian collaborators.

⁵⁹ Perhaps hoping to draw parallels between the 'Latvian Central Council' of the 1940s and the Constitutional Assembly which Janis Čakste had chaired.

Council had already agreed on the draft of a new constitution that, rather confusingly, planned to replace 'the proportional franchise which produced a multi-party system' with a 'new three party system' – even though there were four parties in the Council. How the creation of a three-party system could be achieved constitutionally and democratically was not fully explained. Moreover, Cielēns promised that political parties would perform better in this system because:

'An ideological fermentation and regrouping is now taking place in the former political parties. Two symptoms are characteristic of this process: 1. The best democratic forces and most prominent persons of various political parties are consolidating around a new democratic party which is at present the strongest illegal organization in Latvia and which will play the principal role in the future Latvian state. 2. The relations between the representatives of all previous and present parties are very cordial (Cielēns 1944, p.430).

While the Latvian Central Council may well have managed to unite these previously conflicting interests, Cielēns was likely exaggerating in order to gain support for Latvian independence from the American administration.⁶⁰ Indeed, the Latvian Central Council was more concerned with keeping links with foreign diplomats, and thus keeping alive the idea of an independent Latvia, than indulging in dissident activities in occupied Latvia.

Two other movements worked underground: *Pērkoņkrusts*, and the LKP. Both used their experience of operating illicitly in the Ulmanis era to continue their work. *Pērkoņkrusts* even published and disseminated a newspaper – *Brīvā Latvija* (Free Latvia) – that called on opposition to the German regime and supported establishing an independent Latvia. However, *Pērkoņkrusts* was deeply divided because a number of its leaders had opted to work for the German administration. At the same time, the communists had very little popular support after the events of the 'Terrible Year'.

The last few months of the German occupation were marked by an acceleration in the number of people migrating westwards as the Red Army drew ever closer.⁶¹ Estimates as to the

⁶⁰ Although this seems rather unlikely to have succeeded judging by the accompanying letter to the document from Herschel V. Johnson of the US Embassy in Sweden: 'A careful perusal of the enclosed report cannot help but evoke the thought that the Latvian people seem to have a naïve and almost childlike belief that somehow or other, possibly through the application of the principles of the Atlantic Charter, their national independence is to be restored to them. This hope would appear to be very closely akin to wishful thinking in view of the extremely complicated situation which now exists in the Baltic area' (Johnson 1944, p.428).

⁶¹ See Mark Wyman (1998) for a detailed account of life in the displaced persons camps in Germany, and subsequent attempts by the Soviet Union to have them repatriated to Latvia.

number of refugees vary from 120,000 to 150,000 (Spekke 1952; Dreifelds 1996). The refugees were overwhelmingly 30-50 years of age, well educated professionals – in other words, the intelligentsia that formed the backbone of political parties in the inter-war years and those who could be expected to organize resistance to the Soviet regime. For example, 70% of the teaching staff of the University of Latvia and the Latvian Agricultural University (the two leading higher education institutions in inter-war Latvia) emigrated to the west (Spekke 1952, p.87). A number of these migrants, and their children, would reappear on the Latvian political scene in the early 1990s.⁶²

Latvia in the Soviet Union: 1944-1991

The Red Army reoccupied Latvia in 1944. LKPs political dominance lasted until the late 1980s, culminating in its electoral defeat in the 1990 Republican Supreme Soviet elections. However, despite its firm control over the state, the Soviet regime never gained legitimacy among a part of the Latvian population, and anti-Soviet activities continued throughout the Soviet era. First, several thousand Latvian partisans hid in the forests of Latvia and attacked Soviet forces until the late 1950s.⁶³ Second, dissident activity, in the form of *samizdat* and occasional demonstrations continued throughout the Soviet era.⁶⁴ In the 1970s opposition took the form of cultural renewal as Latvian folklore dance groups and choirs began to mushroom, and students traveled to the Latvian countryside to renovate old churches and other buildings of Latvian national significance. Also, in 1971 seventeen leading Latvian communists sent a letter to communist parties in Western Europe complaining about the Russification of Latvia (Lieven 1994).

Nevertheless, sovietization continued the pattern established between 1940-1941. Deportations resumed, reaching a peak on March 25th 1949 when 43,000 rural residents were packed onto trains and shipped off eastwards. Cultural russification meant that the Latvian language was marginalized in state institutions. However, Latvian remained the language used at the republic level and radio broadcasts, TV, and newspapers continued to operate in the native language.

⁶² See Chapter 5. Émigré Latvians were particularly active in the Latvia's Way party in 1993.

⁶³ There were approximately 12,000 Latvian partisans (Latvian Institute 2004)

⁶⁴ Although Latvian dissident activity was significantly smaller than that in neighbouring Estonia and Lithuania (Bluķis 1982, p.119).

Until the Gorbachov reforms of the mid 1980s, the only blip in this process of sovietization occurred in the mid 1950s, following the political thaw after the death of Stalin. Seizing the opportunities that the more liberal environment offered, a number of nationalist Latvian communists came to power in the Latvian Republic and pushed for an end to the policies of russification. This group, led by Eduards Berklavs, the Deputy Chair of the Soviet Council of Ministers (who was to resurface as a founder of the Latvian National Independence Movement (*Latvijas Nacionālā Neatkarības Kustība* – LNNK) in the late 1980s), sought to develop Latvian cultural awareness through increasing the use of the Latvian language among party and administration functionaries, limiting the migration of Russian speakers into Latvia, and decreasing Latvian industrial dependence on Soviet raw materials (Pabriks and Purs 2001). However, after Khrushchev had consolidated his position as General Secretary of the CPSU in the late 1950s, he moved against these national communists. Eventually Berklavs and 2,000 other leading Latvian communists were dismissed from their positions and the entire Latvian *komsomol* leadership changed (ibid., pp.35-36). The overwhelmingly Russian composition of the top leadership meant that ethnic Latvians felt dislocated from the LKP – from 1959 to 1988 the first secretary of the LKP was a Soviet Latvian (i.e. raised in the Soviet Union), while the second secretary was a Russian-speaker. Following this, the LKP was identified as an organization that defended the interests of Russian-speakers rather than Latvians. In contrast to Estonia and Lithuania, the indigenous Latvian population never made up a majority in the party, despite party membership becoming a pre-requisite for career development (Lieven 1994, p.98). In the Soviet era the non-cash benefits of party membership included access to better forms of housing, consumer goods, status and so on. The LKP also intruded into many aspects of people’s lives – organizing cultural and sporting events, and playing a central role in the educational system.

Table 2.4 – Ethnic composition of Latvia. 1897–1989. (%)

	1897	1920	1939	1959	1979	1989
Latvians	68.3	74.4	75.5	62.0	53.7	52.0
Russians	12.0	10.2	10.6	26.6	32.8	34
Germans	6.2	3.8	3.2	0.1	0.1	0.1
Jews	-	-	4.8	1.8	1.1	0.9
Poles	-	-	2.5	2.9	2.5	2.3
Other Slavs	-	-	1.4	4.3	7.2	8.0
Lithuanians	-	-	1.2	1.5	1.5	1.3

Source: Lieven 1993, p.433

A crucial social development in this period, and one which now forms a key cleavage in Latvia, was the migration of Russian-speakers into Latvia. Between 1945 and 1955 the population of the Latvian republic increased by some 650,000, of whom only 115,000 were ethnic Latvians (overwhelmingly sovietized Latvians who had elected to stay in the Soviet Union after the 1917 revolution) (Plakans 1995, p.154).⁶⁵ Migration continued well into the 1960s and 1970s, albeit at a slower tempo. As table 2.4 shows, by 1989 Latvians were close to being a minority in the Latvian Republic.

This rapid migration was met with some concern by ethnic Latvians who found themselves discriminated against in such basic things as accommodation. The most prestigious apartment buildings in the centre of Rīga were evacuated of their original tenants, and handed over to more senior Russian speaking migrants (Riekstiņš 2002, pp. 455-456).

Another significant development, connected to the migration issue, was the industrialization and urbanization of Latvia. In the inter-war period the overwhelming majority of the population still lived in rural areas – but by the 1950s this situation had been reversed, and by 1980, 70% of the Latvian population lived in urban areas, leading to housing shortages and another source of conflict between ethnic Latvians and Russian speakers (Lieven 1994, p.97). Agriculture was rapidly collectivized. By 1951 98.4% of peasant households had been incorporated into collective farms (Smith 1996, p.151).

The reforms of the Gorbachov era created the opportunity for new political movements to emerge – an era known in Latvia as the ‘third awakening’ (*trešā atmoda*). Indeed, these movements in the Baltic States encouraged secessionist movements elsewhere in the Soviet Union (Muižnieks 1995). However, there were also two other important factors that encouraged these reforms: economic slowdown and social crisis. First, the Soviet Union experienced an economic slowdown in the early 1980s, as the easily accessible natural resources that had driven economic growth since the 1920s became scarcer and more expensive to access. Growth was probably flat in the 1980s, meaning that the standard of living for the majority of the population was beginning to slip (Rutland 1994, p.134). This exacerbated the main elements of the social crisis that had been

⁶⁵ At the same time it has been estimated that some 340,000 Latvians in total were deported between 1945 and 1991, of which 130,000 never returned. They were mostly real and potential opponents to the regime – the independence era elite and professional classes, former soldiers, dissidents, their dependants and so on (Latvian Institute 2004).

building since the 1960s: a housing shortage; a decline in the quality of health-care reflected in a rapidly falling average life-expectancy; rampant alcoholism etc.

Graham Smith (1994, 1996) identified three stages in the transition to Latvian independence: (i) national reawakening (1986-1988); (ii) the emergence and consolidation of a grassroots based nationalist movement (1988-1990) and; (iii) support for independence from the Latvian SSR government (1990-1991).

The first stage was initiated by three small, unofficial, organizations (Kārklīņš 1994).⁶⁶ First, Rebirth and Renewal was founded in June 1987 by Lutheran clergymen challenging restrictions on religious freedoms. This 'rebirth' primarily took the form of renovating old churches, but also had an explicit spiritual element that stood in stark contrast to the atheism of the Soviet regime. Second, *Helsinki-86* was founded by three young Latvians living in the militarized, closed port city of Liepaja in 1986. They initially recorded human rights abuses in contravention to the Helsinki accords signed by the Soviet Union in 1975, and intended to submit them to the Soviet-American conference on mutual relations to be held in the Latvian holiday resort of Jurmala in September 1986. Later, *Helsinki-86* organized the first 'calendar demonstrations' – high profile demonstrations held on dates of symbolic importance to Latvian independence e.g. August 23rd, the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Third, the Environmental Protection Club (*Vides Aizsardzības Klubs* – VAK), challenged the authority of the state through opposition to big infrastructure projects that were harmful to the Latvian environment. VAK had a rich vein to draw on – Latvia had the second highest level of air pollution in the Soviet Union, and after Leningrad, Rīga had the dirtiest drinking water in the Soviet Union, actually experiencing an outbreak of cholera in 1988 (Thompson 1992, p.177). VAK began its activities with opposition to the construction of a hydro-electric power station on the river Daugava, and then opposition to the construction of a Rīga metro system. The former was of particular importance in rallying support against the Soviet system because all Latvians feel a great closeness to the Latvian countryside with the vast majority of the urban population only recently migrated to the cities. Also, the small size of Latvia meant that people often spent time in the countryside, particularly in the summer. The founder of VAK, Dainis Ivāns, went on to be the Chairman of the Latvian People's Front (*Latvijas Tautas Fronte* – LTF).

⁶⁶ Juris Dreifelds (1996, pp.53-54) argued that the first organized opposition groups appeared in the 1970s under the guise of Latvian folklore groups. However, these folklore groups did not have the overtly political nature of the three discussed here.

It is significant that, in their own way, all three of these groups placed history at the centre of their dissidence. Indeed, both Juris Dreifelds (1996) and Clare Thompson (1992) argued that history was central to the Baltic independence movements. For Rebirth and Renewal it was reclaiming the Latvian religious past in the form of old churches. For *Helsinki-86* it was the remembrance of significant days in Latvian history. But for VAK it was the ancient connection between Latvians and the land that they live on. This sense of historic injustice was to be a key driving force of the independence movement, temporarily uniting its many different strands.

There were also large, hugely symbolic popular demonstrations, culminating in the 'Baltic Way' that saw 2 million Balts link hands to form a more or less continuous human chain across the Baltic States. This was memorable both for its size (two-fifths of the entire population participated), and for its unmatched demonstration of Baltic unity.

From early 1984 onwards, each year brought increased political freedoms and ever greater demands for autonomy, and, eventually, independence. Popular culture is a good indicator of the openness of the Soviet system – revealing what was, and was not, tolerated at a certain time. The key year of increased openness was 1989. At this point Gorbachov's *perestroika* and *demokratizacija* had moved forward enough to tolerate outright calls for Baltic independence. At a cultural level this was illustrated by the annual *Mikrofona* song competition, where, on one gala evening, the best Latvian songs of each year were performed before a live television audience. While the early concerts were fairly typical colourless, non-political Soviet cultural events, by 1988 the *Mikrofona* concert featured émigré Latvian singers and groups, and by 1989 two of the leading songs were openly calling for independence – 'Brīvība Baltijai' (Freedom for the Baltics) performed by *Opus Pro*, and 'Atmostās Baltija' (Baltics awake) sung by Viktors Zemgalis.⁶⁷

Thus a momentum was building towards independence by the late 1980s. But, as Walter C. Clemens (1991, p.119) has noted, the independence movement in Latvia (as well as in Lithuania and Estonia) did not have a grand strategy for achieving independence 'in the way that professional military planners and communist revolutionaries had studied possible paths to success'. Rather, after the first calendar demonstrations, Latvians reacted to events coming from Moscow, as well as following the lead of their Baltic neighbours, rather than breaking new ground in the fight for independence. Indeed, there were many arguments among Latvians on how independence could best be achieved, eventually crystallizing into two groups in 1988 – the

⁶⁷ The author watched the annual *Mikrofona* concerts from the 1980s, when they were repeated on Latvian television from June-August 2004.

extreme nationalists and the more moderate, inclusive LTF. Meanwhile, support for the Soviet regime was provided by *Interfront* (International Working People's Front) which was largely composed of ethnic Russian speakers, and the reactionary wing of the LKP.

The radical nationalists were represented by LNNK, which was almost exclusively ethnic Latvian. LNNK was the first large movement to have a founding Congress (in June 1988), and claimed a fee-paying membership of over 10,000 by 1989 (Trapans 1991, p.29). Its very first meeting, held in an apartment, saw the founders quickly splinter into two groups. Those that wished to marginalize the ethnic issue walked out and went on to form the LTF (Apals 1992). This is an extreme example of the splits that would dominate post-communist party politics in the 1990s. A second, more radical group was the *Pilsoņu Komiteja* (Citizens Committee). Started by Visvaldis Brinkmanis, the Citizens Committee aimed to gather 800,000 signatures (thus a majority of the ethnic Latvian population), and then call a 'Citizens Congress' with the aim of declaring an independent Latvia.⁶⁸ This Congress would then be the direct successor to the inter-war Latvian parliament. The Citizens Committee refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Latvian Supreme Council, arguing that it was an institution of the occupying forces. It also refused to acknowledge any elections that allowed people who had entered Latvia after 1940 to vote. It first began registering Latvian citizens (of the pre-1940 state), and then organized an election to a legislature where only these people could take part. Together with LNNK, the popularity of the Citizens Congress forced the initially more liberal LTF to shift to the nationalist right.

The founding congress of the LTF was held in October 1988. It initially claimed a membership of 120,000, one-third LKP members. By the end of the year its membership had shot up to 250,000 (Smith 1996, p.158). The LTF, which came to be the leading opposition movement in Latvia, provided a broad tent for opponents to the Soviet Union. It contained communists and dissidents, nationalists and human rights campaigners, environmentalists and religious groups. The diversity of opinion tolerated in the LTF stood in stark contrast to the more radical, exclusive and nationalist LNNK and Citizens Congress (although in some cases their membership did overlap).

However, there were two competing wings in the LTF, again focused around the ethnic issue: 'one focused on defending Latvian rights, the other on individual civic rights' (Clemens 1991, p.169). The latter initially dominated. In 1989 LTF's official policy was that all those who had lived in Latvia for at least 10 years should be given Latvian citizenship (Clemens 1991,

⁶⁸ By 1990 they had gathered over 500,000 signatures (Hiden and Salmon 1994, p.159).

p.171). However, by 1991 the nationalists had won the argument and the LTF began to support a more restrictive national model.

This can also be conceptualized as a battle between rival institutions. The Citizens Congress believed that it had a moral monopoly on representing Latvia internationally while the Supreme Soviet, which was dominated by the LTF after the 1990 elections, would deal with Moscow (Hiden and Salmon 1994, p.162). The result was that the 'Supreme Soviet won the battle of the institutions [as the basis for future parliaments], but the LTF gradually adopted most of the policies of the Congresses, and hence of the radical groups' (Norgaard and Johannsen 1999, p.24). This is not surprising, because while the radicals had general popular support, the moderates dominated the institutions, and after 1991 the different political groups had to begin organizing themselves for national elections (Gerner and Hedlund 1993, p.90). The Citizens Congress continued functioning organizationally into 1993, when a number of its leading members left to found the nationalist *Tēvzemei un Brīvībai* (For Fatherland and Freedom – TB) party, which, after merging with LNNK, is still represented in the 2002-2006 parliament.

The anti-reform group was led by the *Interfront* movement, an amalgamation of pro-Soviet forces primarily composed of ethnic Russian LKP members, as well as Soviet officers who had settled in Latvia after their retirement. In many ways it was an umbrella organization rather similar to the LTF in that it contained a great number of very different people of many different shades of 'red'. It was formed as a direct rival to the LTF, just a few days after the LTF founding Congress. Its first meeting took place at the Rīga Aviation Institute, where over 99% of students were Russian-speakers. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of its claimed 300,000 membership came from the 800,000 plus Russian-speaking minority (Smith 1996, p.161).⁶⁹

The LKP splintered into pro- and anti-reform groups in 1990 when the LKP held its annual congress – but one-third of reformist deputies walked out of the Congress. As a result, the remaining hard-line deputies voted in one of their own as the new first Secretary (the hardliner Alfreds Rubiks, Mayor of Rīga). The deputies that had walked out formed an Independent Latvian Communist Party. Interestingly, this split was largely along ethnic lines with Latvian communists dominating the Independent Latvian Communist Party while Russian-speakers made up the

⁶⁹ Although some observers argue that a much more realistic membership figure is 30,000 (Dellenbrant 1994, p. 96).

majority of the LKP.⁷⁰ Up until that point the LKP had cooperated closely with the LTF (Dreifelds 1996, p.63). By 1989 it was no longer even the largest political organization, with just 184,000 members to the 250,000 in the LTF. Only 39% of its members were Latvian (Dreifelds 1996, p.63). Thus the independence cleavage gradually morphed into an ethnic one. An opinion poll carried out in late 1988 found that 74% of Latvians and 10% of Russians supported the LTF, while 48% of Russians and 6% of Latvians supported *Interfront* (Clemens 1991, p.170).

By 1989 political parties began to reappear on the political scene, many of which claimed to be the heirs of the political parties of the inter-war era. For example, the LSDSP held its twentieth congress (and first since 1934), in Jūrmala from December 2-3, 1989. New parties also appeared – such as the Latvian National Rebirth Party in April 1989, and the Republican Party in October 1989. In contrast to the LSDSP and LNNK, these parties were not significant actors on the independent Latvian political scene, and most quickly disappeared.

Independent organizations also developed, although in the last years of the 1980s these were primarily organizations from the inter-war era, such as the scout movement and the Red Cross. However, there were also new organizations, such as the League of Women, formed to protect young Latvian soldiers who were serving in the Red Army.

Thus by 1989 there were a multiplicity of social organizations, frequent anti-regime demonstrations, and a number of fledgling parties. The next stage was the organization of competitive elections and the formation of an elected Latvian government. First, the spring 1989 elections to the All Union Congress of People's Deputies. Second, the elections to the Latvian SSR Supreme Council. The All Union elections were significant because they saw the first electoral successes of the reformist groups, and the emergence of a new political class. They also revealed the extensive popular base of the LTF, and gave the LTF its first taste of electoral success.

As with the Constitutional Assembly of the inter-war era, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia can be seen as being rather more than a transitional legislative institution. The Latvian Supreme Council had been elected from a single candidate, closed list (325 candidates standing for 325 seats), sitting for 5 years, although only actually holding plenary sessions for a few days every year. But in 1990 it was opened up for party competition. Again, the LTF did very

⁷⁰ This also partly explains why the split from the Soviet Communist Party came much later in Latvia than in the other two Baltic States where the Balts, rather than ethnic Russians, made up a majority of the membership (Lieven 1994, p.228).

well, winning 131 of the 201 seats, and controlled the legislature. The fact that the LTF won well over 50% of the seats shows that it was drawing support from non-Latvian ethnic communities (although Dominic Lieven (1994, p.242) argued that it could also be down to Russian voter apathy). The legislature passed a number of important pieces of legislation kick-starting the privatization process and renewing the independent mandate of the Bank of Latvia. Of great symbolic importance was the vote to renew Latvian independence on 4th May 1990 – a date that is still celebrated in modern Latvia.⁷¹ Indeed, this is the only time in the history of Latvia (occupied or independent) that politicians have been liberally showered with flowers and cheers.

Events moved ahead rapidly in 1991. The failed August coup in Moscow opened a window of opportunity for the LTF government to declare independence on the 21st of August. This was recognized by Iceland on the following day, and then Russia on the 24th, with the rest of the international community rapidly following. Latvia joined the United Nations in September 1991, and by the end of the year was politically recognized by the international community as a member of the OSCE, and also culturally e.g. as a member of the International Olympic Association.

However, parallels with the situation at the end of the First World War remained. First, the economy was devastated after years of failed Soviet planning. Falling output led to a budgetary crisis and plunging living standards for pensioners and those reliant on the state sector. Major reforms had to be undertaken. Second, while in the inter-war era the new Latvian government had to deal with the issue of the Baltic Germans, the demographic changes of the Soviet era meant that the ethnic Russian issue now took precedence, particularly in terms of citizenship and language policy. Finally, democracy had to be built with few individuals with democratic experience after fifty years of occupation. Moreover, 45,000 serving Soviet military personnel on Latvian soil.

Following independence the broad political umbrella of the LTF collapsed into three parts: (i) national liberals; (ii) reform communists; and (iii) national radicals (Dellenbrant 1994, p.106). Interestingly, very few of the leading Latvian politicians of the 1980s, and dissidents of an earlier age, played a major role in the democratic politics of the new Latvian democracy. Indeed, the LTF did not even win a single seat in the 1993 parliamentary election. The painful economic and social transition was biting hard in 1993, and LTF, as office holders, were rejected by the voters.

⁷¹ The law on 'The renewal of the independence of the Republic of Latvia', which declared the occupation of Latvia by the Soviet Union illegal, and restored the 1922 constitution (although it was then immediately suspended) (Saeima 2005).

Conclusions

Contemporary Latvian democracy can best be understood in the context of Latvian history. History resonates in contemporary Latvia for four main reasons. First, contemporary Latvia had very little experience of democratic politics to draw upon in 1991. Moreover, the authoritarian era of Kārlis Ulmanis is remembered with greater affection than the preceding era of competitive politics. Political parties were remembered as corrupt and self-serving. The LKP, with its nomenclature system of rewarding party members with better apartments and access to imported consumer goods, reinforced this image. Second, the legal framework of the inter-war era did not support the construction of large, stable, organized political parties. Although there were two large parties in the inter-war era, the LSDSP and LZS only won 35/100 seats in the 1931 election, continuing the tendency for them to shed votes. Third, the tsarist era was reflected in the key policies of the inter-war era – the need for land reform, building new foreign trade partners, and minority policy. In the same way, the Soviet era would inevitably leave its mark on contemporary Latvia. Finally, a small country like Latvia, located on the fringes of Europe, is often swept along by events in the outside world, from the first Viking invaders, to the Red Army in 1944. Indeed it was only the weakening of central authority in the Soviet Union that allowed Latvia to break free in 1991.

The independent Latvia that emerged in 1991 was thus faced with several challenges in constructing its democracy. The authoritarian inheritance from the Soviet Union meant that both elite and public had little or no experience of democratic practices. The poor physical infrastructure and command economy constructed by the Soviet Union hindered the construction of a market economy. At the same time, however, the international environment was conducive to democratization in Latvia. The following chapter will consider how far Latvian democracy has consolidated post-1991.

Chapter 3. The four dimensions of democratic consolidation in Latvia

“Having spent most of my life persecuted in the Soviet Union, I am convinced that modern Latvia is a democracy”. Anna Seile (TB/LNNK), interview, 13th March 2002.

“Latvia lacks the substance and the spirit of democracy. And it will take us many years to internalize this.” Jānis Jurkāns (TSP), interview, 5th March 2002.

“Most of the Latvian public has not yet learned the basics of democracy”. Dzintars Ābiķis (TP), interview, 6th March 2002.

Latvia has had four parliamentary elections since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. All have been contested by a multiplicity of parties, and turnout has been well above the European average. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR – a part of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), the primary election observation unit in Europe, sent observers to the 1998 and 2002 parliamentary elections, and found that both were free and fair (ODIHR 1998, 2002). Accession to the European Union in 2004 implied that Latvia had fulfilled the Copenhagen Criteria and was considered a consolidated democracy.¹ At the same time, however, the tone of the political debate in Latvia has been marked by increasingly belligerent sniping between the political elite and Latvia’s fledgling civil society. Indeed, several leading politicians, including President Freiberga, have questioned whether civil society organizations should even be allowed to observe and comment on Latvian politics (Arāja 2004).

This chapter considers this dichotomy between the procedural and qualitative dimensions of Latvian democracy, and its impact on democratic consolidation in Latvia. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996, p.7) elaborated an analytical framework that identified five arenas of democratic activity: (i) civil society, (ii) political society (iii) the rule of law, (iv) the bureaucracy, and (v) economic society. Terry D. Clark (2001) consolidated these into three core dimensions: the institutions of the state (political society, the rule of law and a good state bureaucracy), economic

¹ The June 1993 Copenhagen European Council recognised the right of the countries of central and eastern Europe to join the European Union when three criteria are met: (i) political: stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for minorities; (ii) economic: a functioning market economy; (iii) incorporation of the Community *acquis*: adherence to the various political, economic and monetary aims of the European Union. These accession criteria were confirmed in December 1995 by the Madrid European Council. (EU enlargement web site: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/>)

society and civil society. I add a fourth, ethnic, dimension because of the large Russian-speaking minority in contemporary Latvia.² All these arenas require not just a functioning legal framework, but appropriate attitudes, behaviour and democratic skills for them to be considered consolidated. Moreover, all four dimensions are both interrelated and mutually self-reinforcing.

3.1 Political society

The three key political institutions of a democracy are the legal framework, political parties, and bureaucracy. They structure, organize and manage democratic competition through regular elections, and frame the democratic 'peace' in between. Thus they can either constrain or promote corruption and the rule of law (Kunicova and Rose-Ackerman 2005). However, rules and regulations on their own are not enough to consolidate democracy. They must be brought to life by actors that adhere to the rules of the game. Thus the rule of law, wherein both elite and masses respect the law, must exist for a democracy to be considered consolidated. This section will first consider the Latvian legal framework, then turn to look at the bureaucracy, and finally analyze the extent of the rule of law. Chapters four and five will look at political parties in more detail.

The constitution creates the essential framework and legal basis for democracy by limiting state power and subjecting it to legal rules that stand above the state itself (Batt and Wolczuk 1998). These rules organize state power so that individual rights and freedoms are guarded against the arbitrary rule of the state. Thus the constitution 'can be crucial to the success of democratization' (Dahl 1998, p.119). A well crafted constitution can promote the development of democratic skills, attitudes and behaviour among all parts of the national polity. However, a badly crafted constitution can also have the reverse affect. Is the Latvian constitution a suitable base for democratic consolidation?

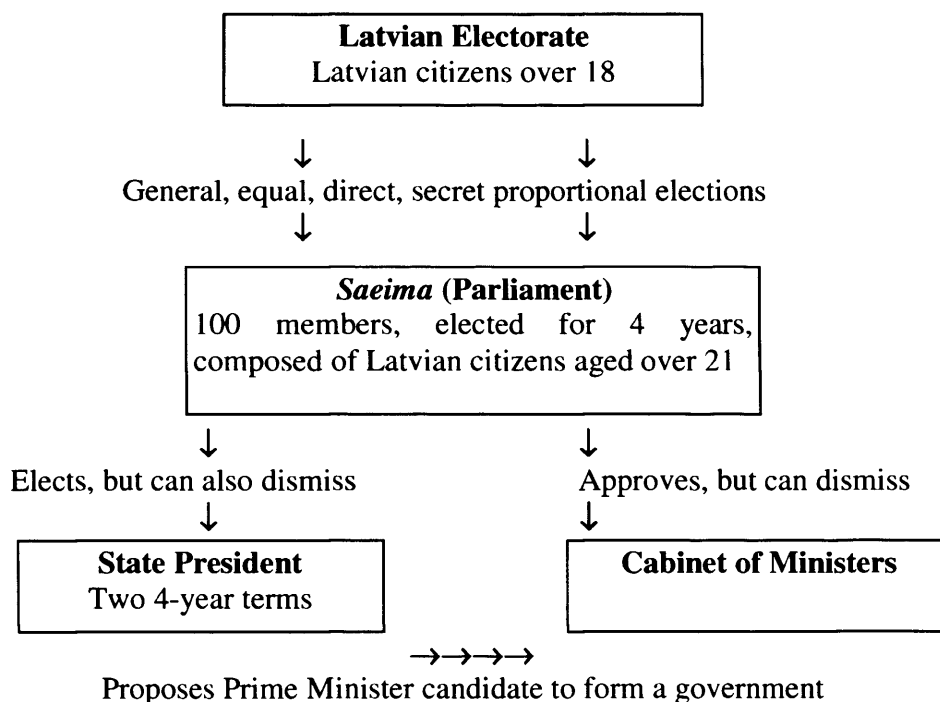
The current Latvian constitution was first adopted in 1922, and then readopted in 1992 to legitimize the modern Latvian state by linking it directly to its inter-war predecessor. While a constitution did formally exist in the Soviet period, it provided no more than a facade for Soviet legitimacy (Elster et al 1998). The constitution has been significantly amended and augmented since 1992, primarily with new clauses on human rights.³ These rights are both negative and

² In a collaborative volume on comparative democratic consolidation on four continents, Ursula van Meek (2005) adds a 'historical memory' arena to the Linz and Stepan paradigm. However, this dimension is not explicitly categorized as a separate dimension in this chapter because the communist legacy is keenly felt, and considered, in all four arenas.

³ These amendments were opposed by the Latvian nationalist parties in the parliament who held that the observation of human rights was already implicit in the constitution because the first two articles declare Latvia to be a democracy

positive (ibid). Negative rights do not require any state action to be put into force e.g. article 96: ‘Everyone has the right to the inviolability of their private life, home and correspondence’. However, positive rights do require some action by the state e.g. article 111: ‘The State shall protect human health and guarantee a basic level of medical assistance for everyone.’ Thus a qualified and skilled bureaucracy is needed to put these rights into practice.

Figure 3.1 - Constitutional division of powers in Latvia



Source: Latvian Ministry of Justice, 2004

The constitution also details the division of powers in Latvia (figure 3.1). Latvia is a parliamentary democracy, with the president elected by a parliamentary majority and holding only limited executive power. The parliament holds the right of legislative initiative, and approves judges at all levels of the system, including the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court.⁴ The major powers of the president lie in proposing a candidate for prime minister, and the right of

where power lies in the hands of the Latvian people. At the end of 2005 the constitution was amended in order to ban same-sex marriage.

⁴ However, the constitution does hold open the option for a public referendum if one-third of deputies ask the president to postpone the promulgation of a law for two months, followed by a signature campaign to collect the signatures of at least 10% of the electorate. The law will then be annulled if the majority of those voting (which has to be at least half the number of those who voted in the previous parliamentary election) vote in favour of this action.

legislative initiative. This can be a powerful tool ‘in a country where a government on the average will serve for eleven months’ (Bottolfs 2000, p. 118).

The amended article 85 gives the Latvian Constitutional Court constitutional control and supervision. The court reviews cases concerning the compliance of laws and other legal norms with the constitution and has the power to declare laws or acts null and void. The judges are appointed for periods of 6 years by an absolute majority (51 votes) of the parliament. This means that they can be subjected to periodic political pressure.⁵ Nevertheless, the Latvian constitution serves as an adequate basic framework for democratic activity, as accession to NATO and the EU indicated. Indeed, accession to the EU also indicates that the legal base meets the democratic standards of the Copenhagen Criteria.

Electoral systems transform individual voting preferences into political power. As a result, electoral system design can influence consolidation. The electoral system shapes the composition of parliament (and thus government stability) by controlling the potential number of political parties that can be elected (Elster et al 1998). The current Latvian election law is an amended version of the 1922 law that oversaw the first parliamentary elections. While the Latvian system is essentially one of proportional representation, it is also quite distinct and relatively complicated in comparison to other electoral systems (Pettai and Kreuzer 1999, p.171).⁶ The Latvian parliament (*Saeima*) has 100 seats, and deputies are elected for four years through a combination of the list proportional representation system and the single transferable vote. Party lists in the 1993 election had to pass a 4% barrier in order to gain representation. However, this was increased to 5% for the 1995 elections (a 1% barrier existed in the inter-war period). Voting was limited to one day rather than two in 1998 (the first Saturday in October). This was designed to encourage turnout which, at an average 76.4% since 1993 is 6% above the mean for east-central European states (Rose and Munro 2003, p.26). As table 3.1 shows, Latvia is divided into five electoral districts based on population data collected four months before the election. The Rīga constituency also contains the

⁵ In contrast, constitutional court judges in the USA are elected for life in order to free them from all types of political pressure. While there have been no explicit cases of judges being pressured, this has not been the case for the Prosecutor-General who is also appointed by Parliament. In Spring 2005, the serving Prosecutor-General, Jānis Maizītis, came in for strong criticism from sections of the press associated with the Ventspils transit lobby (Maizītis was leading an investigation into the finances of the Mayor of Ventspils – Aivars Lembergs – at that time). See Chapters four and five for a discussion on Latvian *eminence grises*.

⁶ Kreuzer and Pettai outline the most distinctive features as being: (i) the aggregation mechanism that turns voter preferences into seats; (ii) the forms of regulating “party governance, financing and campaigning” (Kreuzer and Pettai 1999, p.171)

votes of citizens voting from abroad. Seats are calculated using the Saint-Lague formula.⁷ Despite the large Russian-speaking minority, there are no mechanisms for representing special minority interests. Latvia uses an ordinal ballot system with voters marking candidates on their preferred party list with a positive or negative mark. The final order of deputies is compiled according to these marks.⁸ This gives voters the opportunity to personalize their electoral choices.

Table 3.1 – Parliamentary districts in Latvia

Districts	1993	1995	1998	2002
Kurzeme	14	14	14	14
Zemgale	16	15	15	15
Vidzeme	26	25	25	26
Latgale	20	19	18	17
Rīga	24	27	28	28

Source: Latvian Central Election Commission 2005

Political parties registered with the Ministry of Justice must submit candidate lists to the Central Election Commission two months before the election.⁹ Indeed, queues form outside the Commission's offices several days before candidate lists can be submitted, because the candidate lists are numbered according to the sequence of submission. Thus there is an advantage to being first, and therefore top of the pile of paper candidate lists handed out to voters after they register with their passports (which are then stamped). Each party also submits a security deposit of 1,000 Lats for each constituency in which it plans to compete, refunded only if the party list passes the 5% barrier in each constituency. However, this is a relatively small amount of money and parties are not constrained by this financial requirement. Deputy candidates must be over 21 years of age, citizens, and fluent in Latvian. Ex-KGB officers and members of *Latvijas Komunistiskā Partija* (Latvian Communist Party – LKP) after January 1991 are barred.

Political parties can band together to form joint lists, giving smaller parties a better chance to overcome the 5% threshold. This practice has been barred in other European democracies as the lists frequently fragment after elections, thus reducing voter accountability and fragmenting

⁷ The divisors being 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and so on. According to Arent Lijphardt, the use of the pure St. Lague formula (as is the case in Latvia) creates a bias in favour of smaller parties (Lijphart 1994, Appendix A).

⁸ An ordinal ballot allows voters to personalize their vote through various preferential voting procedures. Those with the most positive marks as against negative marks being elected from the list, regardless of the initial numbering of candidates

⁹ In the first ten years of post-soviet Latvia (August 1991 to August 2001), there were 57 political parties registered at the Ministry of Justice. There were 69 parties registered in January 2006 (Lursoft 2006).

parliament (Pettai and Kreuzer 1999, p.178). Another major weakness is that there is no restriction on the number of district lists a candidate can appear in. As a result, political parties place their most popular candidates in a number of electoral districts (although the candidate can only represent one). Following the election, the successful candidate can then choose which district to represent in parliament (if elected in more than one). This undermines the link between politician/party, and voter, in the district(s) that the candidate has decided to not represent.

Electoral law demands that parties present a 4,000 character party programme. In theory, this is to allow the public to familiarize themselves with the different party programmes. However, in practice the programmes tend to be vague and populist, listing broad policy aims, but giving little detail on how their aims will be achieved. Moreover, it is difficult for the public to hold parties accountable because in a proportional representation system, government is formed by coalition and compromises are inevitable. Nevertheless, the electoral mechanisms do fulfill their core aim of turning votes into political representatives.

The day-to-day running of democracy largely falls on the shoulders of the bureaucracy that runs the public administration. Max Weber stressed the mutual complementarity of an effective bureaucracy with both the development of a functioning 'capitalist market economy' and 'modern mass democracy' (Weber 1978, pp.956-1005). This ideal-type model of bureaucracy is firmly separated from the politicians 'who own it', and follows 'rational rules and regulations' ensuring predictability, efficiency and universal applicability (Mommsen 1989, p.113). The bureaucracy has a particularly critical role in democratic consolidation, because it brings to life the laws of the new system e.g. enforcing taxation in order to 'protect the rights of its citizens and to deliver the other basic services that its citizens demand' (Linz and Stepan 1996, p.11).

However, a transition in the Latvian bureaucracy was inevitable, because the Soviet system was far from the Weberian ideal. The bureaucracy was organized hierarchically, leading to the centralization of bureaucratic power in Moscow, the loss of bureaucratic initiative, and the isolation of the public from the policy process (Vanags and Balanoff 1999). Furthermore, the bureaucracy and the Communist party were closely entwined through the requirement that all middle- and senior-level staff be members of the Communist party. As a result:

'Latvia ...inherited a civil service system where civil servants were trained to control (rather than interact) with society, lacked concern with efficiency and transparency, and adhered to a tradition that stressed partiality rather than the

political neutrality of the Weberian-type bureaucrat.' (Norgaard and Hansen 2000, p.25)

Bureaucratic reform in Latvia can be divided into four phases (Kalniņš 2001, pp.1-5). First (1993-1995), parliament created new institutions and passed new laws in order to develop administrative procedure and promote decentralization. The second phase (1995-1997) saw stagnation as the initial momentum for reform slowed following the 1995 election of a fractious parliament that failed to agree on administrative reform. Thus an extensive EU PHARE-funded reorganization of the civil-service was cancelled. The third phase (1997-1998) saw planning and the formulation of a new strategy plan as the accelerated rate of EU-accession negotiations made it increasingly obvious that administrative reform could hamper Latvia's aspirations in this direction. The fourth stage (1999-present) focused on the execution of reform activities in three key areas: (i) re-organization of institutions; (ii) development of the law on administrative procedure; and (iii) personnel development in the civil service. Latvia's accession to the EU in May 2004, with the heavy administrative commitment that this implies, indicates that the Latvian bureaucracy has developed a certain level of administrative competence since 1991.

Nevertheless, two remaining handicaps to the development of effective administration are the quality of personnel and a closed system of decision-making. These in turn lead to legal implementation and enforcement problems. Personnel problems are largely related to low salaries, and a resulting lack of motivation and clear vision of career development. This also leads to opportunities for corruption. Thus the most talented bureaucrats often defect to the private sector, leaving the bureaucracy short on skilled and experienced administrators. This situation was exacerbated by the exit of many Latvian administrators for much better-paid positions in the European Union institutions following the 2004 accession. Second, a continuing lack of dialogue between civil-society and the state in policy-making issues estranges both government and administration from the public (UNDP 2001). Not only is the bureaucracy isolated from the needs and wishes of its citizens, but it has little democratic legitimacy. This can then have an adverse impact on the rule of law.

The rule of law is a pre-requisite for an efficiently functioning constitution and bureaucracy, and is central to a qualitative democracy (Rose and Munro 2003; O'Donnell 2004). Roger Scruton (1996) defined the rule of law as:

‘The form of government in which no power can be exercised except according to procedures, principles and constraints contained in the law, and in which any citizen can find redress against any other, however powerfully placed, and against the officers of the state itself, for any act which involves a breach of law.’

It is particularly important in the consolidation of democracy where ‘all significant actors – especially the democratic government and the state – must uphold the rule of law’ (Linz and Stepan 1996, p.10). Moreover, the ‘singing revolution’ in Latvia was concerned with overthrowing what was largely seen as an illegitimate regime, thus the extent of the rule of law in Latvia is a reflection of how far the population is satisfied with the current democratic regime. Thus the more the rule of law is established, the more democracy is consolidated.

However, the rule law in Latvia, and thus democracy as a whole, is undermined by corruption. Corruption in post-communist Europe is perceived to be both deep and prevalent. It ‘undermines the workings of democracy, especially in regard to rule of law, political competition and regime legitimacy’ (Kārklīņš 2005, p.1). It also has a negative impact on economic development (Lipset and Lenz 2000). Political corruption is particularly harmful, because the consolidation of the rule of law must become established at the top before it ‘can percolate downwards and gather credibility’ among the general population (Batt and Wolczuk 1998, p.89).

Thus the extent of corruption is an indicator of the extent of the rule of law. However, corruption is, by its very nature, hidden, and thus difficult to measure. Nevertheless, there are a few sources of information available. The 2005 Transparency International corruption perceptions index (a composite index drawing on surveys of business people, the general public and country analysts over a rolling three year period) placed Latvia joint 51st in a survey of 159 nations. Poland was the only European Union member state to rank below Latvia.¹⁰ The index is based on perceptions, thus it is an indicator of the extent to which people consider Latvian institutions and political actors to operate outside the rule of law rather than an accurate reflection of the actual extent of corruption in Latvia. However, it is a useful indicator because, if people perceive corruption to be widespread, they themselves are more likely to participate in it.¹¹ A July 2000 poll of 1,006 Latvian residents (table 3.2), asked respondents to state the spheres in which they regarded corruption as being the highest (defined as most observed or most frequently

¹⁰ From 2000-2004 Latvia was also ranked 57th, so there has been some improvement.

¹¹ For example, a widespread phenomenon in Latvia is bribing traffic police 5 Lats for traffic violations in order to avoid receiving a more expensive formal fine. This practice is so widespread and accepted that a best selling song in 2000 featured four well-known Latvian actors dressed as traffic police declaring their love for 5 Lat notes.

encountered). The results indicate that corruption is seen as most prevalent at the very heart of government, in politics (74.1%) and state institutions (66.8%). The business sector lags quite some way behind.

Table 3.2 Public perception: most corrupt institutions (2000)

Politics (political parties, the government, parliament)	74.1%
Public Administration (state institutions)	66.8%
Business	48.1%
Local Government	38.7%
Medicine	16.5%
Mass media (press, radio, TV)	11.4%
NGO's	8.0%
Education	5.3%
Difficult to say	4.2%

Source: SKDS 2000

Moreover, in 2000 the World Bank published an extensive report on 'Anticorruption in transition: A contribution to the policy debate.'¹² The report analyzed two types of corruption in the post-communist world: administrative (where distortions appear in the implementation of laws by both state and non-state actors) and state capture (whereby actors 'influence the formation of laws, regulations, decrees, and other government policies to their advantage as a result of the illicit and non-transparent provision of private benefits to public officials' (World Bank 2000, p.xv)). The World Bank categorized Latvia as a country with a high degree of state capture (fifth highest among the twenty East-Central European and Commonwealth of Independent States surveyed), but with a medium level of administrative corruption. (ibid, p.xviii) The World Bank argued that the high level of state capture was caused by national wealth in Latvia being concentrated in one key area (transit of natural resources from third countries), and stated that those who control this area seek to maintain their influence through the capture of state institutions.

This indicates that corruption exists in political society. Thus while the laws and institutions of democracy are in place, the rule of law, and thus the spirit of democracy, is weak.

¹² In contrast to the Transparency International Index, the World Bank report is based on interviews and questionnaires with firms in the region - the 1999 Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Survey (BEEPS) commissioned jointly by the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

3.2 Economic society

Socio-economic development has long been linked with democratic consolidation (Lipset 1959; Huntington 1991; Fukuyama 1993; Przeworski et al 1996). Indeed, Seymour Martin Lipset (1959) wrote that 'the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy'. As a result, socio-economic indicators have also been used as measures of democratization. Moreover, the Soviet regime collapsed partly because of its failure to deliver the promised economic benefits. Thus, although the move towards independence from the mid-1980s onwards was largely driven by the effort to reclaim Latvian statehood, the future of democracy in Latvia does partly rely on the success of the economic reforms that have been undertaken (Kornai 1992; Barr 1994).

There was a broad consensus among political leaders in 1991 that Latvia should adopt a market economy to support the new democratic order. However, the state had owned and planned the economy in Latvia for over half a century, and the economy was deeply integrated into the Soviet Union. Thus the transition from a planned economy to a market economy would inevitably be difficult. Nevertheless, there were also political benefits in a redirection of trade away from Russia and the former Soviet Union towards the West (Norgaard and Johannsen 1999, p.109).

Stanley Fischer and Alan Gelb (1991, pp.91-105) argued that four spheres of the communist economy needed to be reformed in order to develop a functioning market economy: (i) stabilization of the macro-economic climate and the social safety net; (ii) price and market reform accompanied by trade liberalization as well as deregulation, demonopolization and the liberalization of labour and capital markets; (iii) enterprise reform through privatization to improve economic efficiency and act as a psychological break from the previous regime; and (iv) the redefinition of the role of the state in the economy, meaning the creation of a suitable framework of laws and regulations for the running of the market as well as the development of human capital and management skills in professions which either did not exist or did not function in the communist model of the economy. In addition, I have added a fifth area of analysis: (v) the shadow economy.

The macroeconomic environment in Latvia had stabilized by the mid-1990s. Between 1995 and 2000, GDP in Latvia rose by 25.6% or an average 4.7% a year. In recent years, Latvia has had the highest annual GDP growth among the 25 old and new member states of the European Union – growth was 7.5% in 2003 and 6.7% in 2004 (Latvian Finance Ministry 2005). However, in 2005 Latvia still remained the poorest country in the twenty-five member EU. Other relevant indicators

include low annual inflation (below 3.0% since 1998, although rising to 6.2% in 2004 (Latvian Statistical Bureau 2005), a fiscal deficit that since 1996 has been lower than that stipulated in the Maastricht Criteria for joining the EURO currency zone (except during the 1998 Russian crisis), and a stable currency and exchange rate (Latvian Ministry of Economics 2001, pp.7-9).¹³

While a minimal social safety net was maintained, the real value of pensions and other social benefits as well as the quality of public sector services (schools, hospitals) has been on a downward curve. An objective measure of the social safety net in Latvia is the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) which includes around 170 countries annually. The HDI was introduced in 1990 as a way of measuring the economic and social development of countries by measuring indicators of the quality of life (life expectancy and educational attainment) as well as economic data (GDP per capita measured as price purchasing parity). As table 3.3 indicates, while Latvia initially ranked 35th in the HDI index, it slumped in the mid-1990s as the infrastructure of the social sector deteriorated and investment remained scarce. From 2001 Latvia has been ranked 50th, behind Estonia (41st in 2003) and Lithuania (45th in 2003), and last among the 25 member states of the European Union. In 2005 it rose two places to 48th. The economic reforms have also resulted in growing economic inequality. The Gini coefficient measures the distribution of earnings, and thus the level of economic inequality.¹⁴ In 2003 the Gini coefficient in Latvia was 0,332 compared to 0,247 in 1991 (UNICEF 2005), although this falls into the European average (UNDP 2005). Thus while the economic reforms undertaken in Latvia since 1991 appear to be proving successful in macroeconomic terms, there has been an ongoing collapse in terms of social and economic development.

Table 3.3 - Latvia and the UNDP HDI. 1993-1005

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Rank	35	30	48	55	92	92	74	63	50	50	50	50	48

Source: United Nations Development Programme, 2005

¹³ An excessive deficit is defined in the Maastricht Treaty as one exceeding 3% of GDP in an annual budget. The Latvian Lat (LVL) is linked to the SDR basket of currencies which 'eliminates uncertainty, reduces currency risk and provides businesses [with] a stable base for planning and price determination'. (Economic Development of Latvia 2001, p.9). From 1st January 2005 the lat was linked to the euro, in preparation for eventual accession to the euro-zone.

¹⁴ The Gini coefficient is a number between 0 and 1, where 0 means perfect equality (everyone has the same income) and 1 means perfect inequality (one individual has all the income).

Second, economic liberalization led to a rapid growth in foreign trade. By 1995 Latvia was exporting more to the EU-15 than to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Latvian Ministry of Economics 2001, p.28). However, the fall in exports in 1999 (the only fall since 1991) following the Russian financial crisis revealed the continuing close links and susceptibility of Latvia to the CIS. Latvia has a negative trade balance because it mainly exports low value-added products to the west (lumber and textiles) (ibid, pp.91-93). Latvia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in January 1999 and the European Union in May 2004, completing its integration into the global trade community.¹⁵

Capital markets developed rapidly after a banking crisis enveloped the country in 1995 when the largest bank in Latvia, *Banka Baltija*, collapsed with large debts and many inhabitants lost their savings (30% of all Latvian deposits were held in *Banka Baltija*). The Bank of Latvia responded by tightening banking regulations and supervision. No depositors have lost money since 1995, and the credit rating of Latvian institutions in the international Moodys and Standard and Poor ratings has consistently improved.

Third, privatization and the reform of corporate governance lie at the 'heart of the transformation process' (Gelb and Fischer 1991, p.98). The privatization of small companies was largely completed by 1995 with remaining enterprises privatized by 1998 (Latvian Ministry of Economics 2001, pp.105-106). However, the privatization of larger enterprises only began in 1994 after the establishment of the Latvian Privatization Agency, and has still not been fully completed.¹⁶ Nevertheless, by 2000 the private sector employed 71% of the Latvian workforce and produced over 95% of GDP in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, trade, hotels and restaurants (ibid, p.106).

Fourth, as the data above implies, the role of the state in the economic sphere has been reduced by privatization as well as the creation of institutions, laws and regulations facilitating the development of a market economy. Initially the International Monetary Fund and the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development played a leading role because of the Latvian governments need for cheap loans, as well as the expertise they could offer (Dreifelds 1996, p.113). However, since 1993 Latvia's structural reforms have been largely guided by the need to

¹⁵ The WTO has 141 member countries (September 2001) in a free-trade framework providing a legal base and uniform principles in trade.

¹⁶ There have been three failed contentious attempts to privatize the hugely profitable Latvian Shipping company between 1998-2001, and a sharp public reaction against the privatization of Latvenergo (the national energy producer) forced the government to remove this enterprise from the list of possible privatizations.

comply with the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union.¹⁷ However, there is still a shortage of professional lawyers and economists working in the public sector due to the low level of salaries in comparison to the private sector and the continuing reform of teaching programmes in these disciplines in tertiary institutions. As a result, while Latvia has adopted the laws and regulations and institutions needed for the maintenance of a market economy there is still a problem with the skills of actors in the sphere of economic policy.¹⁸

Finally, a large shadow economy is potentially destabilizing to democracy because it deprives the government of tax revenue that could be used in furthering necessary political, economic and social reforms, and creates distortions in the legal economy. Moreover, the criminality that accompanies a large shadow economy is more likely to be an obstacle than a crutch to attracting foreign direct investment, particularly because the shadow economy (and the money circulating in it) helps to feed corruption (Anderson 1998, p.20). It is difficult to measure the extent of the shadow economy as these activities are, by definition, unreported. However, one estimate showed that the size of the Latvian shadow economy in 1994-1995 was 34.8%, the highest figure among the eight East-Central European countries that joined the EU in 2004, and far higher than any EU member state (Schneider and Enste 2002, p.33). However, a more recent estimate put the figure at a much lower 20.8% (Bernotaite and Piskunova 2005). Nevertheless, this still adds up to a significant amount of lost taxable income for the state.

Thus while the European Commission declared that 'Latvia can be regarded as a functioning market economy' (European Commission 1999, p.75), and large strides have clearly been made in the development of the market economy through economic reform, there are still microeconomic weaknesses in the economy. Moreover, corruption and the large shadow economy reveals weaknesses in terms of attitudes and behaviour.

3.3 Civil society

John Keane (1998, p.114) argued that civil society functions as the 'realm of freedom' that is a basic 'condition of democracy.' Indeed, it has been argued that there is a 'strong statistical

¹⁷ The Copenhagen Criteria for potential new member states of the EU established at the June 1993 European Council in Copenhagen give two economic requirements for membership: '(i) the existence of a functioning market economy; and (ii) the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union.' (European Commission 1999, p.18)

¹⁸ Although this has been addressed in the social sciences by a number of bilateral (e.g. the Stockholm School of Economics in Rīga), and multi-lateral (EuroFaculty, based at the University of Latvia and financed by the Council of Baltic Sea States) programmes.

association between civil society and democracy (Green 2002, p.466), and that modern democracy has only existed in tandem with civil society (Bernhard 1993). However, it has also been asked if a lively, functioning civil society is the cause or consequence of democratic consolidation (van Beek 2005). In fact, it is a mutually reinforcing relationship. Civil society plays a key role in the qualitative aspects of democracy, but it can only do this in a consolidated democracy with the appropriate legislative freedoms. Thus the health of civil society is also an indicator of the extent of democratic consolidation.

Civil society is a much used term that is actually rather difficult to pin down. It is best defined as the sphere of activity between the state and the individual. It upholds and promotes democratic freedom of expression through the organizations, institutions and other communal activities occupying this space. Civil society provides both vertical and horizontal linkages fostering democratic consolidation (UNDP 1996, p.83). Vertical linkages promote contacts between the population and the government (both political and administrative), thus giving the population the opportunity to influence policy. Horizontal links (between people in different civil society organizations, as well as political parties) strengthen contacts between people and groups from different sections of society and different backgrounds as well and promote exchange of the tools and skills needed for the qualitative development of democracy at the individual level. In a country with sharp ethnic divisions (such as Latvia) these horizontal linkages take on an important role in the nation-building aspect of democracy. Perhaps more importantly, civil society can play an important role in the actual reform process during a systemic transition, acting as both advisor and watchdog to the state, as well as filling gaps in the state budget through its own activities and resources (e.g. immunization campaigns in the health sector). Thus civil society performs three core functions in a democracy: (i) balancing power between the elite and grass-roots level; (ii) promoting horizontal linkages between different sections of society; and (iii) acting as a disciplinary watchdog.

Latvian civil society has developed rapidly since 1991, and has begun to play an increasingly influential, albeit disputed, role in the Latvian polity. In the context of democratic consolidation, civil society has a particularly important role in developing democratic skills, attitudes and behaviour. However, a small middle-class, inadequate legal framework, and negative psychological inheritance from the Soviet era hampers the development of civil society in Latvia.

Civil society was weak in communist countries because 'the communist party assumed responsibility for everything that is happening in society; therefore it [felt] obliged to direct and

control the whole of social life' (Vajda 1988, p.339). Chapter two emphasized the role of Latvian civil society in the independence movement of the 1980s. However, this was a civil society working against the state.¹⁹ In a democracy, civil society plays a more co-operative role with the state and is one of the rocks on which a democracy is consolidated (Keane 1998, p.6).

The Soviet era left a significant psychological impact that continues to affect the role of civil society in that many people continue to distance themselves from engaging with the state through civil society. Indeed, Marc Marje Howard (2002) identified three key reasons for a weak civil society in post-communist Europe, all of which are rooted in the legacy of the previous regimes: (1) mistrust of organizations; (2) the persistence of informal friendship networks in place of structured organizations; and (3) popular disappointment in the social, political and economic changes after the collapse of communism. In a 1997 Latvian survey of citizens and non-citizens, only 18% and 17% respectively believed that the state should involve the population in the policy process and only 4% of both groups believed that the state should defend the freedom of speech (Baltic Data House 1997, p.84). Moreover, the previous communist regime had expected citizens to volunteer their time to official state organizations. As a result, there is a widespread cynical attitude to the type of group activities that lie at the heart of civil society activity.²⁰

Nevertheless, NGO activity has grown steadily since 1991. However, participation remains low. In 1991, 54% of Latvian survey respondents claimed membership of at least one social organization, but by 1994 this number had fallen to 40%, and by 1996 only 20% (UNDP 1996, p.93). In 2000, 27% of citizens and 15% of non-citizens were involved in some form of NGO activity (Latvian Naturalization Board 2001, p.61). Latvian law requires all social organizations to be registered with the Ministry of Justice. Table 3.4 shows a rising trend in registration of NGO's. However, it is clear that not all these organizations are active – in March 2001 only 778 NGO organizations were registered with the Latvian NGO centre (NGO Centre 2001, p.3).²¹ Moreover, it is questionable how representative these NGO's actually are. For example, the Latvian Roma

¹⁹ Dissidents and *samizdat* in the Soviet era are a further example of direct opposition between state and civil-society. Cohen and Arato describe the operation of these fledgling groups as "society *against* the state, nation *against* state, social order *against* political system..." and so on (Cohen and Arato 1992, p. 31).

²⁰ Only 28% of citizens and 20% of non-citizens claim to 'trust' or 'rather trust' NGOs (The Naturalization Board of Latvia 2001, p. 64).

²¹ The Latvian NGO Centre was launched in April 1996 with funding from the Danish government, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Soros Foundation. It promotes NGO activity and co-operation in Latvia through training and educational programmes as well as information exchange. As a result, the number of organizations registered with the Centre is also a good indicator of how many of the organizations registered at the Ministry of Justice are actually active.

Association (led by Normunds Rudēvics, *Latvijas Ceļš* (Latvia's Way – LC) parliamentary deputy from 1993-2002) received 55,000 Lats in 2002 from the Latvian state budget, but had only 97 members from the 20,000 Roma community in Latvia. Moreover, in July 2003 various Roma groups from around Latvia picketed the Justice Ministry (which allocated the money) for an audit of the Association, claiming that Roma groups have not seen any of the money (Kas Notiek? 2003).

Table 3.4 – Number of NGOs in Latvia. 1991-2005

Year	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	Total
Nr.	56	30	993	593	480	749	625	689	696	936	793	777	775	811	960	10,062

Source: Lursoft 2005²²

Trade unions are traditionally one of the leading actors in civil society. However, they initially suffered from weak legitimacy and low membership because of their years of subordination to the LKP. Moreover they were caught in a catch-22 situation:

‘On the one hand, they are identified by the neoliberal ideology as one of the main culprits for economic “rigidity”, a “special interest” threatening economic efficiency. On the other hand, trade unions face a dilemma when confronted with the intemporal trade-offs inherent in market-oriented reforms: accepting these trade-offs is a highly demobilizing strategy with regard to the rank and file; rejecting them appears to be, and often is, irresponsible’. (Przeworski 1995, p.56)

However, after tailing off in the 1990s, union activity in Latvia began to rise in the new century. While in July 2001 there were 122 officially registered trade unions with the Ministry of Justice, by 2005 there were 140 (Lursoft 2005). The largest trade union in Latvia, the Latvian Free Trade Union (*Latvijas brīvo arodbiedrību savienība* - LBAS) claims a membership of 170,000 people, approximately 20% of the working population (Delfi 2005b).²³ However, it was only able to mobilize 6,000 people (and many attendees were pensioners and students, not trade union members) for what it hoped would be the biggest post-1991 demonstration in September 2005 (ibid).

The extent of participation is also affected by ongoing low levels of economic development. Samuel Huntington (1991, p.69) argued that economic development results in a

²² Lursoft is the online database of the Latvian Company register. Of the 10,062 NGOs formed since 1991, 9,719 are still registered.

²³ Also, 20% of ethnic Latvian respondents and 16% of ethnic Russian respondents to a 2004 opinion survey claimed trade union membership (Rose 2005).

large middle-class and a better educated public. This group then goes on to play the key role in forming organizations to defend their own individual and collective interests and provides the financial backing for civil-society to free it from financial reliance on the state. However, there is no tradition of philanthropy in modern Latvia. Indeed, the wealthy prefer making donations to political parties in order to attract specific favours, rather than the group benefits that civil society provides.

Legal structures can both hinder or foster civil society. Laws are needed to guarantee basic human rights, prohibit arbitrary government interference, promote the creation of NGOs and make changes in tax regulations in order to support contributions to NGOs and thus allow them to function effectively. There are still legal barriers to the sustained development of civil society in Latvia. The 1999 annual report of the Latvian NGO Centre, identified the primary areas of legislative weakness, (which are still current in 2006):

‘existing legislation allows NGOs to function, but the laws on financing and accounting are both complex and disheartening for NGOs... the process of obtaining tax-exempt status is confusing and often arbitrary; tax deductions are difficult to obtain and are only for legal persons but not for private persons’ (NGO Centre Annual Report 1999, p.5).

The result is weak funding for Latvian civil society, particularly from national donors (the same report estimated that 80% of the resources of Latvian NGOs in 1999 came from foreign sources), resulting in weak organization and limited activities. This has caused problems for Latvian NGO’s, because accession to NATO and the EU led to a fall-off in foreign funding, as donors moved eastwards, and the shortfall has not been made up by the private sector.

The mass media can involve and even mobilize the public in major political issues. They also act as political watchdogs. Thus ‘the mass media construct political reality through their reporting: they supply situational interpretations and provide insights into the practice of democratic competition’ (Plasser, Ulram and Walrauch 1998, p.129). This is particularly important in Latvia, where the mass media are among the most trusted institutions (see tables 6.6. and 6.7 in chapter 6). However, while there has been a rapid growth in the number of newspapers, magazines, television and radio programmes and stations (as well as newer electronic media available on the internet), media news coverage has tended to concentrate on corruption and

sensationalism.²⁴ While this is partially because of the small middle-class in Latvia (the traditional audience for quality journalism), and because the Soviet period has left people with a low expectation for quality journalism, it is primarily because the press have sided with particular political interests (related to their ownership) and present an unbalanced picture of the greater political issues.²⁵ This is, at least partly, a tradition taken from the inter-war era when all the major newspapers were owned by political parties or their benefactors. Research undertaken by Ainars Dimants (2004, p.116-117) revealed that:

‘... the structure of ownership has a serious influence on editorial autonomy. Western investors are positive participants in this process, because they support editorial autonomy. Latvian investors have been active in shaping policy... the most vivid example in this case is *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze*. Interviews made it clear that its publishers see the paper as a political instrument, not as a long-term project in the media business.’

This was further supported by the revelation in April 2005 that the press releases of Aivars Lembergs (Mayor of Ventspils, and Latvian *eminence grise*, who is discussed in more depth in chapters four and five) were composed on computers used by journalists from *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* (Galzons 2005). Formally, there is no link between the two. However, it has long been rumoured that *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* and other newspapers are owned by Lembergs through off-shore companies. As a result, the media are a part of the political conflict in Latvia. Indeed, *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* has adopted an extremely belligerent stance against certain civil society organizations, and most particularly the Soros Foundation. In a series of cynical front page articles in January 2006, *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* accused George Soros of attempting to ‘capture’ the Latvian state through his foundation’s support for NGO’s, academics, and policy-makers since 1991 (Rozenbergs 2006a; 2006b; 2006c). These organizations are the largest NGO’s in Latvia, and

²⁴ In 1996, there were 130 newspapers purchased per 1,000 Latvian inhabitants. This compared favourably with southern EU member countries such as Italy (104), Portugal (75) and Spain (99), although lags some way behind the numbers for central and northern countries e.g. Germany (311), Sweden (446), Finland (455) and the UK (332). (Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia 1999, p.52)

²⁵ Research by the Soros Foundation and Transparency International in Latvia analyzed articles in six national and six regional newspapers (Latvian and Russian language) between the 10th of February and 10th of March 2001. Researchers searched for articles that were either one-sided or uncritical, or articles that popularized an individual politician or political party. They discovered 189 examples of the latter, 25 of the former and 18 that shared both characteristics. All newspapers were effected. Moreover, they found that these types of article were four times more likely to appear in the national than regional press. (Locmele 2001) A similar exercise was carried out on the four national TV channels between 28th February and 12 March 2001, and 214 cases of hidden party political propaganda were identified.

provide financial support for the Latvian branch of Transparency International (*Delna*) and other major anti-corruption initiatives. Moreover, on January 18th 2006, former Deputy Prime Minister Ainārs Šlesers (LPP) proposed a new law limiting the participation of NGO's funded by foreign donors (Eglītis 2006). Thus by undermining the Soros foundation, and foreign-funded NGO's, the *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* undermines the very foundation of Latvian civil society, particularly the part that provides checks and balances on the political elite.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that the state still plays a role in the financing of national radio and television, allowing it to exert control over this media through the power of the purse. Indeed, the National Radio and Television Board (which oversees both public and private media) is entirely composed of political appointments. Many local newspapers are still owned by local governments with the same potential effect.

Moreover, there are very distinct Russian and Latvian language media, with each reporting political and social issues in very different ways. Indeed, 'one often has the impression that they depict different countries' (UNDP 1996, p.91), and this impression is heightened by the fact that the readerships of these publications do not overlap. For example, a survey published in 2001 revealed that while 29% of citizens read the Latvian-language daily *Diena* and 20% *Lauku Avīze*, only 5% and 1% of non-citizens do so. While 21% and 20% of non-citizens read the leading Russian-language dailies *Subbota* and *Vesti*, the respective figures for citizens were 6% and 3%. This pattern is also reflected in local newspapers, with 42% of citizens and 4% of non-citizens reading Latvian language local newspapers, while 5% and 13% read Russian language local newspapers (Latvian Naturalization Board 2001, p.39). This pattern was repeated for both radio and television stations.

Education is a crucial component of both democracy and civil society, giving the public the tools and skills to understand the policy debate and participate in it. While the number of people being educated has increased over the last ten years, the quality of education has failed to take similar strides. Data from the 2000 population census indicates that there was a 2% increase in the number of people with a higher education compared to the population census of 1989, as well as a 2.2% increase in those with a specialized higher education (Latvian Central Statistical Bureau 2001). The proportion of 18-22 year olds in higher education grew from 15% to 26% between 1989 and 2000 which amounts to a total student increase of 50%. However, there has been a fall of 0.5% in the number of people with a completed general secondary education and one-quarter of

those that finish grade 9 leave with grades too low to continue at school or a vocational training school (Soros 2001, p.3).

But these figures do not tackle the quality of the education. There have been reforms in the curricula of both schools and university programmes, and new departments of sociology, business studies, political-science and communication have been opened in both state and private tertiary institutions (as there tends to be a great demand for these types of programmes). However, these changes are still taking some time to make an impact, especially because there have been no significant changes in the governance of education, despite the deep changes in the type of education offered. There is also a shortage of suitably trained and educated teachers. In terms of civics education of 8th grade students, Latvia ranked 26th from 28 countries, equivalent to Columbia (Soros 2001, p.3). International organizations have sponsored school programmes on civic awareness although the teaching of these types of courses may well take a generation to become internalized, as in many cases the teachers from the communist era, who themselves lack any depth of experience and expertise in these issues, are the ones teaching these classes.

At the elite level, politicians still debate exactly what civil society is. In August 2004 the President of Latvia (Vaira Vīķe Freiberga – a retired Canadian-Latvian university professor) expressed her concern about the protests organized by the Latvian branch of Transparency International (*Delna*), which opposed the appointment of the Latvian Parliamentary Speaker, Ingrīda Ūdre, to the European Commission as the Latvian Commissioner. Freiberga argued that NGO's choosing to comment on the political process in Latvia should register as political parties, with all the financial declarations and other controls that this process imposes (Arāja 2004). One observer on Latvian politics was prompted to compare Freiberga to the authoritarian Belarussian President Aleksandr Lukashenko (Kalniņš 2004). Thus the tone of the elite-civil society debate is confrontational, and this influences the attitudes and behaviour of both groups.

Indeed, the confrontation between state and civil society has been accelerating rather than softening over the last few years. As discussed above, Ainārs Šlesers (LPP), then Transport Minister, accused George Soros of attempting to organize a coup against the Latvian government, and then, in January 2006, proposed new legislation limiting the scope of operation for NGO's funded by foreign donors. This would have largely neutered civil society, particularly the primary anti-corruption vehicles *Providus* (a think-tank off-shoot from the Soros Foundation-Latvia) and *Delna*, who survive largely from foreign donations, particularly Soros. Thus Latvian civil society

partially reflects the dissidence movement in the Soviet Union in that it acts as opposition, rather than a partner, to the state.

Sten Berglund et al (2001, p.37), argued that ‘the East European model might compensate for the lack of NGO’s by mobilizing pre-democratic clientelistic networks to a much greater extent than is – and was – customary in the west.’ However, these closed networks are no substitute for an open and functioning civil society that gives parties and government a public legitimacy and helps to consolidate the democracy as a whole. Indeed, as the same authors argue, the very presence of a high level of corruption in Latvia points to ‘uncivil’ behaviour in the state (ibid, p.161). Moreover, civil society is weakened by an ongoing division between ethnic Latvians and ethnic Russians which has resulted in the construction of two separate political nations.

3.4 The ethnic dimension

Political equality is a key component of democracy, allowing people to shape the legal, political, social and economic space that they occupy. Citizenship is crucial at the most fundamental level of democracy as the question of who will be a citizen affects the constitutional framework and political community, as well as affecting conditions for social harmony and political development (Pettai 2001, p.264). Moreover, national unity is a prerequisite for democracy (Schumpeter 1947; Dahl 1998). Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996, p.33) went so far as to state that democratic consolidation is unlikely in a state where a large part of the existing population are denied citizenship on ethnic grounds.

The Latvian citizenship law adopted in 1994 is very different to that adopted during the first independence era. While the essential principle behind the initial 1919 law was one of *jus solis* where citizenship is based on the place of birth, the 1994 law was based on the principle of *jus sanguine* where nationality is acquired through descent from the parents. The 1919 ‘Law on Latvian citizens’ acknowledged all pre-1914 inhabitants of the geographic boundaries of Latvia as citizens, and by 1925 97% of the inhabitants of Latvia had registered as citizens. The overwhelming majority of the population was ethnically Latvian. However, during the Second World War and its immediate aftermath Latvia lost approximately one-third of its population through a combination of western emigration (approximately 200,000 people (Runcis 2000, p.62)), eastward deportation (approximately 150,000 (Clemens 1991, p.56)) and war casualties. In the following years the Soviet government organized a mass migration of citizens from other Soviet Republics (primarily Russia and Ukraine) in order to both rebuild the population levels (needed to

maintain and develop the relatively advanced level of industrialization in Latvia) and dilute the nationalism of the Latvian SSR.

Following the renewal of independence in 1991 there were two possible routes that Latvian policy-makers could follow: a zero option that would give all Latvian residents citizenship, or a more restrictive law based on ethnicity. Latvian policy-makers chose the latter path, and citizenship was granted to those individuals that were citizens before the Soviet occupation of 17th July 1940, and their direct descendants. Those people that moved to Latvia in the Soviet era (overwhelmingly Russian-speakers) were denied automatic citizenship. This position was based on a legal restorationist view of independence that Latvia 'had not seceded from the Soviet Union nor emerged as a successor country from [its] ruins, but had rather restored [its] legal statehood at the end of a fifty year illegal occupation and annexation by the Soviet Union' (Pettai 2001, p.258). Thus approximately 700,000 people (roughly one-third of the population) was initially left without citizenship, and thus excluded from direct democratic participation.²⁶ Only just over 50% of Latvia's Russian speaking inhabitants had Latvian citizenship by 2005.²⁷ This means that around 450,000 people, or one-fifth of the total population are non-citizens.²⁸

The citizenship issue dominated Latvian politics in the 1990s, and involved many different actors.²⁹ Aside from political parties represented in the parliament, international actors such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Russian government were all vocal in the initial debate, encouraging an inclusive

²⁶ This also meant that 40,000 ethnic Latvians that had lived in the Soviet Union during the first era of independence (primarily communists, communist sympathisers and their children) were denied citizenship while the many and deep-rooted ethnic Russians of the eastern Latgale region who generally had poor or non-existent Latvian language skills, were granted citizenship.

²⁷ The Latvian Naturalization Board (2005) recorded the following ethnic composition on 1st January 2005: Latvian 58.8% (1,350,000), Russian 28.7% (660,000), Byelorussian 3.8% (88,000), Polish 2.4% (56,000), Ukrainian 2.6% (59,000). The total population was 2.3 million. 338,000 Russian speakers had Latvian citizenship, while 301,000 did not.

²⁸ This compares with 9% in Germany, or the highest in Western Europe of 20% in Switzerland. However, the percentage of citizens is steadily increasing. In 2000, one-quarter of Latvia's inhabitants were non citizens (Nordregio Report 2000).

²⁹ An example of external influence can be seen through the case of the OSCE. The first official letter to a Latvian Foreign Minister came from the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel, on 6th April 1993, before the parliamentary elections of that year. In this letter the Commissioner expresses his recommendation for the "speedy adoption of a citizenship law", and urges a law that would allow the overwhelming majority of Russian-speakers to gain "the right to make their views known by participating in the election process". Over subsequent years, van der Stoel continued to strongly push this opinion in a succession of letters, speeches and visits to Latvia.

citizenship law (Sodergren 2000, p.294).³⁰ There was particularly strong international criticism of an idea floated by the nationalist *Latvijas nacionāli konservatīvā Partija* (Latvian National Independence Movement – LNNK) promoting a quota system that would significantly delay the naturalization process for the majority of non-citizens, but was rejected by the Latvian President.³¹ Rather, naturalization was maintained as a gradual process through the creation of age-group ‘windows’ (the youngest coming first). This effectively meant that many people from the older generation were barred from voting, taking up political office and excluded from participating in the political life of Latvia.

The rate of naturalization under this system proved to be very slow (table 3.5) and increased international pressure was placed on Latvia’s policy-makers. Subsequent amendments saw the abolition of age limits and the automatic granting of citizenship to children of non-citizens born in Latvia (if requested by the parents). These were put forward in a referendum on October 3rd 1998 (the same day as the parliamentary election), and approved by 53% of voters. As Table 3.5 indicates, over subsequent years there was a marked increase in the rate of naturalization, particularly in 2004, when non-citizens were motivated to take-up Latvian citizenship because of the perceived benefits of European Union citizenship after accession.

Table 3.5 – Rate of naturalization in Latvia. 1995-2004

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Nr.	984	3,016	2,993	4,439	12,427	14,900	10,637	9,844	10,049	16,064	19,169	85,352

Source: Latvian Naturalization Board 2006

Nevertheless, 20% of Latvia’s inhabitants remain non-citizens. A survey by the Latvian Naturalization Board (2000) provided reasons for this relatively low take-up rate. A poor level of Latvian language knowledge (59%) and lack of preparedness to tackle the history exam (54%) were the two major reasons, indicating insufficient information and funding for the naturalization programme.³² Moreover, the expense of taking the exam was mentioned by 47% of respondents.³³

³⁰ However, the international actors have not had a unified strategy in dealing with Latvia, although they have tended to share a common goal of encouraging democratic consolidation (Smith 2001). Indeed, Vello Pettai (2001) argued that international actors have been key in promoting democratic consolidation in Latvia and Estonia through their provision of both political and economic support for solving the citizenship issue in an acceptable, democratic way.

³¹ The quota system would have seen the naturalization of non-citizens through yearly “windows”, beginning with the youngest, and ending with the oldest.

³² Section 19 of the citizenship law (1994) requires the testing of fluency in Latvian for those being naturalized. Section 20 states that a person will be considered fluent if they:

Another 8% did not wish to serve in the Latvian armed forces (Latvia had compulsory conscription until 2006), while Latvian citizenship was also viewed as an impediment for travel to Russia (20%). 73% believed that there is 'no difference between citizens and non-citizens' and 26% stated that they did not consider it important to participate in elections. (ibid, pp.26 and 30)

This has severe consequences on the Latvian polity. A 'survey of newly naturalized citizens' carried out by the Baltic Institute of Social Sciences (2001) compared political attitudes between three social groups: recently naturalized citizens, citizens and non-citizens. New citizens tended to be more interested in politics than the other two groups, and were generally more satisfied with the development of democracy in Latvia. Moreover, they had greater trust in the parliament, cabinet of ministers, trade unions, political parties and NGO's than the other two groups. This indicates that those people who enter the Latvian political community with full citizens' rights become active political participants. This might well be because they are the wealthiest members of the non-citizens group and are thus less disillusioned by the economic developments of the last 10 years. But it could also be because they feel empowered in finally joining the political community.

There are several organizational links between non-citizens and government. Aside from the political parties representing their interests in parliament, a parliamentary committee for human rights and national affairs was first set up in 1990 in the Supreme Council, and has continued to function in all subsequent parliaments. The President's chancellery has links to non-citizens through a Consultative Council of Nationalities founded in August 1996. Finally, the Naturalization Board was founded in 1995 to deal with issues related to the naturalization process and act as a sounding board for policy initiatives relating to non-citizens as well as commissioning valuable research on issues in naturalization and integration concerning non-citizens and citizens alike, several of which have been utilized in this chapter. Since 2002 there has also been a State Minister for National Integration.

The integration of ethnic minorities is a key component of the consolidation process (Pridham 2005). Ethnic minorities need to be integrated into the state to allow them the same

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- i. completely understand information of a social and official nature;
 - ii. can freely talk about, converse and answer questions regarding topics of a social nature
 - iii. can fluently read and understand any instructions, directions and other text of a social nature;
 - iv. can write an essay on a topic of a social nature given by a commission.

³³ The fee for the naturalization process is 30 Lats, but there are also additional travel costs, as well as photocopying and photographing expenses. The financial burden does seem to be a genuine hindrance as the majority of naturalized citizens are relatively wealthy. (Baltic Data House 2001, p. 2)

opportunities that the titular nationality holds. However, a fine line has to be walked between integration and state interference in the private life of the minority. A national programme for the integration of Latvian society was first discussed in 1998.³⁴ The subsequently adopted programme assumed an assimilationist approach with the Latvian language as the primary tool of integration, which provoked controversy because Russian is spoken more widely than Latvian.³⁵ Again, this was in direct contrast to the more liberal minority policy of the independence period (Kārklīš 1994, p.168).

These policies have clearly had an impact on the Russian-speaking community in Latvia. A measure of the political community is the sense of belonging to Latvia. The Latvian Naturalization Board (2001) found that non-citizens felt a similar connection to their city (82%) than to the Latvian state (81%). The respective data for citizens was quite similar (88% and 80%). More significantly, when asked 'if there was a threat to the independence of Latvia, would you be ready to defend it?', 75% of citizens and 44% of non-citizens answered 'yes', while 7% of citizens and 21% of non-citizens answered 'no'. Thus while both Latvians and non-citizens feel a connection to Latvia, their depth of loyalty to the state is quite different.

Conclusions

Democracy in Latvia is consolidated at the procedural, but not the qualitative level. Latvian legislators have certainly put in place a basic democratic constitutional framework – a constitution protecting the equality and political freedom of all citizens, as well as adequate electoral mechanisms. A key role in the procedural, or constitutional, dimension of consolidation has been played by international institutions, particularly the European Union. The prospect of accession persuaded Latvia and the other post-communist 2004 accession states 'to adopt European Union laws and regulations, to open markets to EU goods and services, and to settle internal and external disputes peacefully (Zielonka 2004, p.23). However, on the negative side, this conditionality has led to a focus on the procedural, rather than qualitative, aspects of democracy. Thus the legal and institutional dimensions of democracy are in place, but the actors that inhabit the democratic space lack the spirit of democracy that brings these procedural aspects to life. Moreover, civil society and the state are in conflict. As a result, the important linkages that civil society brings to the

³⁴ Significantly, the initial study which created the framework document on integration was sponsored by the European Commission and the UNDP rather than direct funding from the Latvian budget.

³⁵ While only 5% of Russian non-citizens speak Latvian fluently, 52% of ethnic Latvian citizens speak fluent Russian and another 31% claim to speak it well. (The Naturalization Board of Latvia 2001, pp. 94-96)

relationship between the state and the public do not exist. The rule of law is weak, and corruption, whether real or perceived, is high, further alienating the public from the political elite.

This, in turn, has meant that democratic attitudes and behaviour have failed to take hold and, as result, democratic skills are weak. Moreover, the initial exclusion of one-third of the permanent population meant that the Latvian democracy was not founded on the central democratic ideal of equality, leading to a lack of national unity between the two ethnic and political nations resident in Latvia.³⁶ As chapter six indicates, this has contributed to a political culture where democracy is not the only legitimate systemic option. Chapter four will now turn to look at political parties in more detail, and consider the role they have played in consolidating Latvian democracy.

³⁶ Although, in contrast to the former Yugoslavia, the nature of the ethnic conflict in Latvia has remained non-violent, and largely at the political elite discourse level. This is largely because the Latvian nationalism that emerged in the 1980s was based on a cultural nationalism (folklore, traditional song and dance) that was passive in its nature (Ginkel 2002).

Chapter 4. Potemkin parties? Political parties in Latvia

'Politics is merely a business project for many of our political parties.' (Einārs Repše, Prime Minister of Latvia, 10th February 2004)¹

'Parliamentary deputies in Latvia are elected to lobby, not legislate'. (Boris Cilevičs, interview, 26th February 2002)

In March 2006 a Latvian public television current-affairs programme, *De Facto*, broadcast a series of leaked phone conversations between two major Latvian political figures – Andris Šķēle (Tautas Partija – TP) and Ainārs Šlesers (Latvijas Pirmā Partija – LPP) – and a political middleman, recorded following municipal elections in the spring of 2005 (Jesina and Plato 2005; Celms 2006).² They were caught discussing a 20,000 euro bribe to a municipal deputy of the wealthy beach resort of Jūrmala, just a few kilometers from Riga. This incident highlights two key characteristics of contemporary Latvian parties: endemic political corruption, and the prevalence of informal actors and opaque procedures (Šķēle held no public, or party, office at the time, and Šlesers was not chairman of his party). More importantly, the lack of public outcry reveals the extent to which parties are discredited in Latvia.

Chapter one pointed out that political parties are the central institutions of a democracy. They shape the nature of democracy through both the legislation that they craft, and the behaviour and attitudes that they bring to this task. Both these dimensions are largely shaped by the skills that parties, as institutions, and the individuals that inhabit them, possess. Thus, as Herbert Kitschelt (1999, p.64) noted, one single approach is not enough to analyze and explain the development and role of political parties in post-communist Europe. As a result, this chapter adopts three different, but complementary, theoretical approaches – institutional, organizational, and sociological.

This chapter draws extensively on primary sources, newspaper articles and interviews with political actors. This is partly from necessity. While parties in the Baltic States are often included in comparative party research (Berglund and Dellenbrant 1994, Berglund et al 2001, Lewis 2000), and there are sections on parties in general books on Latvian or Baltic politics (Lieven 1994,

¹ *'New Era considers coalition with the People's Party'*, www.tvnet.lv 10th February 2004, accessed 10th February 2004

² Šķēle is a three-time former prime minister. Šlesers was then the minister of transport, but previously a deputy prime minister and minister of finance.

Dreifelds 1996, Nissinen 1999, Aarebrot and Knudsen 2000, Pabriks and Purs 2001) there is a paucity of more detailed academic research.³

This chapter first details the eighteen political parties that have been elected to the Latvian parliament in the four post-communist elections held since 1991. It then applies the three theoretical approaches – institutional, organizational and sociological – to the study of political parties in Latvia. The conclusion considers the type of parties that have emerged, and their impact on democracy in Latvia.

4.1 Significant political parties in Latvia

Political parties reappeared in Latvia in the late 1980s in response to the gradual democratization of the Soviet Union, and then again in 1993, in the run-up to the first post-communist parliamentary elections. There were generally three organizational starting points: (i) the radical nationalist wing of the Latvian independence movement that was composed of the Citizen's Congress and the *Latvijas Nacionālās Neatkarības Kustība* (Latvian National Independence Movement – LNNK); (ii) the more moderate *Latvijas Tautas Fronte* (Latvian Popular Front – LTF), a broad umbrella grouping that included moderate ex-communists as well as moderate Latvian nationalists; and (iii) the reactionary pro-Soviet *Latvijas Komunistiskā Partija* (Latvian Communist Party – LKP) and *Interfront*. Indeed, the shape of the Latvian parliament after the 2002 parliamentary election still resembles this spectrum with parties grouped into Latvian nationalist, centrist and pro-Russian speaking fractions. This also reflects the central characteristic of the Latvian party system – the cleavage between ethnic Latvians and Russian-speakers. Indeed, all twelve government coalitions between 1993 and 2006 have been composed of Latvian parties. In addition to the salience of ethnicity, there are two main features of the Latvian party system: volatility and fragmentation.

The volatility of the Latvian party system is evident in tables 4.2 and 4.3. No party has been elected to all four parliaments (although three parties have won seats in every election when merged or fused parties are included). Indeed, Richard Rose and Neil Munro (2003) recorded a volatility index of 171 for Latvia, second only to Lithuania (178) among the post-communist states

³ With three notable exceptions: Pettai and Kreuzer 1999, Zake 2002, and Smith-Siversten 2004.

in Europe.⁴ They argued that this was largely due to supply-side changes in the number of parties (established parties disappearing and new parties forming), and unfavourably compared Latvia and Lithuania to Western European parties where politicians have focused on ‘adapting what they supply’ within the existing parties, rather than forming new parties (Rose and Munro 2003, p.85).

Table 4.1 – Number of effective parties in Latvia and Europe

	Number of effective electoral parties	Number of effective parliamentary parties	Seat share of two largest parties
Latvia	6.94	5.49	45.00%
East Central European mean	5.37	4.08	62.23%
West European mean	4.21	3.72	69.71%

Source: Birch 2001, pp. 359-360

Table 4.2 - Percentage of wasted votes in Latvian parliamentary elections

Election	1993	1995	1998	2002
% of wasted votes	10.7%	12.4%	11.9%	16.1%

Source: Latvian Central Election Commission 2004

Sarah Birch (2001) compared the party systems of twenty East-Central European, and twenty West European party systems. The data indicated that the effective number of both electoral and parliamentary parties in Latvia was significantly above both the East-Central European and West European mean average (see table 4.1). Moreover, the seat share of the two largest parties was also much smaller, complicating coalition formation and stability. In addition, voter volatility resulted in a high number of wasted votes (table 4.2).⁵ The following section will consider Latvian parties, and then Russian-speaking parties, in more detail.

⁴ Volatility is the ‘sum of the arithmetic change in each party’s share of the vote between a pair of elections, including parties that receive no votes because they do not contest an election’ (Rose and Munro 2003, p.82). The Estonian score was 100, and the East-Central European (including Russia) mean was 145.

⁵ Wasted votes are those cast for parties that fail to gain parliamentary representation. They are potentially unstabilizing for a democracy in that they can disillusion those voters that persistently support parties that fail to gain representation. The mean average for ‘wasted votes’ in west European democracies is 6% while by 1999 the average in post-communist elections was 17% (Dawisha 1999, p.267).

Table 4.3 – Parties elected to the Latvian Parliament. 1993-2002

Name of Party	1993		1995		1998		2002	
	Votes %	Seats	Votes %	Seats	Votes %	Seats	Votes %	Seats
Latvian-speaking parties								
Latvijas Ceļš (LC)	32.4	36	14.6	17	18.0	21	-	-
Latvijas Nacionālās Neatkarības Kustība (LNNK)	13.6	15	6.3 ⁶	8	14.6 ⁷	17	5.4	7
Tēvzemei un Brīvībai (TB)	5.4	6	11.9	14	-	-	-	-
Latvijas Zemnieku Savienība (LZS)	10.7	12	-	-	-	-	9.4 ⁸	12
Kristīgi Demokrātiskā Savienība (KDS)	5.0	6	6.3 ⁹	8	-	-	-	-
Demokrātiskā Centra Partija (DCP)	4.8	5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Latvijas Vienības Partija (LVP)	-	-	7.1	8	-	-	-	-
Demokrātiskā Partija Saimnieks (DPS)	-	-	15.2	18	-	-	-	-
Tautas Kustība Latvijai (Zīģerista Partija) (TKL)	-	-	14.9	16	-	-	-	-
Tautas Partija (TP)	-	-	-	-	21.2	24	16.6	20
Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskās Strādnieku Partija (LSDSP)	-	-	-	-	12.8	14	-	-
Jaunā Partija (JP)	-	-	-	-	7.3	8	-	-
Jaunais Laiks (JL)	-	-	-	-	-	-	23.9	26
Latvijas Pirmā Partija (LPP)	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.5	10
Russian-speaking parties								
Tautas Saskaņa partija (TSP)	12.0	13	5.6	6	14.1	16	-	-
Līdztiesība	5.8	7	-	-	-	-	19.0 ¹⁰	25
Latvijas Sociālistu Partija (LSP)	-	-	5.6	5	-	-	-	-

Source: Latvian Central Election Commission, 2004

Latvian speaking parties

(i) **Latvijas Ceļš** (Latvia's Way – LC) was formed in early 1993 by 100 former dissidents, liberal ex-communists, businessmen and émigré Latvians. It was centered around *Klubs 21* (Club 21), a secretive and informal organization that brought the Latvian political, cultural and economic elite together to debate the major issues of early transition. LC was a part of every Latvian government formed between 1993 and 2002. As such, it can be seen as the central party of Latvian politics, playing a crucial role in providing government stability at a time when a succession of other

⁶ In coalition with the *Zaļā Partija* (Green Party – ZP).

⁷ The two parties merged in June 1997.

⁸ In coalition with ZP

⁹ In coalition with *Latgales Demokrātiskā Partija* (Lattgalian Democratic Party)

¹⁰ The three electorally successful Russian-speaking parties campaigned under one unified coalition – *Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā* (For Human Rights in a United Latvia – PCTVL), although this coalition disbanded in 2003.

parties fragmented and collapsed. It won the 1993 election with 32.4% of the vote, collecting 36/100 seats, the highest total in Latvian history. This success was largely down to LC having a collection of high-profile popular political personalities and successfully portraying itself as the logical modern successor to the LTF. However, its failure to pass the 5% electoral barrier in the 2002 elections excluded it from national politics.¹¹

Ideologically, LC claimed to be a liberal party prioritizing foreign policy through integration with the European Union and NATO as the only way of safe-guarding Latvia's future security and economic development. Indeed, LC had a monopoly on the Foreign Ministry portfolio from 1993-2002. It was strongly pro-market and economic reform, but conservative on national issues, arguing that Latvian society must be based on Latvian national morals and ethics (Nissinen 1999). Chapter five is a case study of LC.

(ii) Latvijas Nacionālā Neatkarības Kustība (The Latvian National Independence Movement – LNNK) was founded by radical Latvian nationalists in May 1988. It competed in the 1990 Latvian Supreme Soviet elections, forming an alliance with the Latvian Popular Front in the legislature. In terms of policy, LNNK pushed for the expulsion of Russian-speakers from Latvia. It won seats in both the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections (finishing second in 1993). In 1997 LNNK merged with TB (see below) to shore up the declining radical nationalist vote. In terms of economic policy, LNNK supported the move to a market economy, privatization (although only after 1995 – initially the party was quite cautious about the speed of privatization).

(iii) Tēvzemei un Brīvībai (For Fatherland and Freedom – TB) was formed in 1992 by a radical nationalist splinter group from LNNK. Its origins can be found in the radically nationalist Citizens' Committees of the late 1980s and early 1990s. This was reflected in its uncompromising stance on the national issue in the 1993 parliamentary campaign where it focused on 'the three ds' – de-colonization, de-occupation, and de-bolshevism. Having won six seats in the 1993 parliament, TB cooperated with the other elected Latvian parties (LNNK, KDS, LZS), but initially not LC which it regarded as too liberal on the national issue (Dreifelds 1996).

TB's economic policy in 1993 was populist and left-of-centre, emphasizing the role of the state in the economy, defending Latvian farmers and protecting pensioners, large families and other losers in the transition process through rent control and other economic tools. It also supported the principle of pro-Latvian positive discrimination in terms of employment and other

¹¹ In the 2006 parliamentary election LC has formed a coalition with LPP.

policies. By 1995, however, it advocated lower taxes and the completion of the privatization programme (although this should only benefit Latvian citizens), and began to cooperate with parties based on their economic rather than ethnic programme (although Russian-speaking parties remained taboo).

After the merger, TB/LNNK was the only major party to campaign against the 1998 liberalization of the citizenship law in the 1998 referendum (Nissinen 1999). While its 2002 electoral programme still emphasized the importance of a 'Latvian Latvia', economic and social policy was given more space. Moreover, the nationalist rhetoric of TB/LNNK has been toned down it has become established as a party of government (it served in every government coalition from 1998-2004).

(iv) **Latvijas Zemnieku Savienība** (Latvian Farmers Union – LZS) is the successor to the inter-war party of the same name. It was re-established in July 1990. Indeed, the continuity with the inter-war era was made explicit when Guntis Ulmanis, the grand-nephew of the Latvian dictator, Kārlis Ulmanis, was elected party leader. In 1993 Ulmanis was elected Latvian President, providing a further continuity with inter-war Latvia. LZS came fourth in the 1993 election, winning twelve seats and going into a government coalition with LC from 1993-1994. In 1995 it formed an electoral coalition with the KDS and Lattgalian Democratic Party and again entered government after the election. During the term of the 1995 parliament the LZS faction absorbed a large number of deputies from the LVP after it fragmented and then collapsed. However, it polled just 2.5% of votes in 1998 and disappeared from parliament.

In terms of policy, LZS describes itself as centre-right. It has supported protectionist measures for the agricultural sector. Indeed, one of the causes of the collapse of its 1993-1994 coalition with LC was LZS' insistence that subsidies to farmers should be radically increased.

In the 2002 election LZS formed a coalition with the *Zaļā Partija* (Green Party – ZP. This coalition has the acronym *Z/ZS*). The Green movement in Latvia first emerged in the mid-1980s, as the first mass-organized dissident group in Latvia. It operated in relative freedom, because environmental issues did not directly challenge the communist system. ZP was formed on the bones of the Environmental Protection Committee (VAK) and LTF in 1990. ZP has used electoral alliances as a way of getting past the 5% threshold in parliamentary elections. In 1995 it shared a ticket with the LNNK, with half of the elected 8 deputies coming from the Greens. However in 1998, the electoral coalition that it formed with the *Kristīgi Demokrātiskā Savienība* (Christian

Democrat Union – KDS) and Darba Partija (Labour Party – DP) only received just over 2% of the vote and thus no mandates.

The Green-Farmers Coalition (Z/ZS) campaigned on vaguely euro-skeptic, green and pro-agriculture policies, promising to renegotiate the agricultural chapter of Latvia's negotiations with the European Union. It recruited several high-profile politicians from other parties (including the former LC Prime Minister Vilis Krištopāns (1998-1999) and Jaunā Partija (New Party – JP) former Economics Minister Ingrīda Ūdre), and received extensive financial support from the Ventspils transit lobby (Lapsa and Jančevska 2006). Indeed, it is popularly nicknamed the 'Green-Farmers-Oil' (*Zaļie-Zemnieki-naftinieki*) party. It was a member of all three government coalitions between 2002 and 2006.

(v) **Kristīgi Demokrātiskā Savienība** (Christian Democrat Union – KDS) was formed in the image of the West European Christian democratic parties that had been so successful after the Second World War. The party was relatively well funded in the early 1990s and its Christian identity found a niche in the Latvian political spectrum in the political and social chaos of the early 1990s. Strongly supported by the Lutheran Church in Latvia, the party followed the churches' anti-abortion rhetoric, and argued for Christian morals and thinking to assume a central place in public life. KDS merged with *Latvijas Pirmā Partija* (Latvia's First Party – LPP) prior to the 2002 parliamentary election. However, it soon broke away from LPP and in mid-2006 announced that it would form a coalition with the *Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskās Strādnieku Partija* (Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party – LSDSP) in the 2006 parliamentary election (Delfi 2006).

(vi) **Demokrātiskā Centra Partija** (Democratic Centre Party – DCP) emerged from the moderate wing of the LTF and claimed to be following the original, moderate electoral platform of the LTF. The choice of name was a deliberate attempt to build a connection with the successful party of the same name of the inter-war era. However, within a few months of its formation DCP split in two, and former Foreign Minister (1990-1992) Jānis Jurkāns broke away to found *Tautas Saskaņas Partija* (Harmony For Latvia – TSP), which explicitly supported the zero citizenship option rather than the more cautious and gradual approach to citizenship advocated by DCP. DCP entered the 1993 parliament with 5 seats, but by the end of the parliament in 1995 it had ceased to exist, and was absorbed into the new DPS (see below) formed in spring 1995.

(vii) **Demokrātiskā Partija 'Saimnieks'** (Democratic Party 'Master' – DPS) won the 1995 election with 18 seats on a platform of populism and economic protectionism, both of which had great popular appeal at a time of the greatest economic hardship in the transition to the market

economy. However, DPS described itself as centrist. While failing by one vote (in a split 50/50 vote) to have the proposed government coalition of its party leader, Ziedonis Čevērs, approved in 1995, the party still participated in two government coalitions. However, by the 1998 election DPS was riven with internal strife and devastated by defections to other parties, and failed to pass the 5% threshold.

(viii) Latvijas Vienības Partija (The Latvian Unity Party – LVP) was formed shortly before the 1995 parliamentary election, and went on to win eight seats. Its programme proposed increasing protection and state support for Latvian farmers (it was fiercely nationalist) and industry, coupled with a gradualist approach to economic reform. Alberts Kauls, leader of the party (a former economic adviser to Gorbachev) promised to run Latvia along the lines of his successful ‘Ādaži’ collective farm which had been held up as a model of modern farming in the 1980s. LVP was largely composed of ex-communists that harked back to the positive economic aspects of the Soviet era. However, by the 1998 election all eight deputies had defected to other parties and factions, and it polled just 0.46% of the vote.

(ix) Tautas Kustība Latvijai–Zīgerista Partija (Peoples Movement for Latvia–Siegerists Party – TKL) was named after Joahim Siegerist a right-wing populist German who mysteriously wangled Latvian citizenship in the administrative confusion of the early 1990s. Siegerist largely funded the election campaign of LNNK in the 1993 election and was rewarded with a seat (Dreifelds 1996). However, six months later he was forced to resign having become a frequent embarrassment to the party with his populist comments and (for a nationalist party) embarrassing inability to speak Latvian. A short time later he was also expelled from parliament for non-attendance.

Siegerist went on to form his own political party. An expensive populist advertising campaign (including the distribution of free bananas at political rallies), appealed directly to the traditional ‘losers’ of the transition – the elderly, rural dwellers, manual and state workers – by offering to imprison corrupt officials and businessmen as well as promising universal high levels of welfare. Economic policy was centered on a populist-protectionist renewal of Soviet era industrial concerns and Latvian agriculture through intensive state subsidies. TKL finished third in the 1995 election with 16 seats, but was excluded from government formation largely because the other Latvian parties loathed Siegerists. By the end of the parliamentary term, there were only six people remaining in the party fraction in the parliament and TKL polled just 1.73% of the vote in the 1998 election (Saeima 2005).

(x) **Tautas Partija** (People's Party – TP) was formed in May 1998, five months before the parliamentary election, by former Prime Minister Andris Šķēle. It instantly had a small parliamentary faction through defections from LC (2), KDS (2), and LNNK (1). It won the 1998 election with 24 seats and finished third in 2002 with 20 seats. On both occasions, immediately after the election the TP was excluded from the government coalition, largely due to the polarizing nature of Šķēle. Indeed, TP was only invited into the governing coalition in 2003 after Šķēle had resigned his seat in parliament and retired from front-line politics.

TP portrays itself as nationalist, conservative and firmly pro-business. It stresses family values (the party symbol is a family of two parents and three children) as well as the importance of maintaining Latvian culture through protectionist language and education policy. Its party slogan is 'we love this country!' Of the 24 deputies elected to the 1998 parliament, all 24 were ethnic Latvians. The same is true of the 20 elected in the 2002 elections. In many ways TP has copied the successful LC party model of combining expensive, slick advertising campaigns with a number of popular personalities, including the popular, ubiquitous musician Raimonds Pauls.

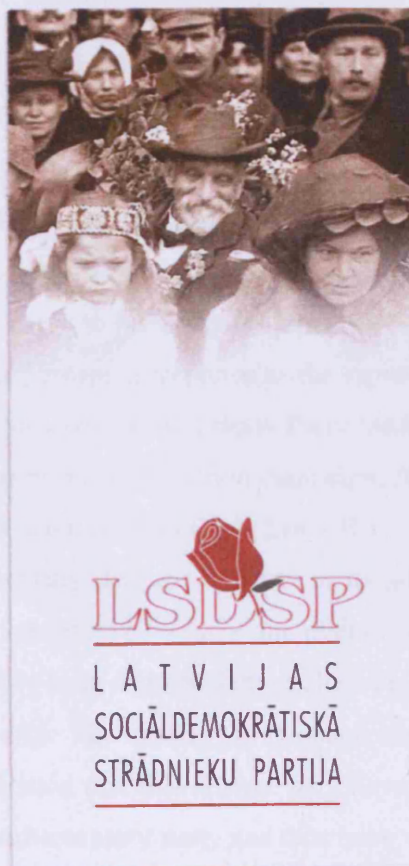
(xi) **Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskās Strādnieku Partija** (Latvian Social Democratic Workers' Party – LSDSP) has been through a number of incarnations since 1991. However, the former KGB General Juris Bojārs has remained the driving force behind the party. In early 1990 Bojārs broke from the moderate wing of the Latvian Communist Party to found the Independent Latvian Communist Party and then, in September 1990, the Democratic Labour Party, which later renamed itself the Latvian Social Democrat Union in 1995. In May 1999 it merged with other minor Social Democrat parties to form the LSDSP.

While LSDSP claims a direct link with the LSDSP that was founded in 1904 (see illustration 4.1, prominently featuring Jānis Rainis, the popular 1920s social-democratic writer and politician), this is based more on sharing a name than any real historical continuity. The leadership also makes much of its links with social democrat parties in Germany and the UK, claiming to be following in their moderate socialist tradition. Indeed, LSDSP's symbol is the now widely used single red rose. The party claims to be a traditional patriotic left-wing party, which means that it is nationalist in terms of ethnic policy. The party programme supports maintaining Latvian as the only official state language, and argues that ethnic Latvians must be positively discriminated against because Latvia is their only ethnic home (Nissinen 1999).

However, LSDSP failed to pass the 5% threshold in the 2002 election. This was for two major reasons. First, the perceived authoritarian nature of Juris Bojārs forced a number of the

parliamentary deputies of the LSDSP to break away and form a new parliamentary faction – the Social Democratic Union (SDS) – which resultantly fractured the left-wing vote in the election (SDS won 1.53% of the vote). Second, following some success in the 2001 local authority elections in Rīga, the LSDSP formed a ruling coalition in the Rīga legislature with the pro-Russian speaking PCTVL fraction, disillusioning the overwhelming majority of their ethnic Latvian supporters. Moreover, its tenure at the head of the coalition running the Rīga local authority between 2001 and 2005 was marked by corruption and scandal.

Illustration 4.1 – LSDSP campaign poster for 2002 parliamentary election



Source: Latvian Social Democratic Party 2002

(xii) **Jaunā Partija** (New Party – JP) was put together shortly before the 1998 parliamentary election and went on to win eight seats in the legislature. The businessmen (known as the ‘Norwegian group’) behind the party, led by Ainārs Šlesers (who had made his fortune opening the

Rimi chain of Norwegian supermarkets in Latvia) recruited the popular Latvian composer, Raimonds Pauls, as the party figurehead. One television advertisement featured two old ladies sitting in a small café discussing the popular music of Pauls and agreeing that this was an excellent reason for supporting JP. As this indicates, the party did not have a strong or distinct ideological message. Nevertheless, JP was in the first government coalition after the election. However, the party rapidly fractured, largely due to the lack of any central cohesion because of a small and ineffectual party organization, and a non-existent ideological glue. Indeed, only five of the eight elected deputies had chosen to form a party fraction, the other three preferring to remain independents. By the summer of 2002 most of the remaining members of the party transferred their loyalty to LPP (see below).

(xiii) **Latvijas Pirmā Partija** (Latvia's First Party – LPP) absorbed the small parliamentary rump of JP, along with KDS in Spring 2002. It was formed on the 25th of May 2002, just four months prior to the parliamentary election. Connected to the same 'Norwegian grouping' of businessmen as the JP, and featuring many of the same political personalities (most prominently Ainārs Šlesers), LPP introduced a religious rhetoric into its advertising, arguing for a spiritual as well as economic revival in Latvia. This decision to form a party around an established European political ideology (Christian democracy) was perhaps a response to the rapid fraying of JP in the previous parliament. The party was quickly nicknamed the Priests Party (*Mācītāju Partija*) in the Latvian press. After another high profile and expensive election campaign, JP won ten seats in parliament and immediately aligning itself with *Jaunais Laiks* (New Era – JL).

In February 2004, several months after the collapse of its alliance with JL, LPP radically changed its stance on ethnic policy, accepting five new members from the Russian-speaking TSP party (Delfi 2004). Having previously been a party with exclusively ethnic Latvian deputies, this changed the complexion of the party. The timing of this defection, coinciding with difficult coalition-building negotiations, indicated that this change may have occurred less for ideological reasons, than to give LPP a larger parliamentary party and thus have more influence in government formation.

(xiv) **Jaunais Laiks** (New Era – JL) was formed by Latvia's successful long serving Central Bank Governor, Einārs Repše, in the autumn of 2001. Repše claimed to be appalled by the stalling of economic and administrative reform, as well as high levels of state corruption. In a surprising move, Repše opened two bank accounts – one to raise cash for the new party, and the other to raise cash for himself. He claimed that this was needed in order to make it financially possible for him

to move from a job that paid an annual salary of 77,000 Lats a year, to another (prime minister) that paid a little over 8,000 Lats annually (Delfi 2001). Moreover, he claimed that this financial windfall would guarantee that he would be free from corruption. He did not get his requested 500,000 Lats but did raise 312,000 Lats for himself, and a similar amount for his party (Delfi 2002). This anti-corruption rhetoric struck a cord with the Latvian electorate, and JL won the 2002 election with 26 seats. Repše formed a four party coalition with himself as Prime Minister and his party holding half the cabinet appointments. However, this coalition collapsed a little over a year later, and JL has been in and out of government ever since. Moreover, Repše has been haunted by newspaper claims of financial impropriety for several years, undermining the party's claim of fighting corruption and cronyism.

Russian-speaking parties

(xv) **Tautas Saskaņas Partija** (Harmony for Latvia – TSP) broke-away from DCP in 1992. Its championing of universal election rights for all Latvia's citizens went against the rather more nationalist views of the DCP. TSP was established in March 1993 and went on to win 13 seats in the 1993 election. Originally known as 'Harmony for Latvia – Rebirth for the Economy', the party has been dominated by Jānis Jurkāns (an ethnic Pole). Jurkāns was Latvian foreign minister in the first years of independence, and claimed that this experience of traveling the globe and meeting foreign diplomats forced him to adopt an inclusive approach to the ethnic question (Jurkāns, interview, 5th March 2002).

TSP positioned itself as ideologically social-democratic, supporting the gradual development of a market economy with elements of state intervention as well as an extensive welfare state, and other typical social-democratic policies. However, the party stood out in foreign policy terms as being strongly anti-NATO (but pro-European Union, seeing the organization as a defender of human rights). As a result, TSP has never been part of a coalition government. In the 1998 election the TSP list combined with the two other major Russian-speaking parties – *Līdztiesība* (Equal Rights) and *Latvijas Sociālistu Partija* (the Latvian Socialist Party – LSP) – to form an electoral union, that then morphed into a parliamentary faction. This was repeated in the 2000 local elections and 2002 national elections. However, TSP disbanded in the summer of 2005 as founder Jānis Jurkāns resigned from the party following a mooted merger with a new party, *Jaunais Centrs* (New Centre – JC) (Delfi 2005c).

(xvi) **Līdztiesība** (Equal Rights) emerged from the pro-Moscow wing of the LKP and has been a keen defender of national Russian interests since its formation in 1993, particularly through its support for legalizing Russian as a second official state language. It won seven seats in the 1993 election, but did not contest the 1995 election. In 1998 it ran in a successful electoral union with TSP, and in 2002 in the *Par Cilvēku Tiesībām Vienotā Latvijā* (For Human Rights in a United Latvia – PCTVL) electoral union.

Līdztiesība has the lowest profile and loosest structure of the three Russian-speaking parties in the PCTVL electoral bloc. In mid-2006 it still had no web page or contact telephone number in the telephone directory. The founder and leader of the party is Tatjana Ždanoka, who is not allowed to run for national office due to her activity in the LKP in the last few months of the Soviet Union. However, she was elected to the European Parliament in the June 2004 elections.

(xvii) **Latvijas Sociālistu Partija** (The Latvian Socialist Party – LSP) is another direct descendent of the LKP, and is led by the former communist Rīga city mayor, and leader of the hardline faction of the LKP in the last years of Soviet rule, Alfreds Rubiks. Rubiks was imprisoned for treason in 1991, but released in 1997. Thus rather like Ždanoka, Rubiks cannot run for office in Latvia. LSP broke away from the *Līdztiesība* movement in 1994, arguing for a more explicitly socialist electoral programme, and particularly state support for the industrial sector and the reversal of the privatization process (*Līdztiesība* focused on Russian-speakers rights). Indeed, in an interview with a Latvian magazine in August 2005, Rubiks lamented the collapse of the Soviet Union, arguing that Latvia had never been occupied by the Soviet Union, and that communism, for all its faults, was still the most sophisticated political-economic system (Veidamane 2005). In 2006, LSP joined forces with other Russian-speaking parties in the newly formed *Saskaņas Centrs* (Harmony Centre – SC) party.

(xviii) **Par Cilvēku Tiesībām Vienotā Latvijā** (For Human Rights in a United Latvia – PCTVL) was an electoral union, and parliamentary fraction, of the three Russian-speaking parties discussed above. PCTVL garnered most support in the Russian-majority Latgale region where it won 36.8% of the 2002 vote (it fared weakly only in the Lattgalian town of Balvi, which has a large ethnic Latvian population). However, it did not do well in the predominantly ethnic Latvian regions of Latvia, polling 6% in Kurzeme, 8% in Vidzeme and 9% in Zemgale.

However, PCTVL fragmented into four parts in late 2003. Over a period of three months, LSP and *Līdztiesība* left the coalition, leaving only TSP which then dropped the PCTVL title. Then TSP collapsed, with most deputies forming the new SC fraction that represents the *Jaunais*

Centrs (New Centre – JC) party. A new political party, adopting the name PCTVL and made up of deputies from all three parties that were in the PCTVL coalition, also emerged, although in May 2006 it had just six deputies in its parliamentary fraction

These eighteen political parties and electoral unions have been the key political actors in shaping the Latvian party system and, in a broader sense, Latvian democracy. However, these parties have both shaped, and have themselves been shaped, by the institutional regulations that govern their activity.

4.2 The institutional approach: The rules of the game

Institutions structure and shape both parties and the party system. These institutions can be placed into three basic categories (Ware 1996, p.196): (i) constitutional rules and laws; (ii) the political institutions of state: and (iii) informal procedures.

Table 4.4 – Charismatic personalities in the 1998 and 2002 parliamentary election campaigns

	1998	2002
TP	Andris Šķēle ¹²	Andris Šķēle / Raimonds Pauls ¹³
TB/LNNK	Guntars Krasts ¹⁴	Guntars Krasts
JP	Raimonds Pauls	-
LSDSP	Juris Bojārs ¹⁵ / Egīls Baldzens ¹⁶	Juris Bojārs / Dainis Ivans ¹⁷
SDU	-	Egils Baldzens
LC	Vilis Kristopāns ¹⁸	Andris Bērziņš ¹⁹
JL	-	Einārs Repše ²⁰
Z/ZS	-	Ingrīda Udre ²¹
LPP	-	Eriks Jēkabsons ²²

Source: Political party campaign advertising and literature for 1998 and 2002 elections

¹² The founding chairman (until January 2003) and main sponsor of TP, and three times Latvian Prime Minister. The 1998 election adverts featuring Šķēle showed graphs indicating that GDP, and other economic indicators, had risen sharply under his prime-ministership. The party advertising slogan was the ‘Šķēle factor’ (*Šķēle faktors*).

¹³ Popular Latvian musician since the 1950s.

¹⁴ Prime minister from 1997-1998, TB/LNNK Prime Minister candidate in the 2002 election.

¹⁵ Driving force behind the Latvian social democratic movement since early the 1990s.

¹⁶ Trade union leader.

¹⁷ Popular leader of the People’s Front in the late 1980s / early 1990s.

¹⁸ Transport Minister from 1995-1998, Prime Minister from 1998-1999.

¹⁹ Latvia’s longest serving Prime Minister. From 2000-2002.

²⁰ Governor of the Bank of Latvia 1992-2001, and former Latvian Independence Movement activist in the 1980s.

²¹ Former Economics Minister, and Speaker of Parliament from 2002-2006..

²² Lutheran Minister, who spent over 10 years in the USA, returning in only 2002.

The basis of political activity in Latvia is the readopted 1922 constitution. Both the constitution and electoral mechanisms were discussed in chapter three. As a result, this section will focus on the laws and regulations that directly govern political parties: (i) election campaigning regulations (ii) the law on political party financing and (iii) the law on political parties.

A review of the newspaper, internet and television advertisements that Latvian political parties place during election campaigns indicates the personalization of Latvian politics. Of the six parties elected to the 1998 and 2002 parliaments, only the Russian-speaking TSP (1998) and PCTVL (2002) did not use personality politics in their advertising (table 4.4), and this may well be because they had far less money to spend than their Latvian counterparts. Latvia's most popular musician, Raimonds Pauls, is an extreme example of this personalization of politics. He has been elected to four different parliaments in three different parties (LC, JL, and TP), and featured heavily in the election advertising of all three parties. Parties tend to advertise individuals rather than policies.

The laws on political advertising are very liberal.²³ There are no limits on television, radio or newspaper advertising. Adverts can run right up to and including the day of the election. The only restriction is on political advertising appearing within 100 metres of a polling station on polling day. Modern political campaigning is increasingly expensive, with a myriad of old and new media available to political parties. Thus Latvian parties spend a lot of money on elections. They have also used many innovative techniques to attract voters to political gatherings. In 2002 Z/ZS organized beer festivals, while LSDSP hired television situation-comedy stars to tour the country, enabling politicians to actually attract an audience. However, the expense of campaigning inevitably leads political parties to turn to wealthy individuals and corporations to fund their activities. This in turn opens up an opportunity for wealthy individuals or corporations to capture the political process, as they demand a return on their financial investment.

There seems to be a positive correlation between the amount of money spent on campaigning and the number of seats won. In other words, the bigger spending parties win more seats. This was acknowledged by the outgoing LC prime-minister, Maris Gailis, following the 1995 parliamentary election when he commented that LC had been beaten 'not by political parties with programmes and a vision of intergration with Europe, but parties that don't even have

²³ In January 2006 Z/ZS proposed to introduce limits on media campaigning. However, as of May 2006, these laws had still not been passed by parliament (Baltic Times 2006).

programmes. Their adverts have been funded by money from dubious sources and have simply fooled voters. Particularly Kauls [VP] and Ziegerists [TKL]' (Diena 1995, p.1).

Accurate data on party campaign spending is only available from the 1998 parliamentary election onwards. Prior to this there were no effective laws regulating party income or spending. For example, in the run-up to the 1995 election, it was clear that DPS was spending the most money on its electoral campaigning, simply by the volume of adverts it had placed in the media. However, the party's central office was unable (or unwilling) to state exactly how much money it was spending, and a leading party functionary even stated that it was so much that he preferred not to know (Ločmele 1995b, p.3).

Table 4.5 – Party spending in elections 1998 - 2002

1998 Parliamentary Election	2000 Local Elections	2002 Parliamentary Election
1, 699,999 Lats	2,250,000 Lats	5,300,000 Lats

Source: Čigāne 2003, p.20

The most accurate data comes from the 2002 parliamentary election, when civil society organizations began to audit campaign spending. Party spending was very high, with parties declaring 5.3 million Lats, although an independent report argued that the real sum may be up to 1.5 million Lats higher (Čigāne 2003). Thus parties spent a total of at least 2.8 Lats per voter (rising to 3.9 Lats if the undeclared sum is included), compared to 1.7 Lats in the 2000 American presidential election and 0.4 Lats in the 2001 UK parliamentary election (two countries that also have no limits on party overall income and spending) (ibid.). TP spent over 1.2 million Lats, more than double that of any other party..

The source of much of the money is murky. A research project sponsored by the Soros Foundation-Latvia found that almost 500,000 Lats, or some 10% of all funds raised, came from untraceable sources (Čigāne 2003). Moreover, in 2004 the Latvian anti-corruption bureau reported that 65% of the donations made to parties by individuals in the run-up to the 2002 election were classified as 'dubious', because the individual donors did not have an income comensurate to their donation (Korupcijas novēršanas un apkarošanas birojs 2004).²⁴

²⁴ The Latvian anti-corruption bureau (KNAB) found that 100% of individual donations to PCTVL; 93% of ZZS; 64% of LPP; 56% of TP; 51% JL and 49% of TB/LNNK, were made by people who claimed that the money came from money earned more than three years previously – and the Latvian taxation authorities can only investigate individual tax-returns with a three-year backlog. Thus, the truth of these claims cannot be investigated (Korupcijas novēršanas un apkarošanas birojs 2004).

Tinkering with party financing laws could conceivably limit the demand or scope for spending. The Latvian political party financing law passed in 1995 allowed for annual individual and corporate donations of up to 25,000 Lats a year, but banned donations from foreign or anonymous sources. In the summer of 2002 the limit was slimmed down to 10,000 Lats. Parties can also earn money from private enterprise and membership fees, although these are not major sources of revenue. Rather, large individual and corporate donations have made up the bulk of party income.²⁵

There has been some debate on the introduction of public financing of parties, and limits on advertising, as has been the pattern elsewhere in East-Central Europe (Lewis 1996, 1998, 2000). However this proposal has not gained wide public support. Limits on advertising are strongly opposed by the media, the eager recipients of much of the campaign spending. They argue that any limits on advertising would be an infringement on free speech. However, unofficially and indirectly, state financing has already existed for quite some time. Governing coalitions appoint individuals to public positions on the boards of public utilities, state or semi-privatized companies where they receive generous salaries. These individuals then make large contributions to the parties that supported their appointment.

Some changes to the law on political party financing were made following the 2002 election, the expense of which had led to a backlash against political parties. Party spending is now limited at 20 santimes per voter. Also, parties cannot accept donations from corporations, and individuals donating money must be able to prove a legal source for the money. However, in the run-up to the 2005 local government elections, parties identified several loopholes in this law. For example, individual candidates were not affected by spending limits. As a result, candidates placed individual adverts for themselves in newspapers, or sent greeting cards to voters. For example, in December 2004 the TP candidate for Mayor, Andris Ārgalis, sent Christmas cards to every household in Rīga (Arāja 2005, p.5). Moreover, parties face only minor administrative fines for breaking these laws.

Thus the party financing model largely shapes both Latvian parties and the party system. It creates party dependency on corporate groupings, the only part of society that can provide the level of financing needed for parties to successfully compete in both local and parliamentary elections (even if the donations now come through individuals rather than businesses). As the then

²⁵ A big donation was defined as over 600 Lats a year for individual donations and 3,000 Lats a year for corporate donations.

TP Economics minister (and prime minister from 2005-2006) said: ‘politics is an expensive business in Latvia’ (Kalvītis, interview, 11th March 2002). Indeed, almost all the Latvian politicians that I interviewed stressed the negative impact of the linkages between parties and corporations that this party financing model has created. Dzintars Rasnačs (TB/LNKK) was typical in pointing out that ‘the party financing model means parties rely on corporate sponsors and individual *éminence grises*, which leads to parties serving the interests of their sponsors, not society as a whole’ (Rasnačs, interview, 11th March 2002). Einārs Repše (JL) went further, arguing that ‘power does not lie in the hands of popularly elected politicians, but in their corrupt links with *éminence grises*’ (Repše, interview, 4th April 2002).²⁶ Vaira Paegle (TP) was even blunter: ‘decisions and laws are not passed in the interests of society, but in the interests of the economic elite’ (Paegle, interview, 26th February 2002).

There are few institutional barriers to forming new parties and entering the system. The law on political parties requires only 200 signatories to form a political party. However, sometimes new parties have problems gathering just a few hundred members. In 2005 a new party, *Jaunie Demokrāti* (New Democrats), only recruited 200 signatories at its second attempt at a founding congress. Moreover, newspapers reported that a large proportion of the 200 founding signatories were students from the maritime academy who spent most of the time loudly and excitedly discussing the evening entertainment being laid on for them by the party. The implication was that the students were only there to make up the needed numbers (Delfi 2005a).

The two primary political institutions inhabited by parties are the parliament and the presidency. The Latvian parliament provides administrative support to deputies in fractions. They receive office space, secretarial support, chauffeured cars and other benefits not available to individual deputies. Moreover, parliamentary fractions also dominate the committees that are a key part of the parliament, in particular the chair and vice-chairmanships of these committees. In the event that a deputy breaks away from the party in which they were elected, they still retain their seat in parliament.

The Latvian president is elected by an absolute majority of the Latvian parliament (51+ votes). However, the fractured character of the parliament means that both of Latvia’s post-

²⁶ The term *éminence grises* was often used by Latvian politicians in interviews. The tradition interpretation of an *éminence grises* is of a backroom operator, exercising power or influence without holding an unofficial position. However, in Latvia the *éminence grises* simultaneously occupy public office and control business interests. Nevertheless, I use this term because it is the standard terminology used in Latvia.

communist presidents have been compromise candidates. Guntis Ulmanis (1993-1999), the first post-communist president, was elected in an act steeped in symbolism, expressing the continuity of the pre-1940 Latvian state (he was the grand-nephew of the Latvian dictator Kārlis Ulmanis, and, with his crew-cut hair, bore an uncanny similarity to his great-uncle). The next elected president, Vaira Vīķe Freiberga (1999-), was a non-party compromise. This approach actually undermines political parties because it means that the highest political position in the land is outside party competition.

The primary informal process is patronage. This ranges from explicitly political positions such as parliamentary secretaries (who are the link between parliament, the relevant parliament committee and the ministry), to managing different government agencies dealing with privatization or development, or appointing state authorized representatives to the boards of state and semi-privatized companies.

The latter has been extremely controversial. Following the 2002 parliamentary election, JL presented a series of proposals to remove these patronage positions, with the state secretary (the leading civil servant in each ministry) being appointed the state authorized representative to each relevant company e.g. the state secretary for transport was appointed to the board of the national railway and major Latvian ports and so on. However, not only were these positions well paid (from 300–2,000 Lats a month) there was also great potential for politicizing these companies and institutions.²⁷ JLs attempts at reform were defeated in parliament.

In addition, parties holding political office have the opportunity to utilize the resources of the office in election campaigning. A 2005 report by the Latvian branch of Transparency International (*Delna*) found that the LSDSP Mayor of Rīga, Gundars Bojārs, had utilized approximately 1.5 million Lats of local authority financing in advertising the achievements of his administration in the run-up to the 2005 local government election (*Delna* 2005).

Thus the laws governing parties are not conducive to the consolidation of parties or the party system. They are especially weak in developing party discipline, democratic attitudes and behaviour. The following section will consider the impact of these laws on party organizational structure.

²⁷ For example, the LSDSP mayor of Rīga (2001-2005) signed a four year contract to a member of the board of the Rīga Port Authority shortly before the 2005 local election, at an estimated annual salary of 50,000 Lats (Kļavis 2005). Another example is Latvian national television (LTV) which has had five different directors in the last ten years. The director is appointed by the National Radio and Television Council (NRTVP) which is composed of political appointments.

4.3 The organizational approach: Do strong leaders make weak parties?

The organizational structure of political parties influences both their public accountability and transparency, and thus directly affects public trust in their efficacy as key actors in the democratic system. As discussed in chapter two, the three main elements of party organization are: (i) the party on the ground; (ii) the party in public office; and (iii) the party in central office (King 1969).

The party on the ground

Table 4.6 – National levels of party membership in Europe

Country	Year	Total Party membership	As percentage of electorate (M/E)
Austria	1999	1,031,052	17.66
Finland	1998	400,615	9.65
Norway	1997	242,022	7.31
Greece	1998	600,000	6.77
Belgium	1999	480,804	6.55
Switzerland	1997	293,000	6.38
Sweden	1998	365,588	5.54
Denmark	1998	205,382	5.14
Slovakia	2000	165,277	4.11
Italy	1998	1,974,040	4.05
Portugal	2000	346,504	3.99
Czech Republic	1999	319,800	3.94
Spain	2000	1,131,250	3.42
Ireland	1998	86,000	3.14
Germany	1999	1,780,173	2.93
Netherlands	2000	294,469	2.51
Hungary	1999	173,600	2.15
United Kingdom	1998	840,000	1.92
France	1999	615,219	1.57
Poland	2000	326,500	1.15
Latvia	2003	15,000	0.9²⁸
Mean (excluding Latvia)			4.99

Source: Mair and van Biezen 2001, p.9

Parties in Western Europe have problems keeping up with the number of party members, and this is even more problematic in post-communist Europe where party organizations tend to be much looser (Lewis 2000). Indeed, party membership in East-Central Europe has been largely

²⁸ This figures coincides with Hermann Smith-Siversten's (2004, p.231) independently gathered information on membership of significant parties in Latvia for 2000.

neglected by the leaders, partly due to a perception that ‘the practice of liberal democracy... operate(s) at national level and within the narrow confines of the political elite’, and partly because party members are of less significance in terms of both party financing and campaigning activities (Lewis 2000, p.104). Indeed, there is little correlation between party membership and electoral success. The winner of the 2002 election (JL) had the smallest number of registered members, while the second largest membership party (LSDSP) failed to pass the 5% threshold for getting into parliament. Indeed, parties may well wish to make it difficult for new members to join in order to remain small and avoid ‘alien takeovers’ (Smith-Silivertsen 2004, p.239).

Table 4.7 – Latvian party membership in 1998 and 2003/2004

	1998 ²⁹	2003-2004 ³⁰
LSDSP	2,076	2,700 ³¹
SDS	-	543 ³²
TP	1,816	1,800 ³³
TB/LNNK	1,703	2,200
LC	890	1,415 ³⁴
JP	400	-
PCTVL	800	375 ³⁵
JL	-	400
LPP	-	1,350
Z/ZS	-	352 /1,200

Based on the party membership data gathered from Latvian parties, there were approximately 15,000 party members in Latvia in 2002. In the 2002 election there were 1,398,156 eligible voters in Latvia (Latvian Central Election Commission 2005). In addition there were approximately 400,000 non-citizens over the age of 18 in Latvia and thus eligible to join political parties (Latvian Naturalization Board 2005). Thus 15,000 party members from a potential pool of 1,800,000 amounts to just 0.9% of the eligible population. This places Latvia firmly at the bottom

²⁹ Bottolfs 2000, p. 95.

³⁰ Phone calls to party offices by author on 14th March 2003, excepting the People’s Party, who provided statistics by email on March 17th 2003.

³¹ The Latvian Social democratic Workers’ Party did not pass the 5% threshold in the 2002 election.

³² The Social Democratic Union did not pass the 5% threshold in the 2002 election.

³³ By 29th November 2003 this had fallen to 1,501 (Egle 2003).

³⁴ Latvia’s Way did not pass the 5% threshold in the 2002 election.

³⁵ Lidztiesiba have 375. TSP and LSP were unable to provide answers to the question.

of party membership levels in Europe (table 4.6).³⁶ Indeed, the real figure may actually be much lower because parties are likely to exaggerate membership data (Szczerbinski 2001, p.171). In any case, both politicians and parties as organizations seem largely unaware of the size of their membership. One TP deputy in the Latvian parliament said ‘we have 3,000 members, although this is still laughably small’ (Ābiķis, interview, 6th March 2002). However, at the same time the party central office reported a membership of just 1,800.

There are two indicators of party openness to new members: the membership fee (which can act as a very real deterrent in a comparatively low-income country such as Latvia), and the number of administrative obstacles that applicants need to overcome. Table 4.8 reveals that the parties which charge membership fees have differentiated rates allowing poorer members to pay less or even be waived from paying fees. Indeed, TB/LNNK party statutes specifically call for members who are deputies or government ministers to pay higher membership fees than the rank and file, and this is also an accepted informal practice in LC and TP. Interestingly, two of the newest parties in parliament, JL and LPP charged no membership dues at all. As Hermann Smith-Silivertsen (2004) argued, membership dues in Latvia are low (and flexible) enough to not act as a deterrent to membership. However, most parties require those applying for membership to produce either two or three letters of reference from existing members. For example, not only does JL require that all potential new members have references from two existing members (no easy achievement when 2003 membership was just 400), but the candidate must then also face an interview panel that seeks to ensure that they are ideologically suitable for JL membership (Egle 2004c, p.5).³⁷ This is a practice that could restrict membership to a relatively narrow circle of friends and acquaintances. In addition, all parties require that new members have to be approved by the party board rather than a local branch, granting the upper echelons of party veto over all potential members.

Most parties also have their own newspapers and youth organizations. The newspaper functions as a basic source of information for party members (although they tend to be distributed during election campaigns when they function as a source of party advertising). Youth

³⁶ Although the table does not feature the other two Baltic States of Lithuania and Estonia, as no comparable statistics are available.

³⁷ In 2004 an enterprising young Latvian journalist attempted to join the five Latvian parties that appeared to be the easiest to join (JL, LC, ZZS, LSP, LPP). However, after five months of interviews, rallies and meetings she had only succeeded in joining two – LC and ZZS (Anonymous, 2004).

organizations act as sources of future elite recruitment as well as cheap, enthusiastic campaigning labour.

Table 4.8 – Obstacles to party membership, party publications and youth groups (2003)

	Monthly membership fee	References? (number)	Newspaper	Youth organization
LSDSP	0.10Ls – 4% of income	Yes (2)	Yes	Yes
SDS	0.10 – 4.50 Lats	Yes (2)	Yes	Yes
TP	1 – 5 Lats	No	Yes	Yes
TB/LNNK	0.50 – no top limit ³⁸	Yes (2)	Yes	Yes
LC	1-5 Lats (minimum)	Yes (3)	Yes	Yes
PCTVL (TSP/LSP/Līdztiesība)	-/- / 03-1% of minimum wage	-/- / No	Yes (coalition) -/- / No	-/- / No
JL	0	Yes (2)	Yes	Yes
LPP	0	No	Yes	Yes
Z/ZS	5 Lats / 0.20 - 1 Lat	Yes (2) / No	Yes / No	Yes / No

Source: Internet home pages and phone calls to parties on 14th March 2003

Local party organizations or branches indicate the extent to which parties are national, rather than regional, actors. All Latvian political parties claim to have branches across the country. Indeed, typically one of the first tasks undertaken by new political parties is the establishment of a branch system. Thus in the first 12 months of their existence, both LPP and JL (both formed in 2002) set about opening branches across Latvia. In its first year JL opened eight, while LPP opened twenty-five branches. This disparity can be explained by a difference in approach to local branches. While JL opened a local office in tandem with a branch, LPP merely required twenty-five people in a locality to form a local branch. Table 4.9 shows the number of local branches of major parties in Latvia, as well as the number of people needed to form a branch (as laid out in the party statutes). It reveals that all the major Latvian parties have made efforts to establish branch systems across Latvia. However, the data does not show the extent to which parties operate vertical links of information that allow information from rank-and-file members to flow up, as

³⁸ The party general secretary informed the author that ministers and parliamentary deputies are expected to pay more than other party members. May 14th 2003.

well as information from party leaders to flow down. In other words, it is not clear what role these regional organizations play, aside from giving parties a more professional, and national, appearance. Moreover, parties do not have recruitment drives, and details on how to join are sketchy and difficult to locate even on their web-sites. Attracting new members is clearly not a priority.

Table 4.9 – Local branches of political parties in Latvia

	Nr. of Branches	Minimum nr. of members needed to open branch
LSDSP	34	None
SDS	23	3
TP	25	None
TB/LNNK	50	5
LC	23 / 12 ³⁹	25
PCTVL (TSP/LSP/Līdztiesība)	1 / 6	1 / 3
JL	8	None
LPP	25	25
Z/ZS	40 /	3 / 7

Source: internet home pages and phone calls to parties accessed on 14th March 2003

An extreme example is presented by the regional party *Latvijai un Ventspilij* (For Latvia and Ventspils – LuV). It has monopolized office in Ventspils since the first post-soviet local elections in 1997 (although the mayor himself, Aivars Lembergs, has held this office since the final years of the Soviet regime).⁴⁰ However, the party has no paid staff or office. Indeed, when I contacted the Ventspils local legislature to enquire about the party, I was directed to contact the Mayors office directly. In this sense, the party and the local authority have fused.

Finally, no Latvian party has explicit links with any trade union or organized interests. While there has been some contact and mutual support between parties and some non-governmental organizations, this has tended to be on an ad-hoc basis. The locus of party power is the public office.

³⁹ The party also lists 12 local groups, which have less than the 25 members required to open a branch.

⁴⁰ Aivars Lembergs is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

The party in public office

The state provides benefits to parties that have won seats in parliament. The above section on the institutional basis of parties argued that this takes the form of patronage, parliamentary staff and administrative resources, and the possibility to regulate party activity through the state.

Thus, in addition to their salaries, parliamentary deputies receive administrative resources and paid staff. Indeed, as mentioned previously, some parties require their deputies to pay a part of their salary back to the party.⁴¹ In addition, every five deputies in a parliamentary fraction receive one employee as well as administrative support (Saeima 2004). Moreover, each deputy receives financial support for up to two assistants. Coupled with administrative support through office space, stationary, telephones and so on, parties winning seats in parliament have an advantage over those failing to pass the 5% threshold. Indeed, during its twelve years of existence, the Russian-speaking TSP never had a party central office. Rather, the party organization was based in the parliament, utilizing parliamentary resources.

Moreover, parliamentary parties regulate party activity through law-making. For example, financial disclosure laws for parties are still very weak with minor fines for infractions. Moreover, deputies have immunity from prosecution. Finally, the parliamentary party is well represented in the decision-making and executive bodies of Latvian parties. For example, the party chairman is typically a deputy or Minister. Thus public office is often combined with the central office.

The party in central office

In 2002, all the major parties in Latvia (barring the three parties that made up the PCTVL coalition), had a central office employing at least one-full time member of staff. The central office managed fund-raising, campaigning and the general financial affairs of the party. While, in absolute numbers, parties employed relatively few people in their central organizations (ranging from 0 in PCTVL, to 6 in JL), the figures are actually quite high when compared with trends in Western Europe where an average of 6.3 professionals per 10,000 members was recorded in the late 1980s (Krouwel 1999, p.91). Table 4.10 shows that it varies from 8 to 187.5 per 10,000 in Latvia. Of course, these numbers are inflated by the relatively small size of the membership. However, a small membership would need a correspondingly small organization. Rather, the

⁴¹ One newspaper even reported that deputy candidates from DPS were placed on the list of candidates according to how much money they had donated the party (Locmele 1995b, p.3). This would imply that these candidates saw potential and direct financial benefits to winning a seat in parliament.

central office is professionally organized because of the importance of fund-raising and financial management in the Latvian party model. The degree of party professionalization is also indicated by the growing tendency to hire outside public-relations and advertising companies to deal with the communications side of party campaigning.

Table 4.10 – Number of professionals in central office and use of external professionals and agencies in 2002 election campaign

	Professionals	Ratio of Professionals for every 10,000 Members ⁴²	Professionals / Agencies (Amount paid in Lats)
LSDSP	5 (+29 local branch employees)	18.5	Yes (35,352.41)
SDS	4	74	Yes (23,383)
TP	9	50	Yes (172,946.58)
TB/LNNK	4 (+ 5 regional 'coordinators')	18	Yes (459,091.77)
LC	5	35	Yes (102,987.26)
PCTVL	0 / 0 / 0	0	Yes (99,993.86) ⁴³ No / No / No
JL	6	187.5	Yes (97,378.60)
LPP	3	22	Yes (18,163)
Z/ZS	0 / 1	0 / 8	Yes (403,386.65) ⁴⁴ No / No

Source: www.pretkorupcija.lv 2003⁴⁵

Naturally, fund-raising assumes a central importance when there is little money being raised from membership fees, and there are no direct subsidies from the state. Moreover, modern political campaigning is expensive, being fought on several different fronts (press, radio, TV, internet, public advertising as well as more traditional canvassing), calling for ever increasing resources. Civil society organizations in Latvia are generally weak and lack financial resources.

⁴² The ration of professionals to 10,000 members is used as this is the standard measure. However, there are no parties in Latvia with over 10,000 members.

⁴³ The parties in PCTVL campaigned both collectively and individually.

⁴⁴ Z/ZS campaigned collectively as a Union, rather than individually.

⁴⁵ The web-site containing the financial declarations of political parties.

Thus corporate interests, and the wealthy individuals associated with these interests, are the main source of income for Latvian political parties.

The section outlining the institutional arrangements of the party system in Latvia mentioned the large amounts of money raised by parties for the 2002 election campaign. But what are the sources of the money and how was it spent? Details on party financing tend to be opaque in all post-communist countries, and increasingly in West European and other democracies that allow for the private financing of political parties (Lewis 2000, p.107). This is also the case in Latvia, where requirements for detailed financial accounting were only introduced in 2002. Thus there are no comparable figures for earlier years in Latvia. However, the financial declarations for 2002 reveal the extent to which Latvian parties relied on corporate and individual donations. Table 4.11 reveals that only TP had a substantial part of its income from sources other than donations, although this is primarily from a 300,000 lat loan made to the party from a source later revealed to be the party founder, Andris Skēle. While these figures do reflect the expense of a parliamentary election year, they nevertheless reveal how parties are financed.

Table 4.11 – Sources of party income in 2002 (Lats)⁴⁶

	LSDSP	SDS	TP	TB/LNNK	LC	PCTVL	JL	LPP	Z/ZS
Membership	2.9	3.9	7.8	3	0.9	-	-	-	⁴⁷
Donations	97	96.1	74.9	97	98.9	99.4	99.9	99.9	
Other	0.1	-	17.3	-	0.2	0.6	0.1	0.1	
Total Income	503,855	162,936	2,098,002	550,104	798,493	272,786	508,623	539,741	513,818

Source: Pretkorupcija 2003

The Soros Foundation-Latvia together with the Latvian branch of Transparency International (*Delna*) funded a project analyzing party financing in the run-up and aftermath of the 2002 election (Čigāne 2003). The project monitored party political adverts in newspapers, radio and television, and made estimates of the expenses of the parties based on the cost of taking out these advertisements. The project found that there were huge discrepancies between what the parties declared to have spent, and what they were estimated to have spent (table 4.12).

⁴⁶ Party income by subject line is expressed as a percentage of the total income.

⁴⁷ Z/ZS provided an incomplete declaration of their financial activity in the 2002 financial year, providing details of only expenditure, not of different income streams.

Table 4.12 – Difference between declared and estimated media expenditure in 2002 parliamentary campaign (Lats)

	Declared	Estimated	Difference
TP	625,424.00	1,102,026.50	43%
LPP	441,897.00	570,069.90	22.5%
Z/ZS	22,039.24	300,734.00	92.7%
PCTVL	101,155.67	164,348.64	38.5%
LC	426,432.00	433,133.00	2%
TB/LNNK	12,782.19	206,991.18	93.9%
LSDSP	63,722.89	382,820.50	84%
SDS	78,291.00	58,792.80	-33%
JL	151,101.57	95,424.00	-37%

Source: Čigāne 2003

There are three possible explanations for this discrepancy. First, parties negotiate either free advertising or special rates in partisan media outlets. As one TB/LNNK parliamentary deputy pointed out, ‘the media are not independent, but under the influence of the different political groupings’ (Jurdzs, interview, 19th March 2002). Second, parties have large streams of undeclared income for illicitly funding advertisements. Third, it may be an accounting trick. The election law allows parties to use advertising agencies as intermediaries in purchasing advertising space. The agencies are not obliged to identify how much of their fee was spent on advertising. In any case, there is a clear lack of transparency in the reporting of spending that the law on political parties requires from political parties.

The income side of party financing is equally opaque. An investigation into the sources of party financing prior to the 2002 parliamentary election analyzed donations of over 2,000 Lats (Soros Foundation Latvia and Delna 2002). This is a large sum in Latvia, where per-capita GDP in 2001 (adjusted for price purchasing parity) was just 4,000 Lats (Ministry of Economics 2002). Thus the authors of the report assumed that an individual contributing over 2,000 Lats would be involved in some form of commercial activity, and thus listed in the Latvian company register, *Lursoft*. Of course, the individual could also be independently wealthy, or a highly paid employee of a company not listed on the database. But this was likely to be the exception, not the norm. Nevertheless, the report found that 54 individuals who had contributed a total of over 350,000 Lats to political parties did not appear on the register. Moreover, another 182,000 Lats was donated by 26 companies that were ‘red-listed’ in the *Lursoft* database as having financial problems, not having handed in an annual report or some other irregularity. It seems unlikely that these troubled

companies would have had significant resources to donate to political parties. Thus over 10% of all donations to political parties were deemed dubious.

Table 4.13 – Dubious donations to political parties (Lats)⁴⁸

	Individuals	Corporate	Total
TP	132,500 (19)	63,800 (11)	196,300
LPP	8,000 (1)	-	8,000
Z/ZS	80,800 (10)	71,100 (8)	151,900
PCTVL	31,200 (6)	6,000 (1)	37,200
LC	24,315 (7)	24,648 (4)	48,963
TB/LNNK	-	10,000 (1)	10,000
LSDSP	38,800 (5)	-	38,800
SDS	37,031 (5)	6,000 (1)	43,031
JL	-	-	-

Source: Čigāne 2003

Thus the primary function of the party central office is fundraising, although it also plays a role in organizing the annual party conferences and disseminating information (although the flow is largely top-down, rather than bottom-up). However, the discussion thus far has focused on the formal organizational and institutional aspects of party. The following sections will consider why these organizations are formed. In other words, what inspires individuals to join, financially support, or vote for these political organizations: policies or personalities?

Policies or personalities?

Political parties in Latvia have relatively short lives. Of the six parties or electoral unions that won seats in the 2002 election, only TB/LNNK had an uninterrupted history of more than five years, while JL and LPP, winning 36 of the 100 seats, had both been formed less than twelve months before the election. This was not a unique pattern, but rather a continuation of the 1993, 1995, and 1998 parliamentary elections, all of which were won by new parties.

As table 4.4 indicated, charismatic personalities play a key role in attracting voters to new political parties. These personalities tend to be both leaders of the party in central office (chairmen), and hold a major government or parliamentary post if their party is in parliament and the governing coalition. For example, in the government formed after the 2002 election the chair

⁴⁸ Amount of money and number of donors (in brackets)

of JL, Einārs Repše, became prime minister while the chair of Z/ZS, Ingrīda Ūdre, became the parliamentary speaker. Ainārs Šlesers, chair of LPP, became deputy prime minister.

The extent of party fragmentation also points towards the important role of personalities in Latvian politics. A great number of parties occupy the same ideological space, separated only by feuds between their political leaders. The split between LSDSP and SDS, and, the bitter rivalry between JL and TP provide two illustrative examples.

There were two charismatic personalities in LSDSP in 1998: Juris Bojārs (the party chairman) and Egīls Baldzens (vice-chairman and head of the parliamentary fraction). Tension between the two culminated in a vote on the party chairmanship at the party's 2002 congress. Bojārs won the vote and Baldzens promptly announced his intention to form a new social-democratic party – SDS – which was formed on 24th March 2002. Both parties campaigned on a similar platform in the 2002 election (they both even shared the red rose symbol), and split the social-democratic vote below the 5% threshold, so neither party won seats in parliament.

In the same vein a personal conflict lies at the heart of the division between TP and JL. Both parties claim to be centre-right, business friendly, and Latvian nationalist (both supported the transition to all Latvian language teaching in Russian-speaking schools by the 2004-2005 academic year), as well as supporters of EU and NATO accession. Both parties were also formed on the personal initiative of prominent Latvian personalities. Andris Šķēle (TP) is one of Latvia's wealthiest businessmen, having owned large parts of the privatized Latvian food processing industry (although the early source of his wealth is somewhat murky). Einārs Repše (JL) is the former long-serving Governor of the Bank of Latvia (the first post-communist Latvian ruble bank notes were affectionately known as *Repsīši*). In terms of policy, the two parties are natural partners, and occupy the same ideological space. However, a mutual dislike between the two leaders dates back to 1995 when Andris Šķēle was first appointed as a non-party, independent prime minister, and threatened to fire Einārs Repše as Governor of the Bank of Latvia for mismanaging the Latvian banking crisis of 1995. This led to the exclusion of TP from the government coalition formed after the 2002 election. Indeed, Šķēle's party had also been excluded from the first post-1998 election government coalition led by Vilis Krištopāns (LC), again for personal reasons. In both cases TP was a natural ideological partner, and would also have eased the process of coalition building with its large number of seats (24 in 1998 and 20 in 2002). However, personal animosity prevented this happening.


This focus on personalities has a negative impact on party institutionalization. Angelo Pannebianco (1998) argued that the presence of a 'charismatic leader' during the formation of a political party is potentially negative in terms of the ability of that party to institutionalize. A strong leader will resist institutionalization because it would weaken that leader's position in that party. This certainly appears to have been the case for a number of Latvian political parties. For example, TKL, the populist winners of the 1995 election, collapsed after its leader Joachim Siegerist lost credibility following a series of financial scandals. The two other leading charismatic personalities in 1995, Alberts Kauls (LVP) and Ziedonis Čevers (DPS), also saw their parties implode by the following election in 1998. In 2003 Andris Šķēle resigned as a parliamentary deputy, partly because his popularity rating was so low that it was felt to be overshadowing the party that he had created.

Illustration 4.2 – Personality 'Photoduel'


✂

Fotoportretu duelis nr.6 Kas iekļūs Saeimā?

➤ **Atzīmē** vienu, abus vai nevienu kandidātu!



Jānis Jurkāns
Saskana



Georgs Andrejevs
Latvijas ceļš

Vārds, uzvārds _____
 Adrese _____

➤ **Izgriez** konkursa lapu!
 ➤ **Izsūti** to jau šodien vai rīt!
 ➤ **Mūsu adrese:** Saeimas Totalizators, *Diena*,
 Pils ielā 12, PDP, LV-1963.

Source: Diena 1993

These rapid falls from grace can be explained in a number of ways. First, newspapers and the media tend to focus on charismatic politicians (which is understandable, given that parties focus so much on these individual politicians), and gleefully report any negative news. Second, these politicians inevitably fail to live up to the dramatic promises made to the electorate. Thus, when the promised economic or social changes are felt by the general public, they lose faith in those they once saw as their saviours. In the run-up to both the 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections, the *Diena* newspaper ran a 'photo-portrait' duel. This entailed publishing photographs of leading personalities from two different parties every day, and encouraging voters to write in with their preferences (illustration 4.2).

The model of party organization that has emerged from this chapter can be described as 'thick and thin': 'Thick' in terms of income, but 'thin' in terms of membership. 'Thick' bank accounts are used to bank-roll election campaigns that focus on charismatic personalities rather than coherent policies or programmes, and relieves the party of the need for a large, active membership. Do political parties represent the interests of different sections of society? Indeed, can salient cleavages be found in Latvian society after half a century of Soviet social 'flattening'?

4.4 The sociological approach: One country, two nations.

The formation of social cleavages in Western Europe was the result of a long historical process (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). The history of Latvia, and the East-Central European region in general, is rather different to that of Western Europe, particularly in terms of economic development and democratic experience. Nevertheless, in the inter-war era Latvian society had clear social cleavages, and parties that represented them. The socio-economic cleavage was represented by social democratic and the pro-business civic parties. The rural-urban cleavage was structured by LZS and other smallholder parties, and the urban-based civic parties led by DC. There was also an ethnic Latvians-minorities cleavage. However, Soviet occupation brought the collectivization of agriculture, secularization of society, rapid industrialization and significant changes in Latvia's ethnic composition. While this created significant social groups, they were flattened by similar salaries, housing and social benefits.

Nevertheless, scholars have argued that two primary cleavages have emerged in post-independence Latvia: Socio-economic (focusing 'around the pace and extent of market reforms') and ethnic/nationalist (Pettai and Kreuzer 1999, p.166). Some scholars have even argued that

Latvia has moved to a primary socio-economic cleavage because globalization and the integration of Latvia into the international political, economic and commercial world accelerated the creation of a new middle class that has superseded the ethnic issue (Bottolfs 2000; Zaķe 2002). However, both authors underestimate the central role that ethnicity still plays in party campaigning. For example Ieva Zaķe argued that TP is neutral on the ethnic issue. However, TP adopts an unwavering stance on the supremacy of the Latvian language and culture (Cichock 2002). Indeed, in the run-up to the 2002 election, TP organized a major music composition contest with the theme 'we love this country!'. Moreover, TP constantly emphasized that it would not, under any circumstances, go into a government coalition with the Russian-speaking PCTVL (as, indeed, did all the Latvian parties elected to the parliament). Thus, the socio-economic cleavage is perhaps better understood as a sub-cleavage of the ethnic cleavage (Vogts 2003, p.91).

Nevertheless, this assertion needs to be considered in more depth. This section studies six cleavage and issue dimensions drawn from the work of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and Ronald Inglehart (1977).⁴⁹ The ethnic, socio-economic, state-church, and urban-rural cleavages.⁵⁰ I also consider foreign policy, due to the priority attached by successive Latvian governments to EU and NATO membership, and the salience of post-material green and gender issues.

There are three aspects of a salient cleavage. First, it must reflect a major division in society. Second, people must be able to identify with this group. Third, it must find organizational expression through either a political party or an organized and influential interest group (Gallagher et al 1992). This third element has been disputed (Rae and Taylor 1970). However, Bartolini and Mair (1990), Mair (1997), and Rommele (1999) have all convincingly countered that a cleavage has no salience if it is not organized and thus cannot be expressed. The thesis will now consider the salience of six cleavage dimensions in Latvia.

(i) Ethnic dimension: Latvia has never been a homogenous state. However, its current ethnic composition is very different to that of the inter-war period, largely as a result of the influx of a

⁴⁹ Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) first, centre-periphery, cleavage has been discarded as this is relevant to an early stage of nation-building when peripheral areas resist the centralizing, nation-building tendencies of the centre. While this was of relevance in the early years of the Latvian state when the Lattgalian region of Latvia initially resisted incorporation, this is no longer of relevance.

⁵⁰ The ethnic cleavage has replaced the regime-support cleavage that was of great significance in the Gorbachov era of the late 1980s. The regime support was largely made up of Communist party officials who either believed that the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachov would lead to a rise in living standards, or the more hard-line group that was actually opposed to any reforms and eventually supported the leaders of the Moscow coup in August 1991. The reformers came from a number of different camps, but were initially broadly united under the umbrella movement of the LTF until disagreements on tactics (a rapid versus gradual separation from the Soviet Union) formed a wedge between the moderate LTF and the more radical nationalist LNNK and the Citizens Congress.

large number of Russian-speakers during the fifty years of Soviet rule (table 4.14). Nevertheless, there were significant minorities in the inter-war era, and a large number of political parties to defend their interests. Thus each of the four inter-war parliaments featured parties defending the ethnic interests of Russians, Poles, Jews and Baltic-Germans.

The Second World War and Soviet occupation drastically altered the demography of Latvia. Most Baltic-Germans left for Germany in the early years of the war, while most Latvian Jews died in the holocaust. Also, many ethnic Latvians died, were deported to Russia or fled to the west. In total, Latvia had lost around one-third of its population by the end of the war. The ten years following the war saw the influx of over half a million Russian-speaking people into Latvia (Plakans 1995, p.153-154). Russian-speakers largely moved to towns and other industrialized areas (Russian speakers form a majority in the seven largest Latvian towns) while Latvians dominated rural areas. The 1989 census revealed that ethnic Latvians were close to becoming a minority. However, the proportion of ethnic Latvians in the population has risen since 1989, reaching 58.3% by 2002.

Table 4.14 – Ethnic composition of Latvia: 1881-2002

Year	Latvian	German	Russian	Jewish	Other⁵¹
1881	77.0	11.3	4.0	5.5	2.2
1920	68.3	6.2	12.0	7.4	6.1
1935	75.5	3.1	10.5	4.7	7.2
1959	62.0	0.1	26.6	1.8	9.5
1989	52.0	-	33.9	0.6	13.5
2002	58.3	-	29.1	0.4	12.2

Sources: Plakans 1995, p.158, and Latvian Naturalization Board 2002

By 1991 it was clear that the ethnic issue would be a key cleavage. Two aspects assumed particular importance: citizenship and language rights. Between 1991 and 1994 post-war immigrants to Latvia were left in a state of flux, having no defined citizenship rights, because the Supreme Council had ruled that the citizenship issue would be dealt with by a parliament elected by the Latvian constitution, rather than a Soviet-era legislature. The law on citizenship was eventually passed in 1994. It denied around one-quarter of the population (approximately 600,000 people) citizenship while granting automatic citizenship to ethnic Latvians descended from pre-

⁵¹ In 2002, the largest other ethnic groups in Latvia were Belarussian (4.0%), Ukrainian (2.6%), Polish (2.5%), and Lithuanian (1.4%) (Naturalization Board of Latvia, 2002)

1941 citizens, no matter where they live or what their language skills. Moreover, 'windows' for applying to citizenship were created according to age and length of residence in Latvia, in addition to language and history examinations. These rules were only loosened in 1998, following a national referendum. This legislation led to the exclusion of minorities in the labour market, particularly the public sector (Aasland 2000, Pabriks 2002).⁵²

Language policy was equally controversial. The 1992 language law made Latvian the official state language. Amendments over the following year saw all street names, railway timetables and other public sources of information converted to Latvian. Moreover, Latvian was made the official teaching language of state funded universities from the second year of studies onward. Later changes to the education law saw Russian demoted to the status of just another foreign language in Latvian-speaking schools. A switch to Latvian as the primary language of instruction in minority schools was introduced in the 2004-2005 school year. As a result, ethnicity has both political and cultural dimensions.

Russian-speakers are a large but not entirely cohesive grouping, composed of not just Russians, but also Ukrainians, Byelorussians and other Russian speaking groups. Moreover, there are Russian speakers who have lived in Latvia for many generations and automatically qualified for citizenship, although most are post-war immigrants. Indeed, Mark Jubulis (2001) argued that the salient cleavage in Latvia is not Russian-speakers vs. Latvians, but rather the 75% of the Latvian population that consists of Latvians and integrated Russians who are citizens and speak Latvian, versus the 25% that is not integrated. Nevertheless, this combination of political and cultural factors has led to the development of a cohesive group identity, and Russian-speaking parties have been elected to every parliament since 1993.

Latvians also have a clear group identity, based on a shared language, culture, and historical experience. Following independence from the Soviet Union, this is also reflected in Latvian's socio-economic status: citizens generally have higher salaries than non-citizens, and are both more interested and more active in politics (FAFO 2000a; FAFO 2000b).

The division between Latvians and Russian-speakers is reflected in the Russian and Latvian language media. Table 4.15 indicates that voters for Latvian parties overwhelmingly watch the four Latvian TV stations (which broadcast in Latvian) while PCTVL voters watch the three Russian stations broadcast from the Russian federation.

⁵² For example, only 4% of Foreign Ministry employees are ethnic Russians (Pabriks 2002).

Table 4.15 – Most watched Russian or Latvian TV stations (%)

	LSDSP	TP	LC	TB	PCTVL	JL	LPP	Z/ZS
Latvian ⁵³ (01/02)	81 / 71	87 / 95	85 / 96	93 / 94	30 / 26	- / 89	- / 91	- / 93
Russian ⁵⁴ (01/02)	16 / 22	8 / 1	10 / 2	5 / 0	63 / 61	- / 5	- / 7	- / 6

Source: Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2001 and 2002

There are also distinctive voting patterns. Polling evidence from a survey of citizens made by the Baltic Social Sciences Institute (2001,2002) before and after the 2002 parliamentary election revealed that over 90% of people intending to vote for the five ‘Latvian’ parties that were elected to the parliament were ethnic Latvians. Meanwhile, over 80% of PCTVL supporters were non-Latvians. This is also reflected in regional voting patterns. PCTVL polled first in the majority Russian-speaking capital city Rīga (although, due to slow naturalization, only 26% of Rīga’s voters are Russian speakers), and the heavily Russian-speaker populated Latgale region that borders Russia.

Thus the ethnic cleavage is salient. It does reflect a major divide in society, it has two clear constituencies, and does find organizational expression.

(ii) **The socio-economic dimension** has been dominant in the post-war West European democracies. As a result, the development of this cleavage can be seen as an indicator of both economic development and party system institutionalization. However, the 2002 parliamentary election saw LSDSP fail to pass the 5% threshold, and thus the presence of no social democratic parties in the Latvian parliament. Indeed, one major reason for LSDSPs electoral failure – LSDSP had formed a coalition with the Russian-speaking PCTVL in the Rīga local authority, and thus lost the support of its Latvian base – gives more support to the idea of ethnicity as the only salient cleavage in Latvia.

However, the socio-economic dimension was central to inter-war Latvia. In this era LSDSP won the largest number of seats in all four parliamentary elections, although it only played a role in two of the thirteen governments of that era. The left was strongly represented in all four parliaments (table 4.16).

⁵³ The four Latvian-speaking channels are: Latvian TV 1; Latvian TV 2; TV3; Latvian Independent Television (LNT).

⁵⁴ The three Russian channels broadcast to Latvia are: ORT; Russian State Television; and NTV.

Table 4.16 – Ideologically left-of-centre party seats in Latvian inter-war parliaments (/100)

Party	1922 Election	1925 Election	1928 Election	1931 Election
Social Democrats	30	32	26	20
Other Socialists	8	5	10	8

Source: Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.18

The Soviet era attempted to do away with socio-economic differences. Nevertheless, they continued to exist in Soviet Latvia. The most obvious difference was between the general public and the party nomenclature. There were also striking contrasts between different branches of the economy with, for example, workers in heavy industry favoured over those in agriculture or light industry. This was largely in non-monetary terms such as housing, schooling, and health care.

Table 4.17 – Economy and welfare: with which statement do you agree? 2001/2002 (%)

	JL	PCTVL	TP	LPP	ZZS	TB	LC	LSDSP
The state sector in the economy should be small (01/02)	-/25	14/24	23/23	-/15	-/18	24/24	27/31	18/16
The state should have a major role in the economy (01/02)	-/75	86/76	77/77	-/85	-/82	76/76	73/69	82/82
Every individual has to care for their own welfare (01/02)	-/39	25/48	39/44	-/32	-/39	36/40	42/55	31/35
The state should care for people's welfare (01/02)	-/61	75/52	61/56	-/68	-/61	64/60	58/45	69/65

Source: Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2001 and 2002

Thus the Latvia that emerged in 1991 already contained a partially differentiated population. The collapse in output that followed the break from the Soviet Union as well as the rapid privatization process led to further differentiation between winners and losers of the transition. Indeed, many residents perceived the economic benefits of the transition as having been unfairly distributed. In a 1999 survey, 75.4% of the urban and rural adult population believed that income differences in Latvia should be 'much smaller' (Aasland 2000b, p.168). This also translates into political beliefs. Table 4.17 shows that respondents to a poll conducted in 2001 and 2002 held left-of-centre opinions. However, it is revealing that supporters of centre-right parties

such as TP, JL and LPP had similar opinions to voters for LSDSP. This indicates that these socio-economic opinions are not the most important in choosing which party to support. Moreover, left political ideology is associated with the former regime and policies of zero-option citizenship and an eastward-looking foreign policy. This perception was reaffirmed by the PCTVL – LSDSP coalition that governed the Rīga local authority between 2001 and 2005, as Rīga adopted a pro-Russia foreign-policy that starkly contrasted with the consistently western orientation of post-independence government policy.

Thus while there is potential for a left-right socio-economic cleavage to emerge, the socio-economic differences caused by the transition are yet to transform into structured cleavages. Indeed, the Latvian public has difficulty differentiating between left and right political values. When asked to evaluate a series of statements and place them into a ‘left’ or a ‘right’ category, 55% of respondents were unable to provide an answer in 1992, and a similar number again in 1997 (Baltic Data House 1998, p.68).

(iii) Religious Dimension: Inter-war Latvia had a large church-going population and a number of successful religious parties (table 4.18). However, the state atheism of the Soviet period (e.g. the central Rīga *Dom* church was turned into a secular concert hall) changed this demographic. Thus, while 85% of 1935 Latvian inhabitants were Lutheran, by 2001 this had shrunk to 58% (including those identifying themselves as catholic). 13% of the 2001 poll identified themselves as Orthodox, while 23% were atheist (Plakans 1995, p.125; Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2001).

Following independence in 1991, religious organizations were freed from all restrictions, and churches regained property lost in the Soviet era. Churches have also been the recipients of consistently high levels of public trust, while other institutions, particularly political, have floundered.⁵⁵ However, church attendance has remained low, and the number of church organizations remains significantly smaller than in the inter-war period (Dreifelds 1996, p.101). In 1993, the Christian-democratic KDS won six seats in parliament, and eight seats in 1995. In 1998 it competed in a joint list with ZP and the *Darba Partija* (Labour Party) but polled just over 2% of the vote. By the 2002 election KDS was incorporated into the LPP. Thus religious parties have had some electoral success. Moreover, polling data indicates that there is widespread support in society for a growing church role in schooling or the state (table 4.19). However, although LPP portrayed

⁵⁵ In February 2002, 73.4% of the general population wholly or partly trusted the Church (Latvijas Fakti 2002, p.94).

itself as an ideologically Christian-democratic party, its supporters have similar religious attitudes Z/ZS or PCTVL supporters.

Table 4.18 – Number of religious parties in Latvian parliaments in the inter-war era⁵⁶

Election year	1922	1925	1928	1931
Number of Religious Fractions (Total)	7 ⁵⁷ /20	6 ⁵⁸ /27	7 ⁵⁹ /25	6 ⁶⁰ /21
Number of Deputies (from 100)	17	12	16	21

Source: Šilde 1976, pp.710-717

Table 4.19 – The Church: with which statement do you agree? (2001/2002) %

	JL	PCTVL	TP	LPP	ZZS	TB	LC	LSDSP
The Church protects moral values and should be involved in Church education / Church is important for morality and should have a larger role in the state (01/02)	-/48	50/61	46/42	-/62	-/59	63/47	45/43	50/54
Faith is personal and should be separate from schools / Churches are private organizations and should have a smaller role in the state (01/02)	-/52	50/39	54/58	-/38	-/41	37/53	55/57	50/46

Source: Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2001 and 2002

Thus there is a basis for the religious dimension to consolidate in Latvian politics. However it has not yet done so largely because while many people claim Christian beliefs, few are active in attending church. Thus they do not make up a significant, clearly identifiable group.

⁵⁶ A fraction is religious if the name of a church or denomination appeared in its name. Fractions at this time were highly fluid. Thus I have listed the total amount of deputies in religious fractions during the three year span of a parliament. However, this does not mean that the deputies spent the entire 3 years in one and the same fraction. Also, I have defined a religious fraction as being one that contains the name of a religious faith or denomination in its title.

⁵⁷ Latgallian Christian Farmers Union – 6; National Christian Union – 4; Jewish Union – 2; United Jewish National Bloc – 2; Zemgallian Catholic List – 1; Jewish Bund – 1; Ceire Cion - 1.

⁵⁸ Catholic and Farmer Party – 4; National Christian Union – 2; Polish Catholic Union – 2; Orthodox Voter and United Russian Organization Bloc – 2; Zionist Organization 'Mizrachi' – 1; Ceire Cion - 1.

⁵⁹ Christian Farmers and Catholics Fraction – 6; United Old Believers Fraction – 2; Zionist Organization 'Mizrachi' - 2; Orthodox and Old Believer Voters and United Russian Organization Fraction – 2; Polish Catholic Union – 2; Christian Workers Union – 1; United Latvian Zionist Socialist Party 'Ceire Cion' - 1

⁶⁰ Christian Farmers and Catholics Fraction – 8; Christian Labour Bloc – 6; Russian Old Believers Workers Fraction – 2; Latvia's Polish-Catholic Fraction – 2; Orthodox and Old Believer Voters and United Russian Organization Fraction – 2; Zionist Organization 'Mizrachi' – 1.

Moreover, while there are political parties claiming to be explicitly Christian-democratic, other Latvian (and Russian) parties encroach this religious dimension. For example, JL made its deputy candidates take an oath in the *Dome* church before the 2002 election. And this lack of a secular challenge to the church undermines its salience as a cleavage.

(iv) The urban-rural dimension was one of the two key cleavages in inter-war Latvia, which was still a largely agricultural country in the 1920s (there were 275,698 smallholdings in a population of around 2 million people in 1935 (Plakans 1995, p.126)). Indeed, the dominant political party of the inter-war era was the agrarian LZS.

However, the Soviet era saw the intensive industrialization and urbanization of Latvia. While urban dwellers formed just 32.8% of the total population of Latvia in 1925 this had risen to 70.8% of the population by 1989 (Plakans 1995, p.108). And at the end of the twentieth century, less than 20% of the Latvian population was employed in agriculture, which made up just 10% of GDP (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.108). Furthermore, the smallholdings of the countryside had been collectivized and converted to *koklhoz* or *sovkhos* by the Soviets. While these have been largely disbanded (although some were privatized and formed into limited companies), living conditions in the countryside continue to be quite poor. In 1993, 42% of farms still had no electricity and 85% no phone (ibid., p.107). Relative income poverty in rural areas was almost twice as common as in urban areas (17% versus 9%) and hourly wages were on average 18% lower (Aasland 2000a, p.6 and 18). Geographic isolation from the cities and the established traditions of the countryside, mean that rural dwellers also have a clear identity. Indeed, only 2% of people living in the countryside have moved there in the last 10 years, so the population is quite well entrenched (ibid, p.23). Moreover, it is overwhelmingly ethnic Latvian.

Despite the dwindling economic relevance of agriculture, the early 1990s saw large government subsidies for the agricultural sector. This stood in stark contrast to industry, which received virtually no subsidies. While the Russian-speaking parties claimed that this was down to ethnic discrimination, because the majority of farmers were Latvian, while most industrial workers were Russian-speakers, it was largely due to policy constraints imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and other international financial institutions which were overseeing the rapid liberalization of the Latvian economy. Agricultural support mechanisms have been restructured in recent years as accession to the European Union has meant integration with the financial instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which has radically increased the amount of funding available to Latvian farmers.

This has further led to an increasing number of organizations representing the interests of the farming community. The Agricultural Organization Cooperation Council brings together the government (represented by the Ministry of Agriculture), with 42 different agricultural producer organizations and farming unions.⁶¹ There is even a Latvian farmer's representation in Brussels.⁶²

In contrast, industrial interests in Latvia are weakly organized for two main reasons. First, the industrial sector is dominated by Russian-speakers who are less active in both civil society and politics. Second, most Soviet era industrial concerns were closed during the 1990s economic transformation, and the Latvian economy has largely shifted over to the service sector, thus shrinking both the size, and influence, of the industrial sector.

Farming interests were well represented in the early parliaments of the post-communist era. LZS won 12 seats in the 1993 election (although the other agrarian party – 'Conservatives and Farmers' – polled just 0.25% of the vote), although this halved in the 1998 election, after it formed an electoral coalition with the KDS and a regional Lattgalian party. LZS then slumped to less than 2.5% of the vote in 1998, before returning to parliament in 2002 with 12 seats, albeit in a coalition with the Green party.

Indeed, in contrast to the industrial sector, there seems to be a firm constituency for agrarian interests outside of just rural dwellers. A 2001 poll revealed that supporters of all the main parties believe that the Latvian countryside deserves a special status (table 4.20). Moreover, many Latvian residents have a close affinity for the countryside, having only recently moved to urban areas.⁶³ This, together with a clear rural identity, strong interest group organization, and a dedicated agrarian party keeps the rural part of the rural-urban cleavage partly salient. However, it has been partly submerged into the ethnic dimension as the overwhelming majority of farmers are ethnic Latvian, while industrial workers are largely Russian-speakers. Thus all Latvian parties have pro-rural policies, while Russian-speaking parties are more pro-industrial and pro-urban.

⁶¹ See their web site: <http://www.losp.lv>

⁶² Albeit partly financed by the Swedish Union of Farmers.

⁶³ Most ethnic Latvian families in Rīga also have summer houses in the countryside. Moreover, all Latvian towns and cities empty of their ethnic Latvian inhabitants at the end of June when Latvians celebrate the midsummer festival, *Jāņi*.

Table 4.20 – Rural policy: with which statement do you agree? (percentage)

	JL	PCTVL	TP	LPP	LZS	TB	LC	LSDSP
The Latvian countryside should be given a special status at the expense of cities	-	79	82	-	85	83	84	84
The countryside is a normal part of Latvia and should be treated equally	-	21	18	-	15	17	16	16

Source: Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2001 and 2002

(v) **Foreign Policy** is important to Latvia, a country that has hovered between east and west for many centuries. The inter-war Latvian state adopted a policy of neutrality. Latvia did not develop effective security arrangements or pacts with its neighbours, but placed its trust in the League of Nations to structure regional security. However, the ultimate failure of these foreign policy arrangements resulted in post-communist Latvia adopting a more assertive and focused foreign policy. Thus all post-1991 Latvian governments have placed membership of NATO and the European Union as the central aim of foreign policy. By 2004, Latvia had joined both. However, this process had not been without controversy.

The Russian-speaking parties in parliament consistently opposed NATO membership. While initially opposing European Union membership, they eventually grew more favourable, arguing that the rights of the Russian speaking population would be better protected in the European Union. In contrast, Latvian parties have been firm supporters of NATO membership as a counterweight to the threat of Russian influence, but more guarded towards the EU. Essentially, nationalist arguments against EU membership boiled down to fears about joining another ‘union’ having only recently escaped one, concerns about the potential loss of sovereignty and, particularly, the lat currency, which has deep symbolism as an expression of an independent Latvia. However, these fears were expressed by individual politicians, as party programmes have adopted more pro-EU stances.

Thus the foreign policy dimension has also taken on an ethnic characteristic. The referendum on EU accession saw a convincing yes vote of 67%. However, less than 20% of ethnic-Russian voters voted in favour of accession (Eglājs 2003).

(vi) **Post-material Dimension:** There are two major aspects to the post-material dimension: gender and the environment. These issues only developed salience in Western Europe and North America from the 1960s onwards, thus there is no relevant background from the inter-war period.

However, gender was an issue particularly addressed by the communist regime, which declared equality of the sexes as one of the achievements of communism. But ‘what the Soviet system referred to as “equality” was actually a leveling of all differences (and choices) regarding gender roles, forcing women and men to do the same work outside of the home’ (UNDP 1998, p.9).

The harsh economic strains of the economic transition saw a rise in unemployment that often led to women being discriminated against in the work force. Indeed, the salaries of men remained on average 24% higher than for women, despite more women having a higher education (FAFO 2000a, p.18). At the highest political levels women remain under-represented within parliament and the Ministerial level.

However, gender interests have never been clearly articulated or organized by interest groups or among political parties. No parties elected to the Latvian parliament have stressed gender issues. Thus gender remains a potentially salient dimension, but lacks a realization among women that they are a potentially influential interest group, and it also lacks organized representation. Moreover, bearing in mind that the women’s parties that did emerge in post-communist countries in the early 1990s subsequently largely faded away, it seems unlikely that single-issue women’s parties will develop in Latvia (Ishiyama 2003).

Environmental issues played an important role in the early development of Latvian politics in the 1980s. The Soviet regime had paid very little attention to environmental concerns in its industrial and military planning, and by the 1980s concerns about the environment were growing in Latvia. Thus Latvian green activists achieved prominence in the 1980s, protesting about the building of a new hydroelectric dam, as well as the possible construction of an underground metro system in the capital Rīga.

The green groups organized themselves into a political party – ZP – in the run-up to the 1993 election, and then entered electoral coalitions for the 1998 and 2002 elections (KDS and the DP in 1998, and LZS in 2002). While ZP has had limited electoral success at the national level, it has been more successful in local elections. While it has remained relatively popular among the general population, largely as a symbol of the national re-awakening period of the 1980s and because of Latvians’ traditional affection for the countryside, it has not been considered as a major political party, possibly because of its relatively loose organization, lack of wider policy agenda, and absence of a charismatic leader. Thus while green issues have the potential to be structured into a salient cleavage, they require a stronger party organization. Moreover, all political parties have accepted the need for environmental policies after the polluting Soviet years, and as Latvia

has shifted to a service rather than industrially-based economy, pollution has become less of an issue among voters and politicians.

The weakness of gender and green post-material issues is perhaps not surprising bearing in mind Ronald Inglehart’s (1977) assertion that they will only develop when a state becomes materially sated, and that after this it still takes a long time for them to develop salience. As a result, this dimension may assume greater relevance as Latvia’s economy grows. Of the cleavages outlined above, this is the only one untouched by the ethnic issue.

Thus the central cleavage in Latvia is ethnic. All the major parties in Latvia can be categorized as either Russian-speaking or Latvian, and the overwhelming majority of their electorates come from these ethnic groups. Of the six issue dimensions discussed above, only the last, post-material, dimension is not explicitly influenced by the ethnic cleavage. The ethnic cleavage can be located in the religious issue (Lutheran or Catholic Latvians versus Orthodox Russian-speakers), the urban-rural (Latvians living in the countryside, Russian-speakers in the cities), the socio-economic dimension (‘left’ ideas being equated with the Soviet regime and an ‘eastern’ foreign policy) and foreign policy (the eastern or western direction of foreign policy). The relevance of ethnicity is clearly not waning. Indeed, a newspaper argued that the March 2005 local government election campaign strategies consisted of claims by the Latvian parties that ‘the Russians are coming’, and by the Russian parties that ‘Latvians are ruthless’ (Arāja 2005, p.3). Indeed, the 2005 local government elections proved the enduring nature of the ethnic cleavage. The capital city Rīga has a high concentration of Russian-speakers as well as Latvians, and these ethnic groups are concentrated in certain post-war housing districts. And the results of the election reveal that areas of a high Russian-speaking concentration voted for Russian-speaking parties, while areas with a high ethnic Latvian concentration voted for Latvian parties (Sloga 2005, pp.1-5).

Table 4.21 – Salience of the six major cleavages in Latvia

	Does it Reflect a Major Division in Society?	Can People Identify With This Cleavage?	Does the Cleavage Find Expression?
Ethnic	Yes	Yes	Yes
Socio-economic	Yes	Yes	Yes
State-church	Partly	No	Yes
Urban-rural	Yes	Yes	Yes
Foreign Policy	Yes	Partly	No
Post-material	No	No	Partly (green)

However, this is not to say that the other five dimensions have not emerged as sub-cleavages. On the contrary, to varying degrees they have. Indeed, the socio-economic and urban-rural dimensions have all the elements necessary to be salient (table 4.21). However, they are distorted by the overwhelming dominance of the ethnic cleavage, and by the catch-all ideology of Latvian parties, almost all of which support economic modernization, a western-looking foreign policy, support for agriculture and the church.

The ethnic cleavage endures because the immediacy of the past means the injustices of the Soviet era remain a fresh memory for many ethnic Latvians. In contrast, harsh citizenship and language policies embittered the Russian-speaking community. Thus ethnic rights have assumed a central importance for both groups. Moreover, parties and politicians have also entrenched the ethnic cleavage. Elmer Eric Schattschneider (1960) argued that certain cleavages emerge as dominant because political parties choose to emphasize them. Playing on ethnic fears has ensured that all Latvian governments since the 1993 election have been formed by centre-right ethnic Latvian parties that have hastened market-oriented economic reforms, and a foreign policy aimed at accession to the European Union and NATO. It has also allowed for political graft and corruption. As chapter six will show, Latvians do not like their politicians or parties, but still vote for them largely as protectors of their ethnic rights.

However, this has led to a marginalization of the Russian-speaking population. Not just the 25% of inhabitants who are non-citizens, but the overwhelming majority of Russian-speakers who participate in elections vote for Russian-speaking parties that are permanently removed from the coalition-building process. This further alienates them from the political process and the political institutions that do not seem to represent them. Moreover, survey evidence from the Central and East European Barometers clearly shows that Russian speakers are less satisfied with democracy than ethnic Latvians (Berglund et al 2001, pp.89-90). While this is a minority part of the population, and does not appear to pose an immediate threat to the democratic system, it can be seen as having an impact on the quality of the democratic experience for this part of the Latvian population.

Conclusions

This chapter studied Latvian parties through the institutional, organizational and sociological approaches. The institutional approach revealed that there are few barriers to new political parties entering the party system. Extremely liberal financing regulations allow parties to

spend large amounts of money on election campaigns. This money typically comes from corporate sponsors: ‘To some extent or other most Latvian parties have *eminence grises* who have a great deal of influence over the party... and this kind of closed corporatism leads to decisions being made in favour of these interests, and to corruption’ (Leiškals, interview, 8th April 2002). At the same time, however, this money further alienates the population, and entrenches the belief that ‘political parties are lobbies of economic groupings’ (Nissinen 1999, p.203). Party organizations are small and weak. Deputies flee from one party to another, and parties frequently fragment and collapse. Parties have few members and little contact with civil society. Decision-making is centralized in the parliamentary party and central office (which are often one and the same), thus isolating members from decision-making processes in the party. This electoral-professional organizational model is widespread in Western Europe. However, in contrast to their West European counterparts, Latvian parties are very new and do not have a steady base of support to draw upon. Thus this organizational model – of small, but wealthy parties – is not conducive to party institutionalization. The sociological approach revealed that the only salient cleavage in Latvia is ethnicity, a weak basis for grounding parties in society.

These three analytical approaches provided evidence that can now be applied to the four dimensions of party institutionalized developed by Randall and Svasand (2002), discussed in chapter one, and presented again in table 4.22.

Table 4.22 Dimensions of party institutionalization

	Internal	External
Structural	Systemness	Decisional autonomy
Attitudinal	Value infusion	Reification

Source: Randall and Svasand 2002, p. 13

First, the two structural dimensions. In terms of *systemness*, the loose organizational structure of Latvian parties means that there is a low intensity of interaction between party members (except the elite) within the structure of the party. In terms of *decisional autonomy*, Latvian parties are greatly influenced by their corporate sponsors – the source of party election campaigning and thus electoral success. As a result, informal groups have a great deal of influence. Vaira Paegle (TP) eloquently summed up her experience of Latvian politics as follows:

‘Having worked in TP since it was founded, and having been a deputy for 3 ½ years and on the board of the party for all this time, I now believe that TP was constructed as a project to achieve certain narrow, selfish economic aims. Formally we have a

multi-layered structure, but in actual fact decisions are taken among a very small group of people. The structure is merely a façade of democracy. Indeed, there is a very small, elite group in all parties that actually make the important decisions. That goes for LC and TB/LNNK as well, all of which is dominated by an economic brotherhood' (Paegle, interview, 26th February 2002).

Second, the two attitudinal dimensions. *Value infusion* has not really taken place, as parties have no durable and stable social base. Indeed, voters actually have difficulty applying any particular values to the different political parties. *Reification* is perhaps the strongest aspect of party institutionalization, as the parties which are in the parliament do adopt a high profile and are recognized by the Latvian public.⁶⁴ However, this recognition has little meaning when it is not accompanied by a firm base of support to ensure the political survival of the party. Moreover, parties are not identified by policies so much as by the charismatic personalities that dominate them – a shallow form of identity.

What impact has this had on the consolidation of democracy? Parties play an important role in structuring the organizational framework of democracy, through the laws passed by parliament and government. An equally important task is that of setting the tone of the democracy. However, Latvian parties, through their attitudes and behaviour, have set a tone of corruption and elitism, and have done little to develop the qualitative elements of democracy. While parties and politicians are skilled in electioneering and manipulating laws and institutions, they have few democratic skills. As a result, the political skills that parties have accrued are not used to further the cause of qualitative democracy.

Thus Latvian parties are wealthy, but organizationally small, with no sociological support base apart from an ethnic one. Their key relationship is with party sponsors rather than rank and file members or civil society organizations. However, this relationship is largely opaque. Chapter five attempts to cast more light on the inner workings of Latvian political parties through a case study of the organization and social base of the most successful and influential political party in post-soviet Latvia – *Latvijas Ceļš*.

⁶⁴ For example, a poll made in 2000 found that the four parties making up the government coalition at that time were recognized by 78-88% of the Latvian public (although just 47-78% of Russian-speakers), while the two parties in parliamentary opposition were recognized by 44-72% of the Latvian population (and 45-47% of Russian-speakers)..

Chapter 5. *Latvijas Ceļš*: ‘An airplane with no landing gear’?

‘Our political opponents call us an airplane without landing gear – a plane that cannot land without crashing.’ (Kristāna Libāne, interview, 11th March 2002).¹

Following electoral defeat in the 2002 parliamentary election *Latvijas Ceļš* (Latvia’s Way – LC) politicians had difficulty coming to terms with their new life outside parliament and ministerial office. LCs central office fielded calls from confused ex-parliamentarians unsure how to drive into the Old Town of Riga without a parliamentary pass (and, in some cases, a driver), pay their mobile-phone bills, and generally cope with day-to-day life (Matule, interview, 11th April 2003). This indicates the extent to which LC was the party of the elite, the dominant party of Latvian politics from 1993-2002.² Indeed, it was the only party represented in all eight government coalitions, four of which were led by LC prime ministers (see annex 2). LC also had significantly more ministerial posts than any other party (Mednis and Antonevics 2001). This dominance led Li Bennich Bjorkmann (2005) to suggest that the party model adopted by LC has influenced the organizational development of other Latvian parties since 1993. LCs extended grip on political power allowed it to shape the institutions and laws that govern party activity that are crucial in shaping the models of political party. And its near-decade of success, while others parties collapsed, set it apart from other parties in the 1990s. However, there has been little detailed research on individual Latvian political parties, and no significant analysis of LC.³

As a result, this chapter examines LC in more depth, and particularly considers the development of LCs model of party, and its wider impact on the consolidation of democracy in Latvia. The chapter is structured in the following way. First, the chapter looks at LCs development from 1993 to 2002. The chapter then turns to consider four parts of its organization: (i) the party in office; (ii) the party in central office; (iii) the party on the ground; and (iv) corporate links. The first two organizational elements will be considered together, because the party in parliamentary office also served as the central office of the party until 1998. Moreover, even after 1998 the party

¹ At the time of the interview, Kristāna Libāne was the chair of the LC parliamentary party from 1998-2002, and an LC deputy since 1993. However, in 2003 she left LC, joined TP and married Andris Šķēle, the founder and motor behind TP. This is indicative of the close-knit nature of the Latvian political community.

² In the 2002 parliamentary elections LC finished below the 5% minimum threshold. Despite this setback, rather than disappearing off the political map (as has been the tendency for parties that have fallen out of parliament), LC sprang back to win one of the seven Latvian seats in the June 2004 European Parliament election.

³ Two important exceptions are a comparative case study of LC and Pro Patria (Estonia) made by Li Bennich Bjorkman (2003) and Ieva Zaķe’s (2002) article on TP discussed in the previous chapter.

was still controlled from parliament. The third section analyzes LCs political ideology. The fourth and final section turns to look at the social base of LC.

A number of sources have been used. First, eleven interviews with leading LC party members, including two former prime ministers and party chairmen, as well as a number of ex-ministers, and parliamentary deputies. Second, newspaper interviews, reports, political memoirs, as well as several articles and books about post-communist Latvia. Third, internal LC memoranda from the 'LC Collection' at the Hoover Institute.

5.1 A brief history of Latvijas Ceļš: 1993-2002

LC has gone through two core stages of development. First, a preparatory stage in the run up to the 1993 parliamentary election. Second, the near-decade of political dominance from 1993-2002 when LC established itself as Latvia's party of power.

The founders: A 'political bouillabaisse'?

LC was formed at a meeting in the Latvian beach resort of Jurmala on 13th February 1993.⁴ The meeting was attended by members of Club 21 and émigré Latvians informally representing the World Federation of Free Latvians (WFFL).⁵ The participants then invited a number of leading ex-communists to join the mooted party. This was done for both pragmatic and symbolic reasons. Pragmatic, because a number of the reform communists (particularly the chairman of the Latvian Supreme Council, Anatolijs Gorbunovs) had great public support. And symbolic as a show of reconciliation between the two extremes of the Latvian nation: nationalists and ex-communists. Thus there were three basic components to LC: (i) émigré Latvians; (ii) Club 21 (the post-communist political and economic elite) and (iii) Soviet era nomenclature.

LC initially registered as a pre-electoral association rather than a political party. This accurately reflected its status as an 'umbrella' organization for the three political and economic elite groups that formed the core of the party. In this respect LC differed radically to the other

⁴ Although the formal announcement only came two weeks later on the 28th of February 1993. The conference was 'closed' in the sense that only invited participants could attend. Thus from the very beginning LC was elite-based and lacking transparency.

⁵ Club 21 was an organization founded in late 1991 by 21 leading members of the Latvian business and political communities, with the stated aim of bringing together the Latvian elite in an informal forum where various economic, social and political issues could be discussed. Club 21 is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. WFFL was founded in 1956, this was an organization representing all Latvian organizations based outside of Latvia. The representatives in Jurmala were the political elite of the émigré community.

associations and parties of the early 1990s, which generally contained small, homogenous groups of like-minded individuals. In contrast, LC was diverse from its very beginning, prompting Anatol Lieven (1994, p.301) to memorably describe it as a 'political bouillabaisse.'

In 1993 Latvian society was favourably disposed toward émigré Latvians, who were regarded as 'dedicated and honest patriots,' and reservoirs of valuable democratic and market economy experience (Dreifelds 1996, p.88). Indeed, Māris Gailis (LC Prime Minister from 1994-1995) believed that they were the key ingredient to LC's 1993 electoral victory (Gailis 1997, p.66). The WFFL annual conference in Jurmala in early 1993 revealed the esteem in which émigré Latvians were held at that time. The conference was opened by both the Latvian prime minister Ivars Godmanis, and Anatolijs Gorbunovs, chairman of the Supreme Council (and acting head of state). Godmanis even chose the occasion to declare a major new development in the symbolically important conversion from the Latvian ruble currency to the Latvian lat (Tihonovs 1993b, p.1). Thus 'émigré's gave the party [LC] the image of an open-minded, liberal political force able and willing to lead Latvia through reform' (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.68). Émigré LC members also emphasized this in interviews: 'The émigré Latvians involved with LC from the very beginning came with a great degree of experience from the west and knew how political systems functioned in the UK, Canada and the USA' (Pablovskis, interview, 21st August 2003).

But why did émigré politicians choose to cooperate with Club 21 and the former communist nomenclature rather than simply form their own party? Indeed, WFFL had initially considered a coalition with the more nationalist Latvian National Independence Movement (LNNK) whose ideology was closer to that of WFFL (Kadeģis 2001). However, the emergence of the extreme right-wing German-Latvian Joachim Siegerist in the ranks of LNNK drove foreign Latvians away from closer links to LNNK, and created an opportunity for an alliance with Club 21.

WFFL also considered forming its own political party (Pablovskis, interview, 21st August 2003). However, this did not happen for three reasons. First, only WFFL chairman Gunārs Meirovics had any significant profile among Latvian voters, and this largely for the achievements of his foreign minister father over sixty years earlier.⁶ Second, émigré's were worried that they would be seen as too elitist if they formed an exclusive list: 'We did not want to create the sort of situation in which émigré's were seen to be coming to Latvia and telling people what to do. So we

⁶ His father, Zigfrīds Anna Meirovics, was the popular and youthful Latvian Foreign Minister in the post-first world war era. He died a tragic early death in a car accident in 1925.

did not want an émigré party' (Pablovskis, interview, 21st August 2003). Third, Andris Kadeģis argued that the motivation for cooperation came from a symbolic need to unite Latvia through 'people with shared values and vision [who] should unite regardless of their biographies' (Latvijas Jaunatne 1993, p.2).

WFFLs role in LC was certainly a controversial decision within the émigré community, particularly because of the presence within LC of people associated with the Soviet regime in Latvia. Indeed, the WFFL board could not agree to exclusively support LC in the parliamentary election, instead supporting four political parties: LC, *Latvijas Tautas Fronte*, (Latvian Popular Front – LTF), LNNK, and *Latvijas Zemnieku Savienība* (Latvian Farmer's Union – LZS) (Tihonovs 1993d, p.1). And some émigré's, (e.g. Jānis Ritenis (LZS) and Juris Sinka (LNNK)) opted to join parties other than LC.

However, émigré's had difficulty working with their local counterparts. This is not surprising, because the two groups had been raised in vastly different political cultures and were deeply suspicious of each other. Gunārs Meirovics (interview, 15th August 2003) claimed that major problems began soon after the 1993 election: 'Things began to change just as the party began to stabilize... a totally different wind began to blow from 'over there' [meaning the local Latvians]... it was clear that they did not want us [émigré's] anymore, that they did not want to talk to us.' Indeed, 'Meirovics could not stand Inkēns [an LC deputy from Club 21]– he believed that he was ex-KGB. In fact, he had many doubts about the "Latvians"' (Graudiņš, interview, 19th August 2003).

The Soviet era nomenclature grouping in LC was led by Anatolijs Gorbunovs, the Chairman of the Latvian Supreme Council, and leading reform communist.⁷ Gorbunovs was the most popular politician in Latvia. Not only was he an imposing figure, famous for his dark, luxuriant bouffant, he was also seen as a safe hand, and an experienced, pragmatic politician. Māris Gailis (1997, p.77) wrote that 'it was very important for us [LC] to recruit Gorbunovs... it was clear that whichever party he joined would win the election. For the same reason, LC would not allow Ivars Godmanis, the unpopular serving LTF prime minister, to join.'⁸ Both the ruling LTF and the *Latvijas Darbu Partija* (Latvian Labour Party – LDP – a predecessor to the LSDSP)

⁷ He was a former ideology secretary of the Latvian Communist Party, and from 1988 chairman of the Presidium of the Latvian Supreme Soviet. In 1987, Gorbunovs had warned that anyone going to the Freedom Monument on the 18th of November (Latvian Independence day) would be a traitor, but by 1989 he had switched sides to the pro-independence movement (Thompson 1992, p.32). He then became Chairman of the Latvian Supreme Council (1990-1993), and finally chairman of the Latvian Parliament (1993-1995).

⁸ Godmanis did eventually join LC in 1998.

openly invited him join their party lists (Tihonovs 1993a, p.1). Other former members of the communist nomenclature attracted to LC included Georgs Andrejevs and Imants Daudišs, while others, such as Valdis Birkavs, straddled the nomenclature-Club 21 divide, having been both leading members of the Latvian communist nomenclature and members (in the case of Birkavs, vice-chairman) of Club 21.

Anatolijs Gorbunovs played a leading role in all three successful LC parliamentary election campaigns, and presents an interesting case study of what makes an electable and charismatic personality in Latvian politics. First, he is male – important in patriarchal post-communist Latvia where there is no established tradition of females holding executive political office.⁹ Second, he is well-groomed with famously dark, thick hair groomed into a spectacular bouffant. Third, Gorbunovs has a reputation of managerial (or technocratic) competence.¹⁰ Indeed, Gorbunovs' popularity is remarkable in light of the fact that he only switched to the pro-independence side in 1988. In an opinion poll published a few weeks before the 1993 parliamentary election, Gorbunovs came a clear first when respondents were asked to name two politicians they have a favourable opinion (Diena 1993, p.1).¹¹ He proved that charismatic politicians with a communist past (or any other potentially dubious past e.g. sudden and unaccountable wealth – a characteristic of many leading Latvian politicians) could still be electorally successful.

LC provided a way back into power for the Soviet era nomenclature (Meirovics, interview, 15th August 2003). And the nomenclature gave LC a group of popular, eminently electable charismatic personalities that promised a moderate policy of reconciliation with the communist era. This stood in stark contrast to other leading parties of the time – LNNK, LZS and TB – all of which took a more black and white view of the past, and refused to cooperate with the communist nomenclature. Moreover, opinion polls revealed that the parties favouring reconciliation with the Russian-speaking community (TSP and Līdztiesība) were likely to win just a small minority of

⁹ The only woman to have been central to an election campaign is Ingrīda Ūdre, for the Green/Farmers-Union coalition in the 2002 election. Kristāna Lībane featured heavily in the 1998 and 2002 Latvia's Way electoral campaigns, albeit in a secondary role. Indeed, the party slogan of Latvia's First Party (elected to parliament in 2002 with 10 seats) is 'virs un vards', which awkwardly translates as 'man and oath'. Vaira Vīķe Freiberga, the first female president of Latvia (1999-) has no executive powers. Moreover, the speaker of the Latvian parliament, who also holds no executive powers, is also a woman – the aforementioned Ingrīda Ūdre.

¹⁰ See chapter 6, table 6, which shows that over 60% of Latvians believe that experts, not politicians, should run the country.

¹¹ Gorbunovs polled 46.7%. Another LC candidate – Georgs Andrejevs – came second with 26.5% while the only émigré Latvian to poll over 1% was Gunars Meirovics, with a mere 4.8% (Diena 1993, p.1).

votes and remain in parliamentary opposition. Thus the clearest route to influence and legitimacy for the nomenclature was via LC.

Club 21 brought together the post-communist Latvian political and economic elite in an informal atmosphere. There were a few émigré Latvian members (but only one of the 21 founding members – Māris Graudiņš), but the group was largely composed of ethnic Latvians. Club 21 quickly developed a reputation for elitism and secretiveness. Not only were all its meetings strictly private, it was also extremely difficult to join, as all potential members were first invited, and then approved, by all the other members (Nissinen 1999, p.130).¹² In this way Club 21 ensured that it remained an exclusive meeting place for the Latvian elite, a forum where businessmen, politicians and a smattering of intellectuals could freely discuss public policy, current affairs and business, safe in the knowledge that their discussions would not be leaked to the media. 'Although Club 21 was very pretentious, it did bring together a lot of people, decision-makers, from all parts of society. People gathered, got to know each other, networked, and in this way laid the basis for a political party. If not a mass party, then at least an elite one' (Graudiņš, interview, 19th August 2003). However, these informal links between businessmen and politicians were maintained after the formation of LC, and the secrecy in which Club 21 meetings were held spilled over into political party meetings and government discussions (Bjorkman 2005). It eventually became an embedded characteristic of Latvian politics.

Club 21 formed a party with émigrés and the former nomenclature because its priority was to gain power. The émigrés, it was believed, gave LC a certain credibility as reformers. The nomenclature, and especially Anatolijs Gorbunovs, gave them electoral popularity and reassured the general population in this era of great political uncertainty. Club 21, in turn, provided the bulk of future party cadres as well as a link to financial sponsors through its informal contacts with the developing Latvian business community.

Which of these three founding groups was the most influential? Some evidence can be provided by the first Latvian government formed under an LC prime minister in 1993. Both the prime minister and half of the eighteen ministers were members of Club 21, while only four of the eighteen were émigrés, and the rest nomenclature (Nissinen 1999, p.130). Thus Club 21 was clearly dominant after the election.

¹² Club 21 met every Friday evening. Free drinks ensured a consistently high turnout (Graudiņš, interview, 19th August 2003).

Perhaps this is not surprising, because the election results revealed that the émigré Latvians were not as popular as had been believed before the election. Preferential voting allows voters to support individual candidate(s) with a '+', or to reject that candidate with a '-' sign. This gives an opportunity to see which politicians were most popular with LC voters. The data for the 1993 election shows that the most unpopular candidate among LC voters was the émigré Gunārs Meirovics whose name was crossed out by 10.34% of LC voters (37,491 individuals). Moreover, among the top seventeen candidates receiving a '+', only four were émigré's.¹³ Anatolijs Gorbunovs was, of course, the most popular candidate by quite some way, polling 59.74% '+' – actually making him the most popular candidate in Latvia. Meirovics was the most popular émigré in LC, but he only polled a '+' vote of 17.74%.

Nevertheless, émigré Latvians were well represented in parliament. Of the 36 LC deputies elected in 1993, eight were émigrés. Indeed, of the total 100 deputies elected to parliament in that year, eighteen were émigré's (Dreifelds 1996, p.90). This was a disproportionate percentage, as only 18,413 of the total 1,118,316 votes cast in the election were from abroad – or around 1.5% (Zīle 1998, p.396). This low émigré turnout was somewhat of a surprise as émigré Latvian leaders had long claimed that around one-tenth of the entire Latvian population lived in the west (Kadeģis 2000).

The following years saw the émigré role in LC fade away. In the parliamentary vote for president following the 1993 parliamentary election, the émigré Gunārs Meirovics was the official LC candidate. However, this was a 'pro-forma candidacy' (Graudiņš, interview, 19th August 2003), and Meirovics was forced to retract his candidacy after the first round of voting, something that he himself bitterly regrets (Meirovics, interview, 15th August 2003).¹⁴ By the 1995 parliamentary election, there were only five émigré candidates on the LC list, none of whom were elected. By this point LC was dominated by Club 21.

Nevertheless, the broad appeal of LC was certainly partly responsible for its runaway success in the 1993 election. Indeed, its diversity was a key part of its election campaign slogan – 'only those who can unify themselves can unify others' (Dreifelds 1996, p.88). This slogan actually worked at many different levels. Latvian society in 1993 was fractured. The early beneficiaries of the economic transition, with their new cars and expensive restaurants versus the

¹³ Gunars Meirovics (3rd), Olgerts Pablovskis (19th), Inese Birzniece (26th) and Egils Levits (31st).

¹⁴ Meirovics argued that the Club 21 and nomenclature factions in LC had never seriously considered him as a serious presidential candidate, but rather dangled the prospect of the Presidency as a way of recruiting him to the party (Meirovics, interview, 15th August 2003).

great mass of have-nots; Russian speakers versus Latvians; citizens versus non-citizens; an eastward looking foreign policy versus a western orientation and so on. LC portrayed itself as being able to tackle and overcome these problems, largely because it was such a 'bouillabaisse' of differing identities itself.

But a number of key LC politicians also identified the electoral significance of LC being seen as the party of 'reform' at this time. As former Prime Minister Andris Bērziņš (interview, 19th August 2003) put it: 'At that time [1993] the aims of Latvia's way coincided with the wishes of society, which had recognized that big reforms needed to be carried out, and believed that after this had happened everything would fall into place.' The 'liberal' reforms that LC promised were widely accepted as necessary. Allied with the administrative competence associated with having one-third of the 150 or so LC members at the time being deputies in the Supreme Council, LC was a formidable political force that dominated Latvian politics between 1993 and 2002 (Blūzma 1998, p.374).

1993-2002: 'Power' and government

Following its sweeping victory in the 1993 election (winning a record 36 seats), LC registered as a party on the 25th of September 1993, with 154 founding members.¹⁵ Two governments were formed in the 1993-1995 parliament, both of which were led by an LC prime minister. In addition, two of the top three positions in the parliament also went to LC – Anatolijs Gorbunovs was elected Speaker of Parliament and Imants Daudišs first Secretary. Furthermore, seven of the fifteen parliamentary committees were headed by LC for the full term of the parliament. Thus LC clearly dominated the 1993-1995 parliamentary session.

However, both were minority governments. The first was formed in coalition with the LZS which had won 12 seats, making a total of 48/100 votes. A deal was struck giving the presidency to the LZS candidate, Guntis Ulmanis. In return Ulmanis immediately nominated LCs Valdis Birkavs for prime minister, subject to a parliamentary vote of confidence. The Latvian constitution calls for a majority of votes among those deputies present in the chamber in order for a government to be formed, so the 48 votes of the minority government, against the 11 who voted against and 32 that abstained, were enough to see LC form the first elected post-soviet Latvian

¹⁵ In 1993 a party required 100 members in order to register, against the 200 required since 1998.

government. The opposition was too fragmented (between Latvian nationalists and Russian-speakers) to pose a cohesive opposition.

The Birkavs cabinet was dominated by LC. He appointed thirteen Ministers and nine Ministers of State.¹⁶ Ten of the thirteen full Ministers were LC members, and eight of the nine Ministers of State (see annex 1 for a full list). However, the Birkavs cabinet only lasted one year, being torn apart by accusations of LC Ministers' former KGB-complicity as well as wrangling over the citizenship law and state subsidies to agriculture (Dreifelds 1996, p.94; Nissinen 1999, p.131).¹⁷

After the collapse of the government, President Ulmanis gave the nationalist opposition an opportunity to form the next government coalition. However, Andrejs Krastiņš (LNNK), the candidate prime minister, was unable to garner the necessary level of parliamentary support. As a result, the president turned back to LC. This was an important stage in the development of LCs identity, as it established LC as the party capable of forming a government when others failed.

The second government was headed by Māris Gailis, Minister for Reform under Birkavs. It took over two months (from July to September 1994), to construct this highly fragile coalition of centre and centre-left leaning parties: LC, LZS, and the left-leaning Tautsaimnieks (which was not elected to the 1993 parliament, but formed by break-away deputies from other parties). The presence of Tautsaimnieks meant that this second LC government was more left-oriented than the previous one. This was swiftly made clear by two key initiatives. First, Gailis excluded the most radical economic reformers of the Birkavs government from his cabinet – the 'Georgetown gang' of economists that had studied under Juris Viksniņš, a Latvian-American Professor of economics at Georgetown University. Second, Gailis introduced new protectionist agricultural tariffs (Dreifelds 1996, p.96). LCs position at the centre of Latvian politics, able to be elastic in both left and right policy directions proved crucial. Juris Dreifelds (1996, p.96) captures the essence of LC between 1993 and 1995: 'this party has demonstrated stability, inner discipline and solidarity in spite of general expectations to the contrary after its victory in the elections.'

Thus these first two years of parliamentary experience developed two key features of LC. First, it cemented the image of LC as the party of political power. This was particularly important in terms of the self-identity of the party politicians. Indeed, LC later largely considered itself as a

¹⁶ Who can only vote on issues of direct relevance to their competences

¹⁷ Foreign Minister Georgs Andrejevs was forced to resign because of his ties to the KGB. In June 2004, Andrejevs was the sole LC candidate to be elected to the European Parliament.

party of political 'power' (*vara*) rather than liberal or some other ideology based party.¹⁸ Second, it revealed LC to be an ideologically flexible party, using its self-appointed place in the centre of the Latvian party spectrum to gather parties around it in the process of government coalition formation. These mutually reinforcing traits were maintained over the following seven years of uninterrupted political power. This flexibility also allowed LC to utilize populist campaigning techniques. Thus LC was capable of adopting right-wing policies (Birkavs), swiftly followed by left (Gailis). This was a trait that was continued in the next parliamentary calling between 1995 and 1998 when LC won 14.6% of the vote and 16 seats, in an election that produced a deeply fragmented parliament containing nine parties. Although LC had lost a net 20 seats since the 1993 election, the party still viewed this as a victory, bearing in mind that it had overseen a continuing collapse of the Latvian economy, and the particularly controversial collapse of Latvia's largest bank, *Banka Baltija*.¹⁹ Government coalitions continued to be fractious and short-lived. Three governments were formed between 1995 and 1998, none of which were led by an LC Prime Minister. Following the election, President Ulmanis had initially nominated Ziedonis Čevērs, leader of the populist centre-left DPS as his Prime Minister candidate. However, Čevērs was unable to put together a coalition that the parliament would approve, failing by just one vote.²⁰

The fractious nature of the parliament meant that political parties could only unite around a neutral, non-party Prime Minister. Indeed, the first government coalition was approved only two months after the election, revealing the complicated nature of the negotiations. The first two governments were formed with the independent Andris Šķēle as Prime Minister, while the last government was formed by Guntars Krasts (TB/LNNK).²¹ LC was in each coalition. The professionalism and experience that LC had gained between 1993-1995 certainly played a big role in its ability to ensure that it was involved in each cabinet.

¹⁸ It should be noted that the concept of 'power' parties has also been used to describe parties of the Russian political elite (Knox, Lentini, and Williams 2006).

¹⁹ *Banka Baltija* was constructed as an elaborate pyramid scheme, at one point even offering annual interest rates of 110% on deposits in US\$. By spring 1995 it held one-fifth of all deposits in Latvia, and its collapse caused a 10% drop in Latvia's GDP in 1995 (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.103). As of January 2005, three former owners of the bank were still awaiting a Judges decision on their culpability for the collapse.

²⁰ Interview evidence suggests that LC played a key role in the failure of Čevērs to win a government majority. A former Prime Minister and parliamentary deputy explained that several bribes were paid to ensure that Čevērs would not have a majority vote approving his coalition. This incident will be discussed later in this chapter.

²¹ The first Šķēle government lasted from 21st December 1995 to the 13th of February 1997, then 13th February 1997 to 7th August 1997. Šķēle was actually one of the largest sponsors of LC. However, in the run-up to 1998 he formed his own political party, TP, which won the 1998 election, and came third in 2002. Ironically, TP has replaced LC as the party of 'power', the party that takes the lead in negotiating complicated government coalitions.

The first Sķēle government had a record large number of 28 ministers, revealing the compromises made in the ‘rainbow’ coalition of nationalist TB/LNNK and LZS, LC, *Demokrātiskā Partija Saimnieks* (Democratic Party ‘Master’ – DPS) and *Latvijas Vienības Partija* (Latvian Unity Party – LVP). The second Sķēle government had a much smaller number of ministers, as the LVP had left the coalition and did not need to be accommodated.²² The third government, formed by Guntars Krasts, also featured the same parties. Thus despite a smaller parliamentary presence, LC continued to keep itself at the hub of political power.

LC won 21 seats in the 1998 election (considerably less than 1993 but an improvement on 1995). Two of the three prime ministers in this four year parliamentary calling were LC members. Indeed, LCs dominance of the prime ministers office was disturbed for only nine months. The extent of LCs electoral success in 1998 was quite a surprise, as it had been faring badly in the polls in the run-up to the election. However, LC had adopted a moderate policy on the ethnic issue, which was reaching boiling point at this time. This prompted former LC Prime Minister Bērziņš to claim that ‘I think that many people voted for us in 1998 on the ‘lesser of two evils’ principle’ (Andris Bērziņš, interview, 19th August 2003), meaning that many people voted for the moderating influence of LC in this issue, despite their dislike of the party as such.

The first post-election government was formed by LCs Vilis Krištopāns (who, together with Anatolijs Gorbunovs and Kristiāna Lībāne, had been the charismatic personality that the 1998 LC campaign had focused on) in coalition with *Tēvzemei un Brīvībai / Latvijas Nacionālās Neatkarības Kustība* (For Fatherland and Freedom / Latvian National Independence Movement – TB/LNNK) and *Jaunā Partija* (New Party – JP). This was, again, a minority government that relied on the tacit parliamentary support of the *Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskās Strādnieku Partija* (Latvian Social Democratic Worker’s Party – LSDSP). The main rationale was to keep *Tautas Partija* (Peoples Party – TP), which had won the election with 26 seats, out of government.

The programmatic orientation of TP and LC were actually very similar, and only individual antagonism kept them apart, as made clear by a continuing sharp exchange of words between Vilis Krištopāns and Andris Sķēle (the chairman of TP), as well as an increasingly vitriolic exchange of words between Aivars Lembergs (Mayor of Ventspils, and alleged head of the Ventspils transit

²² Ministerial positions in Latvia are quite flexible in administrative terms. State ministers can either work in a specific existing ministry (specializing in a particular branch e.g. a Minister for cooperation with International Financial Organizations under the Minister of Finance) or form a new small secretariat. Not only is this a way of giving a party extra votes in the Cabinet of Ministers, it also provides a system of patronage for special pet projects that parties may have e.g. in 2002 a State Minister for National Integration was created, as was a Family and Childrens Affairs Minister.

group) and Jānis Naglis (Director of the Privatization Agency and LC member). Under these bitter conditions it was no surprise that the government collapsed after 8 months.²³

The next government coalition was pieced together by Andris Šķēle, assuming his third prime ministership in four years. However, this government also lasted less than a year. Once again, the Latvian parliament was fractured and polarized. A compromise figure was needed to unite the fractured Latvian parliament. Inevitably LC identified a suitable candidate – Andris Bērziņš, the serving LC Mayor of Rīga. As he had been involved in local politics for the previous three years, he had avoided much of the mud-slinging in national politics, which meant that he had not personally alienated other parties in the parliament. Moreover, he had ministerial experience. In return for the prime minister's post, LC kept only the transport, foreign and culture ministry portfolios. In 2002 Andris Bērziņš became the longest serving prime minister in Latvian history, holding the post for just over two years, overseeing the final negotiations on EU and NATO accession as well as a period of rapid economic growth.

This brief history has revealed the central role in Latvian politics occupied by LC. The party was consistently in the thick of negotiations on government coalition formation, prepared to work with parties of both left and right, and proved highly adept and flexible in its search for power. However, this meant that LC eventually became associated with all the ills of the Latvian economic and social transition, and most particularly the high level of corruption that seeps through the contemporary Latvian polity. In the 2002 parliamentary election LC failed to pass the minimum 5% threshold and exited national politics.

Why did LC remain a cohesive political unity while other parties fragmented and collapsed? The answer lies in the party's organization and ideological base.

5.2 The organization of *Latvijas Ceļš*

The organizational structure of LC is particularly relevant when considering Li Bennich Bjorkman's (2005) argument that the organizational structure of LC was copied by other political parties seeking to emulate their success. Evidence for this is provided not just in the similarities between LC and other parties outlined in chapter four (small membership, wealth, centralized decision-making, focus on personalities), but also from anecdotal evidence from LC deputy

²³ Vilis Kristopans subsequently resigned from LC, and with him went the Ventspils transit groupings hegemony in LC. Kristopans was re-elected to parliament in 2002 on the *Z/ZS* list which had been heavily sponsored by the Ventspils transit group.

Olģerts Pablovskis (interview, 21st August 2003) who stated that: ‘one of the founders of TP told me that they adopted the same organizational strategy as LC.’

The next section looks at the organization of LC in more detail. It considers the party on the ground, and the party in central office, and in public office. However, the latter two aspects are combined, because LCs dominance of government between 1993 and 2002 meant that the role of the central office was marginalized by the perks of parliamentary and ministerial office. Thus the central office managed party finances, but little else (Matule, interview 11th April 2003).

The party on the ground

LC has often been described as a ‘dream-team’ or ‘team of stars’ (Pabriks and Purs 2001, p.68). This indicates a focus on the elite level of politics. Certainly, LC has always had a small membership. However, detailed data on membership is rather spotty. Internal party documents in 1996 put LC membership at just 495 (Latvijas Ceļš 1996). However, by 2002 LC had 23 local membership branches (of at least 25 members) and total membership had grown to 1,415.²⁴ In November 2004, after being out of parliament for over two years, LC still claimed a membership of 1,276 (Egle 2004).²⁵ The financial income from members was negligible – as the previous chapter pointed out, membership fees accounted for only 0.9% of funds raised by LC in the 2002 election year.

LC was also relatively difficult to join, requiring three references from existing party members (no mean feat when there were just over a thousand members). The application was then reviewed at a party conference and, only if there were no objections from party members, was the application approved. This could take from 2-6 months (LC party statutes). In 1993 potential new members also had to complete forms declaring their income, savings and any past dealings with the KGB (Gailis 1997, p.79).

The flow of information in LC was largely top-down. Kristāna Lībane, chairperson of the LC parliamentary fraction in 2002, explained that ‘after every meeting of the parliamentary fraction I send a detailed letter to the local branches explaining the position that we have taken on certain issues, our motivation, our discussion and so on’ (Lībane, interview, 11th March 2002). Members did have the opportunity to speak at party congresses. However, these were largely

²⁴ Phone call to LC party office by author on 14th March 2003.

²⁵ The party also lists 12 local ‘groups’, which have less than the 25 members required to open a branch.

ceremonial occasions, and rank and file members realistically had little possibility to influence the party leadership.

The party in office (and central office): The dream team.

The party leadership has always been seen as one of LCs great strengths, both by party members and outsiders. After all, its great electoral appeal in 1993 was based on its ‘dream team’ of political heavyweights. Chapter four observed that a major feature of Latvian electoral campaigns is the focus on political leaders rather than party programmes. This was true in the 1993 parliamentary election, and still relevant in the 2002 campaign. Certainly, LC was the first party to stress the importance of attracting popular, charismatic individuals to its ranks, and its electoral success in 1993 was down to its success in attracting a diverse, but highly electable, group of individuals to its ranks.

The image of a team of strong individuals formed quickly. Only a few days after its first press conference, a newspaper article asked ‘What will LC be like?’ (Jegermanis 1993, p.2). The article emphasized that LC was different to the other parties campaigning for parliament because it had a very large number of well-known Latvian politicians. Thus from its very beginning LC was seen as a guarantor of stability in a period of social, economic and political transition. The politicians that came from the independence movement, and who had voted for independence in the 1990 vote, were guarantors of the national state. The émigré Latvians were seen as providing western expertise in economic reform. Finally, the nomenclature provided a guarantee of administrative competence during the inevitably difficult transition. This image of security, competence and experience, is one that LC also used extensively in subsequent election campaigns. Indeed, an internal party memo on the eve of the 1995 parliamentary election instructed campaign organizers to focus on six core strengths of LC, the first four of which were based on the personal characteristics of the party leadership (Latvijas Ceļš 1995).²⁶ Indeed, other parties have attempted to emulate this success by focusing on their own charismatic personalities.

Thus it comes as no surprise to discover that decision-making in LC has been strongly centralized at the top of the party. Table 5.1 shows that between 1993-1997 and 2000-2003 the LC chairman was either the prime minister or, in the case of Valdis Birkavs from 1994-1997, foreign

²⁶ These were: (1) An experienced and professional leadership; (2) a strong list of candidates for government positions; (3) a ‘high’ intellectual potential; (4) many young and educated people on the candidate list (Latvijas Ceļš 1995).

minister. From 1997-2000 the Party Chairman was Andrejs Pantelejevs, who also doubled as LC parliamentary deputy, and head of the LC parliamentary fraction. Thus the party and national office were blended together. This means that power in the party was inevitably concentrated in national political office.

Table 5.1 – LC party chairmen and terms of office

Valdis Birkavs	1993 – 1997
Andrejs Pantelejevs	1997 – 2000
Andris Bērziņš	2000 – 2003
Janis Naglis	2003 – 2004
Ivars Godmanis	2004 – present

Source: Latvijas Ceļš 2004

Naturally, LC did have a formal organizational structure. It had three formal executive-administrative levels. The party congress, the party conference and the board. At the bottom of this three tiered pyramid was the party congress, held once a year and called by the board (unless one-third of members sign a petition calling for an emergency congress). Its two main executive tasks were to elect the party chairman and the board. The party conference met at least once every six months and was composed of the party elite: the party board, its ‘expert group’ (appointed by the board, and charged with policy analysis and innovation), and all elected deputies (both at national and local levels). The conference had far greater powers than the party congress, appointing official party candidates for political positions ranging from the presidency to ministers to the secretary of parliament and takes decisions about potential coalition partners.

The chairman headed the party board and had sweeping executive powers to represent LC in government coalition negotiations, chair board meetings and congresses, and responsibility for formulating LC policy and hiring and firing all party staff. The general-secretary (appointed by the board) ran the party central office (based in Rīga) on a day-to-day basis, but had no executive powers of his own. The board also compiled the list of candidates for parliamentary elections (although they had to be approved by the party congress), and also approved candidate lists for local elections put together by LC branches. Moreover, the board also elaborated and oversaw pre-election strategy and expelled members from the party.

However, in addition to these formal structures outlined in the party statutes, Aija Matule (interview, 11th April 2003), an LC party functionary, described a parallel, shadowy structure that

met once a month and actually controlled the party. Named, perhaps ironically, the politburo, it was composed of leading party members as well as corporate sponsors. Minutes were never taken or published, and the existence of this grouping never formally discussed. Nevertheless, Matule maintained that this was the real source of power in LC. Gunārs Meirovics (interview, 15th August 2003) also made reference to ‘a tight knit group of around ten men at the centre of the party who had also been in Club 21.’ Dzintars Ābiķis (interview, 6th March 2002), who defected to TP from LC in 1998, also claimed that ‘decisions in LC were made behind the scenes, even at party congresses with 500 delegates.’ Moreover, ‘internally, LC was quite ruthless. It is not a case of one-for-all and all-for-one... the paedophilia scandal saw one leading party member turn against another. Nobody in this party carries the wounded’ (Lībane, interview, 11th March 2002).²⁷

Thus despite the formal organizations listed in the LC statutes, the core of the party was a relatively loose collection of individuals. Moreover, the governing clique of the ‘politburo’ had no formal status in the party, yet controlled it. Thus the party organization really does appear to have been set-up primarily as a façade of party democracy.

The shadowy figures in the ‘politburo’ were the link between the party and corporate donors. LC had links to a number of different corporate interests. One former LC prime minister argued that this was actually a good thing because it meant that, in contrast to other parties, LC had never been ‘one individual’s personal party.’ (Andris Bērziņš, interview, 19th August 2003). However, it did mean that LC began a tradition of close party-corporate ties that is now a major feature of the Latvian political landscape.

There appear to have been three stages in the relationship between corporate interests and LC: (i) 1993-1995, LC virtually monopolizes corporate donations to parties; (ii) 1995-2002, a number of donors break away and form new parties, or support other established parties; (iii) From 2002 onwards LC relies on donations from small businesses. In the first stage, all the major Latvian corporate interests united to support LC in the 1993 parliamentary election. Indeed, this could be seen as a direct continuation of Club-21. Moreover, the programme for LCs first party congress on 22nd October 1994 included a list of party sponsors (invited to a special corporate reception) that reads like a who’s who of Latvian business (including several soon to be bankrupted and disgraced bank presidents) (Latvijas Ceļš 1994b).

²⁷ In 1998 a television news programme produced by Edvīns Inkēns, a long-serving LC parliamentarian, accused Valdis Birkavs, Andris Šķēle and a slew of other public figures of being part of a paedophile gang. The prosecutors office subsequently dismissed the allegations, but by then the damage had already been done to those accused.

In the second stage in the relationship between corporate interests and LC, other political parties adopted the successful model of tight party-corporate relations. Thus many earlier LC sponsors began to support, and even create, other political parties. Between 1995 and 2002 there were just two major corporate interests within LC. 'The biggest factions were TP [Sķēle] versus Ventspils. But these groups have always been fluid, and have never been clearly defined, so it has been difficult to identify which individuals represent which group... [however] in the last parliament we did have a group that could be called Ventspils, and tended to vote differently to the rest of the party in parliament or in parliamentary committees' (Matule, interview, 11th April 2003). Newspapers have also emphasized the importance of the Sķēle corporate grouping (named after Andris Sķēle, multimillionaire and three-time Latvian Prime Minister) and the Ventspils transit grouping dominated by the Mayor of Ventspils, Aivars Lembergs (Jemberga 2002a).²⁸ The political influence of each group in LC has ebbed and waned over time. However, they both still play a central role in Latvian politics.

Ventspils is the endpoint for an oil pipeline that stretches across Latvia from Russia. Before the Russian government took the decision to cut off the oil pipeline to Ventspils, it was one of the largest oil terminals in Europe, transiting 11% of all Russian oil and oil products (37.9 million tonnes in 2001). As one of the few cash-rich Latvian businesses in the early 1990s, the interests of the Ventspils group rapidly expanded into publishing (Ventspils owns two of the three major Latvian daily newspapers) and a number of other businesses. Aivars Lembergs is often mentioned as the real owner of the off-shore businesses that own the major transit-related businesses in Ventspils. Gunārs Meirovics (interview, 15th August 2003) stated that: 'Lembergs was involved with LC from the start, orchestrating the party.' The Ventspils transit-related companies were privatized between 1993-1995, when LC dominated the government, including the prime ministers office, the finance ministry, the transport ministry, as well as the privatization bureau. Moreover, LC monopolized the transport ministry between 1993 and 2002 although transport was never listed as a pre-election manifesto priority. Two individuals in particular have been strongly associated with the Ventspils group: long-serving parliamentarian and former party Chairman Andrejs Pantelejevs – described by parliamentary colleagues as the holder of a 'Ventspils scholarship' (Egle 2004b, p.3) – and Vilis Krištopāns, prime minister from 1998-1999,

²⁸ The political influence of Lembergs is such that in the first postcommunist local government elections, in 1994 and 1997, Lemberg's local political party 'For Latvia and Ventspils' (Latvijai un Ventspilij) ran unopposed, despite Ventspils being, in that period, the wealthiest local authority in the Baltic States (in per-capita terms), and the fourth biggest town in Latvia.

and long-serving transport minister (Matule, interview, 11th April 2003). Indeed, during the Krištopāns premiership, Lembergs attended meetings of the Cabinet of Ministers, and the Krištopāns government was regarded as being Lembergs' 'pocket government' (Lapsa and Jančevska 2006, p.133). Indeed, Krištopāns' Economics Minister stated that 'the real government leader is Aivars Lembergs' after he was fired in 1999 (Huang 1999b).

The Sķēle group revolved around one charismatic individual, Andris Sķēle, a former civil servant at the ministry of agriculture who managed to gain ownership of a string of Latvian businesses connected with the food and drinks businesses (controlled by the ministry of agriculture) in the early 1990s. The Sķēle wing of LC was represented by Andris Bērziņš, the party chairman and former prime minister, Druvis Skulte, and Kristāna Lībane who Sķēle married in 2004 (Matule, interview, 11th April 2003). However, in 1998 Sķēle actually formed his own party, TP, to compete, and win, the national election. Nevertheless, he still maintained some measure of influence within LC. This helps to explain why the Andris Bērziņš government formed by LC and TP (together with TB/LNNK) held onto power longer than any other government coalition in Latvia's parliamentary history.

However, by 2002 both Lembergs and Sķēle had withdrawn their financial support for LC. Thus in the third phase of the LC-corporation relationship, LC relied on a series of smaller donors: 'In the 2002 election we relied on a number of small and medium sized sponsors (Matule, interview, 11th April 2003). The *eminence grises* had withdrawn their support for two reasons. First, LC was fairing very badly in opinion polls, and JL (which was leading in the polls) had made it clear that it would not enter into an electoral coalition with the parties that had previously held power (although this promise was broken after the 2002 election when it entered a coalition government with TB/LNNK). Second, after 1995 the *eminence grises* began to fund a number of new parties to ensure that they maintained their power whatever the election result.

Thus LC has always been well-funded. In the first 1993 election campaign LC were the biggest spenders, with a declared 12-14 million Latvian rubles (~100,000 Lats) (Dreifelds 1996, p.90). LC party documents at the Hoover Institution show that its income between July 1993 and October 1994 was 215,724 Lats (Latvijas Ceļš 1994). Only 36,575 Lats of this sum was spent on party organization (at this time the party had only three branches), the rest was spent on paying campaigning debts. Thus the real expenses of the election campaign were far higher than those initially claimed. Moreover, it is interesting to note that just 2,812 Lats of the 215,724 Lat total came from membership dues (Latvijas Ceļš 1994).

These corporate links also help to explain LCs long-standing control over the transport and foreign ministries. The transport ministry controlled the wealthiest part of the Latvian economy, as well as overseeing the privatization of the ports, airports, railways as well as the increasingly important and wealthy telecommunications sector. Meanwhile the foreign ministry directed integration with the European Union, NATO and other western organizations, thus making the economic reforms (including privatization) irreversible.

One particular story illustrates the financial influence that these groupings gave LC. In 1995 the party orchestrated the purchase of the two votes needed to prevent left-wing populists assuming power in 1995. Kārlis Leiškalns (interview, 8th April 2002) explained that:

‘The vote was 50-50 in the parliament. But power would not allow these populist or leftist parties to form a government. So LC bought the votes of Guntis Eniņš and Andris Rubins. Call it corruption or informal influence... Latvian politicians simply did not allow the left-wing to take power in Latvia. The extreme multi-partyism in Latvia helped us in this situation. You can always buy or persuade somebody... decisions are made by a very small corporative grouping, and in this case power was simply scared of a revision of the economic process, of the distribution of resources... after this the *éminence grises* simply started buying everybody. As a result, they will never have enemies in power. Everybody who has come to power has had some money from them.’

Leiškalns’ use of the term ‘power’ (*vara*) was typical of the Latvian political elite. Indeed, one former LC prime minister entitled his 1997 biography ‘the technology of power’ (Gailis 1997). The term roughly corresponds to the British ‘establishment’ or the more conventional political science term of ‘elite.’ In the Latvian context it refers to the shadowy political-business elite that control political parties, and thus the political process.

In organizational terms it could be argued that LC was little more than a front for corporate interests. It had a membership, a party programme, and an organizational structure. However, real power lay in the informal politburo, which continued the Club-21 tradition of informally tying together corporate and political interests. The following section will consider how LC used political ideology to bind the party together and as an electoral tool.

5.3 Ideology. An 'eclectic cocktail'?

While LC has been careful to portray itself as a liberal party, it has actually been torn between identifying itself as conservative, or liberal, from the very beginning. In early party publications, party leaders attempted to reconcile this difference of opinion by claiming to be both. Thus an article by Andrejs Pantelejevs (1993, p.2) in the second edition of the party's own newspaper claimed that LC 'simultaneously stands for both conservative and liberal values.' However, at its first party congress in 1994, the LC leadership announced that it had joined the Liberal International.²⁹ The decision to opt for a liberal ideology was pragmatic, and largely because contemporary liberalism itself is so difficult to pin down.

Liberalism has evolved over several hundred years and been defined in many different ways.³⁰ In order to avoid a lengthy discussion on liberalism, perhaps the most appropriate definition, in the context of this research, comes from the liberal manifesto of the Liberal International. This defines liberalism as:

'Freedom, responsibility, tolerance, social justice and equality of opportunity: these are the central values of liberalism, and they remain the principles on which an open society must be built. These principles require a careful balance of strong civil societies, democratic government, free markets, and international cooperation' (Oxford Manifesto 1997).

This also indicates three key policy areas that have a distinct liberal agenda: (i) minority policy; (ii) economic policy; and (iii) foreign policy. The latter two are derived from 'free markets' and 'international cooperation', while minority policy is the most challenging aspect of developing civil society and consolidating democracy in contemporary Latvia. This section will later consider LCs ideological position in these three key policy areas.

However, it first considers LCs definition of liberalism. It was initially difficult for LC to develop an ideology, because the term had negative connotations that still echo to the modern day. As Monika Zīle (interview, 10th March 2002) explained: 'The term ideology in Latvia has a very

²⁹ The Liberal International is an organization, based in London, that unites political parties with liberal ideologies. It defines liberal parties as being those that accept its basic documents - the Liberal Manifesto of Oxford (1947); the Declaration of Oxford (1967); the Liberal Appeal of Rome (1981).

³⁰ From John Locke's development of classic liberalism in *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) and Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) to the twentieth century debate on state intervention discussed by the economists John Maynard Keynes and von Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) and the modern liberalism of Nozick in *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974) and Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971).

dark meaning. It means something very bad, because in the previous regime political parties were actually very repressive. So we are still scared to use this term ideology.'

LCs first policy statements were blatantly populist. At its first press conference LC promised that, if elected to government, it would double the income of every family in Latvia every 12 months (Tihonovs 1993c, p.1). Oļģerts Pablovskis (interview, 21st August 2003) explained that LC was pragmatic in its choice of ideology: 'From the very beginning LC ideology was to adopt the best features of the British, Canadian and American systems.' Thus liberalism was chosen because it was the leading ideology in Europe in the early 1990s (Matule, interview, 11th April 2003). Thus,

'The rational reason for the formation of LC was not liberalism but power... ideology was not important. Liberalism was the same as communism or fascism. After fighting for and supporting independence the founders realized that they must be tied to some political party, and realized that it would be best to be tied to a sort of non-political grouping.' (Leiškals, interview 8th April 2002).

Thus liberalism was adopted as a vote-winning strategy. It also served as a recruiter to the party. For example, Aija Matule (interview, 11th April 2003) was initially attracted to LC by its liberal ideology: 'I was a fourth or fifth year student of philosophy in 1993. In ideological terms I had become a liberal. LC claimed to be liberals, so I decided to go and see what liberals look like close up.'

Liberalism also proved useful in explaining away deep internal divisions, because LC could argue that liberal parties were tolerant of diversity. Moreover, this allowed two separate, opposing corporate interests to function in the party, and initially allowed three diverse groupings to form the party in 1993. Aija Matule (interview, 11th April 2003), argued that LC was not an ideologically liberal party: 'You can find everything in the party programme which is an ideologically eclectic cocktail. If you look at the party's political behaviour, or its programme in office, then you can see that it has not really been very liberal... liberalism was used more as an outward source of identity. For example, being a member of the liberal international.'

However, despite a liberal ideology being adopted for reasons of outward identity (or façade), some LC members maintained that it was also used for substantive, policy reasons e.g. 'we are ready to make decisions based on our ideology, whether they are popular or unpopular' (Indulis Bērziņš, interview 28th February 2002). This chapter now considers how far this was actually the case in terms of: (i) national minority policy; (ii) economics; and (iii) foreign policy.

Minority policy

Chapter four discussed the centrality of the ethnic cleavage in Latvian politics. LCs approach to minority policy has changed since 1993, becoming both more pragmatic and populist: 'LC was initially envisaged as a multi-national organization, uniting the different strands of society.' However, 'when discussions on creating a dream-team with WFFL began, this aim of creating an open party including ethnic-Russians loyal to the Latvian state was discarded. This was due to the more nationalist approach of the émigré Latvians.' (Graudiņš, interview, 19th August 2003). As a result, LC has been seen as a 'Latvian' party, and the opportunity to construct a multi-ethnic party was lost.

Thus in its 1993 electoral programme LC proposed granting citizenship to Russian-speakers gradually, based upon individual merit e.g. Latvian language fluency (Latvijas Vēstnesis 1993). It has been argued that this makes LC radically different to other ethnic Latvian parties:

'LC has followed a cultural form of nationalism, which made citizenship primarily contingent upon integration into Latvian society through the acquisition of language skills, and has also been more pragmatic and willing to reach compromises... in short, LC viewed non-citizens as *potential* citizens, capable of being integrated, while the radical right viewed the non-citizens as "occupiers" who should be barred from *ever* acquiring Latvian citizenship' (Jubulis 2001, pp.8-9).

This interpretation of LC defines it as a pragmatic, ethnically tolerant party, not supporting the 'zero option' of granting citizenship to all residents of Latvia simultaneously, but also not denying Russian-speakers the opportunity to become citizens if they fulfill certain criteria. Thus LC has acted as a restraining influence on the more nationalist forces found in other political parties. Indeed, argued that LC was central in pushing through the later more liberal Latvian citizenship and language laws that the international community supported (Jubulis 2001). However, it is also the case that both the cabinets of Valdis Birkavs and Māris Gailis between 1993 and 1995 were 100% ethnic Latvian, and LC has primarily appealed to ethnic Latvian voters. Indeed, LC is a party made up almost wholly of ethnic Latvians.³¹ Rather than being a force for tolerance, perhaps

³¹ In the 2002 election 85.6% (48) of candidates on the LC list were ethnic Latvians. Only two were Russian, one Polish, one Lithuanian, one Lib (a small ethnic Latvian group located on the western coast of Latvia) and three did not identify their ethnicity (Latvian Central Election Commission 2005).

LC can be seen as a compromise between the two extremes of nationalist Latvian politicians, and the Russian speaking parties.

The ethnic issue also emphasizes the elasticity and pragmatism of LC. It was prepared to cooperate with Russian-speaking parties on ethnic issues (which were crucial to the European integration aspect of LCs programme), but then worked with Latvian parties when it came to pushing through liberal economic reform packages.

Is this a liberal policy? Classic liberalism, as originally expressed by John Locke (1690/1963), emphasized personal equality and equality of opportunity. Moreover, liberalism in its many forms has consistently stood for individual freedom. While LCs approach to ethnic policy has certainly been more liberal than that of the more national parties in parliament, LC did support a restrictive citizenship policy that has hindered the individual freedoms of non-citizens. For example, non-citizens cannot be civil-servants, thus restricting their career opportunities. At the same time, however, LC could argue that by introducing a language requirement to the citizenship exam, they have made non-citizens more competitive in the economy. Indeed, economic policy presents a clearer liberal policy model.

Economic policy

LC has portrayed itself as a party of economic reform, liberalization and modernization: 'moderately nationalistic on the citizenship question and decidedly free-enterprisers in economics' (Dreifelds 1996, p.87). LCs economic policy was guided by the Latvia-2000 economic programme written in 1992 by the 'Georgetown gang' of Latvian economists who had briefly studied under Latvian-American Georgetown economics professor, Juris Vīksniņš (Bluzma 1998, p.375). This same group of economists later developed the Latvia-2010 economic programme.

Latvia-2000 called for a rapid transition to a market economy, and the simultaneous construction of a strong social safety net. Subsidies and economic protectionism were to be things of the past. In this sense, LC economic policy is tied in with its foreign policy priority of EU accession and the *acquis communautaire*. Marju Nissinen (1999, p.133) has compared it to the German *soziale Marktwirtschaft* economic model in that it sought to create a market economy that also emphasized the rights of workers, good working conditions and a generous state social welfare system. And this certainly struck a chord with the Latvian electorate, which also wished for a market economy, albeit with universal healthcare, education and so on. Latvia-2000 also called for a rapid programme of privatization, setting the target of privatizing 75% of state-owned

enterprises by 1996. Indeed, these ideas have remained at the core of LC economic principles: 'We have always been sure about our basic principles. For example, there has never been any debate in LC about whether privatization is a good or bad thing, or restitution necessary. Moreover, there has never been any discussion about whether or not the state needs to support social security' (Andris Bērziņš, interview 19th August 2003).

Classic liberal economic theory emphasizes limited government and laissez-faire economics – the 'invisible hand' of Adam Smith (1776/2003). While this has been tempered by arguments for state intervention in the early twentieth century, it is still central to modern liberal economic thinking. Accession to the EU shows that the Latvian economy has indeed been restructured to a more liberal model. Thus the economic policies that LC has supported have clearly been ideologically liberal.

Foreign policy

In the 2002 election campaign LC emphasized its long-held commitment to integration with the international community, and most particularly NATO and the European Union. Indulis Bērziņš (interview, 28th February 2002), then Latvian Foreign Minister, claimed that 'LC has realistically and substantively supported EU integration and not just as a political slogan... the people actively working for EU integration are all from LC. Indeed, leading Ambassadors and civil servants from the foreign ministry are mostly from LC.'

Certainly, LC monopolized the foreign minister portfolio from 1993 to 2002 and consistently worked towards integration with the West, rather than Russia and the East. Ironically, this culminated less than two months after LC had left government and Latvia was formally invited to join both NATO and the EU. Thus the foreign policy cultivated by LC has been westward looking.

The focus on the west was for historic and symbolic, as well as political reasons. First, in terms of history and symbolism, a 'return to Europe' was an important part of the opposition movement against the Soviet regime – the idea that Soviet occupation in the Second World War had diverted Latvia away from its natural trajectory towards Europe. Thus an independent Latvian foreign policy was single minded in resisting the lure of Russia. As former LC Prime Minister Valdis Birkavs rather figuratively put it: 'Russia is like a big vacuum cleaner and we must always run forward to be rooted in western society. If we stop running, we will be sucked in' (Huang 1999). Second, the political motivation was closely tied in with LCs economic ambitions of

creating a market economy – the EU's *acquis communautaire* would guide (and in some cases force) the establishment of this economic model in Latvia.

This foreign policy certainly fits in with liberal theory. Accession into the European union led to the deregulation of the Latvian economy in terms of eradicating tariffs with EU member states and opening the national economy to increased competition (at least to other European Union countries). It has also increased personal freedoms as people are able to travel more easily around the enlarged EU of 25 countries. Moreover, the 'conditionality' of accession to the EU, whereby Latvia had to fulfill certain human rights, rule of law and democratic criteria, pushed the Latvian government in a more liberal direction.

Liberal or pragmatic?

This brief review of LCs policy in three key policy areas reveals several things. First, LC held consistent political convictions. The emphasis on integration with NATO and the EU as a source for security and embedding the market economy, and a modernizing economic policy in particular. Also, an ethnic policy that allowed Latvia to avoid condemnation from international organizations and human right's organizations, but at the same time protected the national rights of ethnic Latvians, particularly in the form of language protection.

However, while economic liberalization and integration with the international human rights organizations and the European Union can certainly be seen as promoting liberal values, LCs stance on ethnic policy is less so. The individual freedom of some 400,000 Russian-speaking individuals in Latvia is still inhibited by their lack of citizenship. They cannot participate in national or local elections or referenda, or even work in the public sector. Moreover, their freedom of movement within the enlarged EU will also be hindered by their lack of EU citizenship.

Rather than being viewed as liberal perhaps LC is better understood as a pragmatic party with certain long- and short-term aims. Liberalism was used for outside legitimacy rather than internal identification: 'Liberalism was only used as a cover for a lack of party discipline – to explain why the parliamentary party had free votes on various critical issues' (Matule interview, 11th April 2003).

Thus liberalism in the LC context seems to have been largely understood as individual freedom within the party. Liberalism has been used to explain away conflicts and differences in the party. Liberal ideology has been used as part of the façade of party, rather than for programmatic reasons. Pragmatism, rather than liberalism is the governing ideology of the party.

Moreover, this focus on pragmatic electability appears to have been adopted by other parties in Latvia, which, as Chapter four pointed out, are largely identified by their leading personalities rather than grounded in social or ideological bases. Nevertheless, LC has enjoyed unprecedented longevity and success in Latvian politics. Who voted for LC? And why?

5.4 Who voted For *Latvijas Ceļš*?

This section uses polling data from before and after the 2002 election to identify LCs social base. Of course, this poses certain problems because LC failed to pass the 5% threshold in 2002, while it enjoyed substantial electoral success in 1993, 1995 and 1998. However, interviews with LC members and internal LC data provide some evidence for these earlier years.

LCs success in 1993 has generally been put down to it being the first party to harvest the ‘uncommitted voters that vote one way in one election, and then another in the next’ (Andris Bērziņš, interview, 19th August 2003). Its initial ‘catch-all’ appeal lay in the large number of diverse but charismatically popular politicians that it gathered under one roof. Thus it was seen as the party most capable of pushing through the reforms needed in Latvia: ‘In 1993 LC had the tactic of appealing to everyone. It was not a student party or a farmer’s party, but a party that could appeal to everyone’ (Lībāne, interview, 11th March 2002). However, its appeal to Russian-speakers was limited.

Table 5.2 – LCs Electoral Performance 1993-2002
(% of the vote / number of votes and number of seats won)

1993		1995		1998		2002	
32.41%	36	14.65%	17	18.05%	21	4.9%	0
(362,473)		(139,929)		(173,420)		(48,430)	

Source: Latvian Central Election Commission 2004

While the roots of their initial popularity was clear, the LC party elite were nonplused when asked who supported them in later elections: ‘LC voters are in all social groups, by age, profession or sex’ (Lībāne, interview, 11th March 2002). However, others were prepared to detail their vision of the LC voter: ‘Educated people who understood that these reforms were necessary as a cornerstone for the state to develop further’ (Andris Bērziņš, interview, 19th August 2003). Further,

‘if you divide our voters into various age categories then, first, young people: the ones who have no memory of the USSR and feel much closer to Europe and democracy and want to take advantage of all the things that Europe offers ... then, of course, private property holders, those who have never supported collectivism. And the intelligentsia – people with liberal values’ (Zīle, interview, 10th March 2002).

Kristāna Lībāne also identified: ‘the Latvian middle-class’ as LC supporters (Lībāne, interview, 11th March 2002). So the core electorate can be summarized as (i) young (ii) property-owning (also to be interpreted as the middle-class) and (iii) well-educated. Lībāne also outlined ‘who does not vote for us. The poorest or weakest in society, the unemployed with a low level of education, people with little hope’ (Lībāne, interview, 11th March 2002). The survey data supports this interpretation? Table 5.3 shows that the public identifies LC voters as rich, urban, and primarily women.

Table 5.3 – ‘Which parties do you think the following social groups vote for (%)?’

	Rich	Urban	Pensioners	Workers	Rural	Women	Poor	Young
LC	34	22	14	7	14	16	5	8
TB/LNNK	14	15	14	8	15	11	6	8
LSDSP	7	18	24	36	14	11	25	8
TP	37	18	7	7	12	10	5	11
PCTVL	5	8	9	8	4	6	9	4
JP	3	3	4	2	5	5	5	5
Greens	2	4	3	3	10	5	2	10
No-one	2	2	4	4	4	3	9	6
Can't Say	38	51	46	44	50	61	49	56

Source: Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2001

Table 5.4 shows the values that voters associate with particular Latvian parties. Generally, LC does not appear to have a clear association with any core value. The one slight exception is ‘wealth’ in 2001, although LC still clearly lagged behind TP in this regard. In any case, it seems that by 2001 LC was failing to present itself as the party of the middle-class and economic liberalization (despite what its members believed). This could partly explain LCs dismal electoral performance in the 2002 election.

Table 5.4 - Values associated with political parties in 2001 and 2003 (%)

	Wealth (2001/03)		Environment (2001/03)		Latvianness (2001/ 03)	
LC	21	14	3	3	13	17
TB/LNNK	11	10	3	3	41	51
LSDSP	10	10	4	2	9	7
TP	32	39	2	4	12	21
PCTVL	5	12	2	4	2	5
JP	3	13	2	3	4	13
Z/ZS	3	12	58	65	8	15
JL	-	25	-	7		22
No-one	9	8	6	7	7	4
Can't Say	38	-	28	-	33	-

Source: Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2001/ 2003

Table 5.5 shows how far the electorate identify political parties with certain policies. LC is most associated with the foreign policy arena and, particularly, accession to the EU. In 2001 LC trailed only TP in terms of being recognized as supporting big business. Interestingly, the data from table 5.5 also reveals that voters believe political parties in Latvia are programmatically similar. Thus charismatic personalities, and well-crafted election campaigns, have an important role to play in differentiating and building support for parties.

LC supporters have opinions very similar to those supporting other Latvian parties. Perhaps this is not surprising, bearing in mind that LC did not have a strongly articulated ideology, and adopted a 'catch all' electoral strategy. Moreover, election campaigns in Latvia focus on charismatic individuals and glossy, populist advertisements rather than programmatic or policy issues. Thus support for LC has been very shallow, and not rooted in a concrete social group, or shared ideology.

Table 5.5 - Party image. 'Which of the following parties has these policies.' (2001 / 2003 %)

	LC		TB/LNNK		LSDSP		TP		PCTVL		JL ³²	JP/LPP		Z/ZS		None		Don't know ³³
Supports Big Business	24	11	9	4	8	2	29	33	4	4	13	2	4	2	4	10	35	12
Supports Small Business	10	3	8	3	12	5	12	9	3	5	10	2	3	2	11	17	44	44
Secures economic development	18	7	10	3	13	2	14	15	3	6	17	2	4	2	3	26	37	34
Is concerned with ethnic harmony	8	6	12	8	10	4	6	6	15	21	8	3	3	1	3	14	12	42
Supports social justice	6	3	8	5	26	13	6	5	14	18	15	2	6	2	4	19	16	31
Supports rural development	6	3	6	2	7	1	6	5	3	3	6	1	2	8	52	37	17	32
Supports EU accession	51	45	26	21	16	9	22	28	6	8	29	6	12	6	11	4	5	30
Supports the environment	6	5	5	3	6	2	5	9	2	3	6	2	3	35	42	19	14	30
Supports the Latvian nation and language	12	14	40	45	10	7	11	19	4	6	16	3	9	3	7	9	7	32
Independent of economic groupings	3	1	3	2	4	1	3	3	4	7	13	5	5	8	4	36	28	41
Fulfills its campaign promises	5	-	5	-	8	-	5	-	5	-	-	1	-	3	-	40	-	34
Single leader party	-	3	-	2	-	7	-	40	-	5	43	-	3	-	3	-	9	-
Cares for old people	-	4	-	4	-	7	-	8	-	7	9	-	6	-	4	-	33	-

Source: Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2001, 2003.

Conclusions

LC united a group of diverse, but charismatic, individuals with the aim of winning political office. As Aija Matule (interview, 11th April 2003) put it: 'in terms of identity I would say that LC has been a government-power party'. Indeed, 'I know that our political opponents call us an airplane with no landing gear – in other words, a plane that cannot land without crashing' (Lībāne, interview, 11th March 2002). LC was a power party, with the quest for political office overriding

³² Only formed in 2003 – so no data for 2002.

³³ This option available in 2001 questionnaire only

everything else. This approximately fits in with the catch-all model of party, containing two key ideological and organizational criteria (Kircheimer 1966). First, parties have little ideological baggage. Second, the role of the general membership is downgraded at the expense of the party's national-level leadership. Certainly LC fits this model, albeit with one caveat – that the 'catch-all' appeal is directed at ethnic Latvians rather than the entire population.

LC has undoubtedly had a significant impact on the Latvian party system. Indeed, the successful power-seeking LC party model has been widely adopted by other political parties. The 2002 parliamentary election saw TP revisit the 1993 LC advertising campaign – pictures of a well-dressed, all-male cabal of well-known TP politicians sitting around a boardroom table in a wood paneled room discussing issues of great national importance. However, these ideologically and organizationally small catch-all parties that now make up the Latvian political landscape, with their focus on corporate rather than civic links, are not conducive to consolidating democracy.

LC Members believed that the party had played a crucial role in democratic consolidation in Latvia. 'I think that LC has been very important in strengthening Latvia's democracy. Both in the parliament and in government, because of its tolerance, its problem-solving, and its moderation in the national question' (Pablovskis, interview, 21st August 2003). Indeed, it was argued that LC's selfless commitment to reform played a part in its downfall because 'for the good of the state a lot of unpopular decisions had to be taken. The kind that were unpopular, but in the long-term had a positive influence on the development of the state' (Andris Bērziņš, interview 19th August 2003).

Tracing the historical development of LC back to Club 21, it can be seen that corporate and political interests have been tightly interlinked. This has led some former LC members to be more critical in their evaluation of LC's role in consolidating Latvian democracy: 'It seems to me that LC did not fulfill its ambitions because everyone began working for their own benefit, instead of the benefit of the state.' (Meirovics, interview, 15th August 2003). At the same time, however, LC used its presence in government from 1993-2002 to extract economic resources from the state through patronage and privatization.

Thus the long-term democratic impact of LC is mixed. Its pragmatic combination of policies and canny political experience allowed it to push Latvia towards a market economy and integration with the EU as well as form a more moderate national policy than that advocated by other Latvian parties. However, its model of party organization, particularly its corporate links has led to high levels of perceived and actual political corruption. Moreover, LC has filled only the most basic definition of a political party – organizing a group of candidates to stand in an election

and then fulfill government functions. It did not develop the qualitative aspects of political party – an active rank-and-file membership, a responsive and accountable leadership, and links with civil society. Rather, LC has been a vehicle (‘an airplane’) for capturing state power, and using that state power to further the interests of a small group of corporate interests. While policies were obviously enacted (most notably economic reform and accession to the EU and NATO) they served to strengthen the constitutional, procedural aspects of democracy, rather than the attitudinal and behavioural dimensions.

Thus LC mirrors Latvian democracy. It has the formal attributes of party in terms of structures and regulations. However, it lacks the type of democratic behaviour and attitude among the party elite that is needed to actually bring these formal structures to life. Moreover, the party developed political skills over the course of its life, and used these to maintain political power in Latvia for an extended period of time. However, these skills did not promote democratic modes of behaviour, but the type of informal, backroom political dealing that has done much to undermine democracy in Latvia. Most importantly, the LC model of party has been adopted by other political parties. This has resulted in Latvian politics being dominated by small, elite, secretive, wealthy political parties closely connected to corporate interests. The following sixth and final chapter will evaluate the impact of these parties on democratic consolidation.

Chapter 6. Political parties, democratic consolidation and political culture in Latvia

“There is one common safeguard in the nature of prudent men, which is a good security for all, but especially for democracies against despots. What do I mean? Distrust.” Demosthenes 1878.

“Parties have had a negative impact on democracy in Latvia. Social surveys show that society distrusts parties and politicians. Can a person that people distrust promote democracy?” Jānis Jurkāns (TSP), interviewed 5th March 2002.

‘Why bother having elections? Better to invite all the parties to the town square and hand power over to the party that bids the highest amount of money.’ Judīte Čunska, Latvian Evening News, 27th March 2005.¹

This final chapter is divided into two parts. The first considers political culture in Latvia, and its relationship with democratic consolidation and political parties. The second part pulls together the two main themes of this thesis – democratic consolidation and political parties – and discusses their relationship in Latvia. Latvian political culture is analyzed through the traditional three orientation – cognitive, affective and evaluative – framework (Almond and Verba 1963). Previous chapters have focused on the elite, party, level of Latvian politics. This chapter assesses Latvian political culture. Political culture largely reflects the nature of a democracy, and particularly the behaviour and attitude of both the elite and public. As such, it provides an insight into how far the qualitative aspects of democracy (attitudes, behaviour and democratic skills) have become consolidated. It also indicates specific aspects of democracy with which the public are dissatisfied.

A number of social surveys were used to construct the model of Latvian political culture. They place Latvia into three relevant comparative perspectives. First, a post-soviet Baltic perspective with Estonia and Lithuania, who have a shared modern history with Latvia.² Second, a post-communist East-Central European (ECE) perspective, particularly focusing on the other

¹ Reporting on the attitude of the inhabitants of Rēzekne, a town in Latgale which has to hold new local elections after the previous one was annulled due to widespread vote-buying.

² The three Baltic States have a largely shared history of occupation by a number of different foreign forces (Swedish, Russian, German) followed by a brief period of independence in the twentieth century inter-war era, followed by Soviet occupation and then renewed independence in 1991.

seven post-communist states that joined the European Union in May 2004.³ While their starting points are not identical to Latvia's (not least in terms of time-frame – the five central European states began the democratic consolidation in 1989 and 1990, while the three Baltic States began in the second half of 1991), the economic, political and social reforms undertaken on the road to EU and NATO accession provide a basis for a valid comparison. The third perspective is with the older West European democracies. Of course, Western Europe is not homogenous in terms of democratic and economic development (particular differences exist between the northern and west-central European Union member states, and the Mediterranean countries that emerged from dictatorship in the 1970s).⁴ Nevertheless, the aim of the post-communist transition was to achieve the economic and democratic 'normality' that these states enjoy. Thus they provide a marker of how far Latvia has progressed to the West European democratic model.

The chapter utilizes four particularly valuable data resources. First, the six 'New Baltic Barometers' (1993-2005), and the 'New Democracies Barometers' (1993-2004) covering East-Central Europe. They allow for the comparison between Latvia and the other post-communist states. Second, the 'Central and East European Barometers' published by the European Commission between 1992-1998, the later 'Candidate Country Barometers' published between 2002-2004, and the 'Eurobarometer' offer further comparative data. Third, the 1999 'European Values Survey', covered Latvia for the first time, and gives a valuable comparative insight with Western Europe. Finally, a survey carried out by the Baltic Social Sciences Institute in October 2004 as part of a wider 'State of Democracy' study of Latvia (based on IDEA methodology), provides recent data from Latvia.⁵

Using a number of different sources that ask essentially the same question over an extended period of time allows for an analysis of 'underlying values, assumptions, and fundamental beliefs, which change more slowly' than attitudes captured in snapshot in single surveys (Brown 2003, p.20). Thus the fifteen years that have elapsed since the collapse of the Soviet Union provide a sufficient amount of time to see how political culture has changed and developed in Latvia. After all, support for democracy does not emerge overnight (Lipset 1959; Almond and Verba 1963,1980).

³ In addition to Estonia and Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

⁴ Indeed, the extent of democratic consolidation in Spain, Portugal and Greece was still being studied in a transition context in the 1990s (Linz and Stepan 1996).

⁵ The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has developed a methodological tool for assessing democracy in a given country: *The International IDEA Handbook on Democracy Assessment*. www.idea.int

6.1 Political culture in Latvia

Political culture is the aggregated pattern of attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviour that the public holds in respect to the political system. As such, it is a key component of democratic consolidation, bringing to life the formal processes and institutions of democracy. Low levels of support for the political system imply a weak or unconsolidated democracy because public support is needed for the effective functioning and maintenance of democracy (Lipset 1960; Powell 1982). This is of particular importance for newly consolidating democracies, where the system is not established as the only game in town (Mishler and Rose 1997). Indeed, the groundbreaking work of Gabriel A. Almond and Sydney Verba (1963, pp.3-4) argued that an appropriate political culture was a key part of a consolidated democracy. 'A democratic form of participatory political system requires as well a political culture consistent with it' because 'democracy is a matter of attitude and feeling' just as much as a formal process.

What causes distrust towards democracy? There are two major theories. The first finds the roots of distrust in a state's political culture (Almond and Verba 1963). In other words, political culture influences outcomes. The second claims the reverse, arguing that system outputs lead to dissatisfaction, and that political outcomes influence political culture (Harmel and Robertson 1986). This is a key issue that directly addresses the role of political parties in democratic consolidation. Are parties victims or perpetrators? I will return to this question in the second half of the chapter, following the discussion of Latvian political culture.

Almond and Verba (1963) identified three different orientations of political culture: cognitive, affective and evaluative. The cognitive orientation is the depth of an individual's knowledge and belief about the political system. The affective orientation observes individual's feelings about the personnel and performance of the political system. Finally, the evaluative orientation reflects opinion about the political system. These three orientations will now be considered in more detail, drawing a composite picture of Latvian political culture.

Cognitive data

Cognitive data, evaluating the extent of public knowledge of the political system, corresponds to two qualitative dimensions of democratic consolidation – behaviour and democratic skills. Thus cognitive data provides an opportunity to examine the democratic skills of the public. However, there is little suitable and available data for Latvia. Most surveys contain questions of the affective and evaluative orientation. Nevertheless, basic evidence of Latvian

publics knowledge of the system is indicated by turnout in elections (table 6.1). The average for the four post-communist parliamentary elections is 76.8%, which compares favourably to the EU-15 post-war average (1945 to April 2002) of 59.4% (Rose 2004)

Table 6.1 – Turnout in Latvian parliamentary elections. 1993-2002.

	1993	1995	1998	2002
Turnout	91.2%	72.7%	71%	72.5%

Source: Latvian Central Election Commission

However, turnout was also high in the communist era, and the procedural act of voting regularly might simply be instinctive habit inherited from the previous political regime. Thus a more relevant indicator may be participation in the various organizations and actions that compose civil society. Chapter four revealed that party membership in Latvia is extremely low, and Chapter two showed that civil society organizations also have few members and, barring a few largely foreign-funded organizations (which, in any case, have been in sharp conflict with the political elite since 2001), are largely inactive.

Table 6.2 – Participation in a demonstration between 2001-2004

Yes	No	Don't Know
9.4%	90.2%	0.4%

Source: Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2004

Nevertheless, participation is a key indicator of both the behavioural and democratic skills dimensions of democratic consolidation. Indeed, it has been argued that the people who engage in protest activities play a particularly crucial role in post-communist consolidation through the political application of their protest experience (Guerin, Petry and Crete 2004). However, tables 6.2 and 6.3 further indicate the political passivity of the Latvian public. While table 6.2 indicates that less than 10% of the public have participated in demonstrations between 2001 and 2004, table 6.3 reveals that only 19% of Latvians have ever signed a petition (compared to 55.6% in the EU-15, and 29.3% in East-Central Europe). The higher number of people (25.1%) that have ever attended a lawful demonstration found in table 6.3 are likely to be the Latvians that attended the anti- or pro-Soviet demonstrations in Latvia in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Table 6.3 – Have / would ever sign a petition (1999/2000)

Latvia			EU-15			ECE		
Have done	Might do	Would never do	Have done	Might do	Would never do	Have done	Might do	Would never do
19.1	32.8	48.1	55.6	28.5	15.9	29.3	32.2	29.3

Source: European Values Survey 1999/2000

Perhaps this low participation can be explained by the lack of suitable institutions through which people can become political actors? Chapter four argued that parties do not actively recruit members (because they are not needed financially or for electoral campaigning) and civil society remains small, poor, and marginalized. With no viable outlet for their political or social aspirations, the vast majority of the public simply become observers, not participants.

Table 6.4 – Have / would ever attend a lawful demonstration (1999/2000)

Latvia			EU-15			ECE		
Have done	Might do	Would never do	Have done	Might do	Would never do	Have done	Might do	Would never do
25.1	36.9	38.0	27.6	39.2	33.2	14.3	40.0	55.7

Source: European Values Survey 1999/2000

Thus the Latvian public largely participates in democracy at only the most basic, procedural, level. The following affective data will indicate public attitudes towards the political system, and offer some clues as to why participation is so low.

Affective data

There is a great amount of data on Latvian public attitudes towards the personnel and performance of the political system – the affective orientation. The key indicator is overall public satisfaction with democracy: ‘the quality of democracy hinges not only upon citizens’ sense of being represented, but also their perception that the political elites govern effectively’ (Kitschelt 1999, p.345). However, the efficacy of this indicator has been questioned for two primary reasons. First, it cannot distinguish between specific support for democracy as opposed to diffuse support related to economic growth, development and other factors. Second, it is not clear what empirical level of support for democracy is needed for consolidation to be complete (Ullram and Plasser 1998, p.38). Nevertheless, Larry Diamond (1999, p.68) has suggested that, while ‘any designation of a threshold of quantitative support is inevitably arbitrary’ 70% of the public supporting

democracy, and 15% rejecting it is sufficient for consolidation. As the data below indicates, support for democracy in Latvia is far below this level.

Table 6.5 – Satisfaction with democracy⁶

Fieldwork	Satisfied (%) (very + fairly satisfied)			Dissatisfied (%) (not at all + not very)		
	Latvia	ECE ⁷	EU-15	Latvia	ECE	EU-15
Autumn 1991	37	37	-	52	51	-
Autumn 1992	17	33	45	75	60	52
Autumn 1993	30	32	43	61	60	54
Autumn 1994	26	29	49	68	64	49
Autumn 1995	28	34	-	66	60	-
Autumn 1996	26	32	-	70	61	-
Autumn 1997	24	35	49	71	59	47
1999/2000 ⁸	30	30	56 ⁹	70	70	40
Autumn 2002	37	42	59	57	52	38
Autumn 2003	40	34	54	53	60	43
Autumn 2004 ¹⁰	32	-	57 ¹¹	62	-	40

Sources: Central and East European Barometers and Candidate Country Barometer (1991-1997 and 2002-2003); Eurobarometer (1991-2004) European Values Survey (1999); Baltic Social Sciences Institute (2004).

The Central and East European Barometer (CEEB) captured public opinion in Latvia, and the other post-communist states, between October 1991, just two months after the fall of the Soviet regime, and 1997.¹² The European Values Survey and the Candidate Countries Barometer provide comparable data for 1999-2004. In addition, the Eurobarometer provides data for the European Union (twelve states from 1992-1994, and then, following enlargement, fifteen until 2004).¹³

⁶ There is a gap of several years (1998-2001) between the final Central and East European Barometer report, and the first Candidate Country Barometer to include the question of satisfaction in the national democracy.

⁷ The ECE average is the mean for the east-central European countries appearing in the survey who were EU candidate countries, joining the EU in 2004 (Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia). Thus the data for Bulgaria, Romania as well as Russia, Ukraine etc. is not included in the mean.

⁸ Taken from the 1999/2000 European Values Survey. There is a slight difference in the questions asked. Respondents are asked to evaluate democracy as either (i) very satisfied; (ii) rather satisfied; (iii) not very satisfied; (iv) not all that satisfied.

⁹ Autumn 1999 Eurobarometer.

¹⁰ Baltic Social Sciences Institute (2004)

¹¹ The EU-25 (thus including Latvia and the other post-communist countries).

¹² It is interesting to note that the European Commission considered Latvia, and the two other Baltic States, in a different category to Belarus, Ukraine and so on already in 1991. By grouping the Baltic States together with the east-central European states, the European Commission seems to have made their accession to the EU almost inevitable.

¹³ The Eurobarometer data on satisfaction with democracy masks large variations between the EU states. For example, in 1997 Denmark (77%) and the Netherlands (71%) had far higher satisfaction with their national democracy than

Thus we see that in 1991, 37% of the Latvian population was 'satisfied with democracy' (table 6.5). However, at the same time a majority (52%) was 'dissatisfied'. Indeed, this was the high point of popular satisfaction with democracy in post-communist Latvia until 2003 (following the referendum that voted in favour of EU membership), although by 2004 the number had dipped again. And by autumn 2004 there were less people satisfied with democracy than in 1991. Thus there has been no significant improvement in satisfaction with democracy since 1991. Indeed, the dissatisfied part of the population has consistently been a majority, in contrast to the European Union average. Moreover, the Latvian public has lagged behind the East- Central European average (except in 2003), albeit by only a small margin.

This indicates a broad, and entrenched, lack of support for democracy. What explains this deep-rooted dissatisfaction? An initially sluggish rate of economic growth, as well as the drastic fall in living standards that accompanied the transition, particularly in the early years, led the public to unfavourably compare democracy with the former system. The immediate benefits of democracy – particularly increased freedom – were submerged beneath the day-to-day struggle to survive. This is indicated by the rapid fall in satisfaction by November 1992, the height of the Latvian economic crisis, which saw savings wiped out by hyperinflation, unpaid salaries in both the public and private sector, and a rapidly crumbling social sector. However, since 2000 the Latvian economy has been among the fastest growing European economies (and the fastest since 2004), but without any corresponding rapid growth in support for the political system. This indicates a deep-rooted dissatisfaction with the political system that cannot only be explained by socio-economic factors.

The public's lack of trust in institutions indicates the focus of dissatisfaction. While Juan J. Linz (2002) argued that declining trust is an issue in both new and old democracies, it is particularly acute in Latvia and the post-communist states. Table 6.6 shows that 75% of the Latvian population distrusts both political parties and parliament – higher, although similar, to levels in east-central Europe. However, this does not reflect a general lack of trust in society – 48% 'trust most people.' Interestingly, table 6.6 also reveals that the public has relatively high levels of trust in the media (television and newspapers), the medium that Latvian parties utilize in contacting the public during election campaigns, and that are deeply politicized. Moreover, this politicized media portrays rival politicians and political institutions (particularly political rivals) as

Belgium (29%) or Italy (30%). Nevertheless, it does indicate the wider west European trend for satisfaction with democracy.

corrupt and self-seeking. This also explains why parties have, until 2006, resisted the temptation of limiting party access to the media during election campaigns.¹⁴ While media advertising certainly has a negative affect on democracy in the long-run, parties find short-term electoral benefits from the current legislation. The media is trusted largely because it has a monopoly of information over the vast majority of the public, and the news is now presented more subtly with little of the monochrome drum-beating ideology of the communist regime.

Table 6.6 – Trust in political institutions. 2001

	Trust	Neutral	Distrust
Parliament			
Latvia	8	17	75
ECE	13	20	67
Political Parties			
Latvia	7	18	75
ECE	11	20	69
Television			
Latvia	51	25	24
ECE	43	27	30
Newspapers			
Latvia	40	31	29
ECE	36	28	36
Most People			
Latvia	48	31	21
ECE	37	29	34

Source: New Europe Barometer 2002

However, table 6.6 also raises a thorny question. Namely, who will deliver democratic consolidation if the institutions at the heart of the process – parliament and political parties – do not hold public trust? As discussed above, contemporary Latvian civil society lacks the size and legitimacy to represent the public. This is a serious hurdle on the road to democratic consolidation, as there appears to be no institution, or individual, capable of gaining public trust and pushing for more public participation and thus developing the qualitative dimensions of consolidation.

¹⁴ And with the largest political parties being allied to certain newspapers, television stations and other media, the legislative package limiting political party advertising in all media several weeks prior to parliamentary elections was aimed at new parties that do not have this level of access and support.

Table 6.7 – Institutional confidence (1999/2000)

	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much	None at all
The Church				
Latvia	25.8	40.8	21.2	12.2
EU-15	15.5	34.3	34.4	15.8
EU-25	18.0	34.2	31.8	16.0
ECE	18.8	34.0	29.4	17.8
The Press				
Latvia	4.6	40.2	44.7	10.5
EU-15	4.9	33.9	46.8	14.4
EU-25	4.7	36.7	44.8	13.8
ECE	4.0	42.6	41.2	12.2
Trade Unions				
Latvia	5.3	26.9	41.3	26.6
EU-15	5.2	33.9	44.3	16.6
EU-25	4.9	32.2	44.6	18.3
ECE	4.0	28.4	46.6	21.0
The Police				
Latvia	6.3	33.6	40.9	19.2
EU-15	16.2	53.2	23.8	6.8
EU-25	13.0	46.9	31.2	8.9
ECE	6.3	34.7	45.7	13.3
Parliament				
Latvia	3.6	23.9	45.2	27.3
EU-15	5.5	37.3	43.2	14.0
EU-25	5.0	32.8	45.0	17.2
ECE	3.6	23.0	49.7	23.7
Civil Service				
Latvia	4.5	44.7	38.6	12.3
EU-15	4.4	40.1	43.8	11.7
EU-25	4.1	37.3	45.6	13.0
ECE	3.3	31.5	50.1	15.1

Source: European Values Survey 1999/2000

The 1999/2000 European Values Survey (table 6.7) supports the evidence from table 6.6. Again, parliament has extremely low levels of confidence – only 27.5% of the public expressed any confidence in it, compared to an EU-15 average of 42.8%. Indeed, table 6.7 reveals that the public in the EU-15 also has little confidence in key political institutions. However, this is in the framework of a consolidated democracy – in other words, citizens may not trust these institutions, but they do not question their right to exist, or the value of democracy. Further data in table 6.14 (discussed later) indicates that this is not the case in Latvia.

Table 6.8 – How important is politics in your life?

Latvia		EU-15		EU-25 ¹⁵		ECE	
Very + quite	Not + not at all	Very + quite	Not + not at all	Very + quite	Not + not at all	Very + quite	Not + not at all
23.6	76.4	36.4	63.6	33.1	66.9	26.1	73.9

Source: European Values Survey 1999/2000

This lack of trust in political institutions leads to public isolation from political life. Indeed, Table 6.8 reveals that more than 75% of Latvians do not consider politics to be important in their life, above the EU-15 average of 63.6%, but around the same levels as elsewhere in CEE. Interestingly, however, table 6.9 shows that Latvians are more inclined to discuss politics than their EU-15 or EU-25 counterparts. How can this contradiction be explained? It seems that the Latvian public is interested in politics (hence their willingness to informally discuss politics), but is alienated from the process. Thus public attitude towards the democratic system is largely negative.

Table 6.9 – When you get together with your friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally or never?

Latvia			EU-15			EU-25			ECE		
Freq.	Occas.	never	Freq.	Occas.	never	Freq.	Occas.	never	Freq.	Occas.	Never
19.3	58.0	22.6	15.0	53.3	31.7	15.3	53	31.7	16.7	52.5	30.8

Source: European Values Survey 1999/2000

Evaluative data

Evaluative data explores the attitudes and behaviour of the Latvian public in more detail. The first set of data (table 6.10) reveals the public's evaluation of the current political regime. Thus rather than evaluating democracy as an abstract concept, it asks the public to evaluate the contemporary political system.

Table 6.10 reveals that a majority of the Latvian public only positively evaluated the current democratic system of government in 2001 (although Russian-speakers remained less supportive). However, this slipped below 50% again in 2004. Indeed, in the 2004 poll Latvia took a diverging path from the Estonian and Lithuanian public, which had a far more positive

¹⁵ Except Cyprus, for which there is no data.

evaluation of its system of governing. This further indicates a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the democratic system of government in Latvia, among both Latvians and, particularly, Russian-speakers.

Table 6.10 – Current regime evaluation. (% positive)

	Autumn 1993	Spring 1995	Autumn 1996	Spring 2000	Autumn 2001	Autumn 2004
Estonians	58	75	69	70	71	76
Estonian Russians	50	57	49	62	65	64
Latvians	43	45	37	49	56	49
Latvian Russians	39	40	30	39	49	43
Lithuanians	46	34	37	45	47	69
Lithuanian Russians	58	37	42	42	42	67

Source: New Baltic Barometers 1993-2005

How does this compare with support for the previous, non-democratic communist, system of government? Table 6.11 shows that a significant percentage of the population (and particularly Russian-speakers in Latvia who enjoyed full, albeit insubstantial, political rights under the communist regime, in contrast to the non-citizen status of many in modern Latvia) gave a positive evaluation of the previous regime. Support for the former regime grew at a brisk rate until 2001, indicating discontentment and an increasingly favourable memory of the communist era. However, it fell in 2004, possibly as the result of the public euphoria of accession to NATO and the European Union.

Table 6.11 – Former regime evaluation. (% positive)

	Autumn 1993	Spring 1995	Autumn 1996	Spring 2000	Autumn 2001	Autumn 2004 ¹⁶
Estonians	32	28	22	48	53	38
Estonian Russians	65	57	67	76	78	74
Latvians	36	35	41	53	54	31
Latvian Russians	66	51	67	72	78	59
Lithuanians	46	47	43	56	52	50
Lithuanian Russians	66	64	59	69	65	72

Source: New Baltic Barometers 1993-2005

¹⁶ In 2004 the question was rephrased to ask how respondents evaluated 'the former communist regime'.

However, tables 6.10 and 6.11 appear contradictory. How can both systems have approval rates of over 50%? This can be explained by respondents instinctively differentiating between the political and economic benefits of the two systems. While the communist regime provided a minimum amount of economic security (which the transition years did not), the democratic regime granted greater personal and political freedoms. However, when the public is directly asked if it wants to return to the communist system (table 6.12) both Latvians and Russians overwhelmingly reject this option (although Russian-speaker support for this option is noticeably larger than Latvian support).

Table 6.12 – Do you think we should return to communist rule? (% agreeing)

	Spring 1995	Autumn 1996	Spring 2000	Autumn 2001	Autumn 2004
Estonians	1	1	4	3	4
Estonian Russians	9	14	25	17	11
Latvians	4	3	1	5	5
Latvian Russians	9	9	4	11	19
Lithuanians	7	7	9	12	7
Lithuanian Russians	10	8	14	21	14

Source: New Baltic Barometers 1993-2005

Thus, there is nostalgia for the economic and social benefits of the former system. However, table 6.13 indicates that the public was relatively optimistic about the long-term performance of democracy in Latvia, although optimism fell dramatically in 2004, despite rapid economic growth and accession to the European Union (that had been approved in a public referendum in autumn 2003). This downturn among Russian-speakers could be partly explained by a significant contemporary event. In September 2004, a school reform saw Russian-language secondary schools switch more of their teaching over to the Latvian language. This was bitterly opposed by Russian-speaking political parties and NGO's. However, there was no such cataclysmic event for Latvians in this time period. Indeed, it may even have been expected that this school reform would make Latvians more optimistic. But it did not. As a result, the only explanation may be that the ongoing lack of stability in parliamentary politics, and continued perception of political corruption has begun to undermine Latvian's hopes for a better form of government. In other words, they may believe that the model of Latvian democracy that has emerged since 1991 is becoming entrenched.

**Table 6.13 – Future regime expectation: Evaluate the system of government in 5 years time.
(% positive)**

	Autumn 1993	Spring 1995	Autumn 1996	Spring 2000	Autumn 2001	Autumn 2004
Estonians	88	92	89	87	86	66
Estonian Russians	79	83	72	71	72	56
Latvians	81	74	69	74	76	60
Latvian Russians	71	74	57	57	69	48
Lithuanians	81	69	70	61	56	72
Lithuanian Russians	82	61	64	65	47	59

Source: New Baltic Barometer I to VI 1993-2005

**Table 6.14 – What do you think about these systems
as a way of governing the country (1999/2000)**

	Very good	Fairly good	Fairly bad	Very bad
Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections				
Latvia	17.6	40.3	29.1	13.0
EU-15	6.8	17.8	28.5	46.9
EU-25	7.4	18.4	30.5	43.7
ECE	8.7	20.3	35.7	35.3
Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country				
Latvia	12.1	48.5	31.7	7.7
EU-15	10.8	35.5	31.4	23.3
EU-25	14.4	40.0	28.0	17.6
ECE	21.8	50.4	21.2	6.6
Having the Army rule the country				
Latvia	0.3	5.1	18.3	76.3
EU-15	1.2	4.0	19.3	75.5
EU-25	1.1	4.3	22.1	72.5
ECE	0.7	5.2	28.2	65.9
Having a Democratic Political System				
Latvia	17.5	70.7	9.2	2.5
EU-15	56.0	37.2	5.0	1.8
EU-25	47.4	44.0	6.6	2.0
ECE	29.6	57.7	9.9	2.8

Source: European Values Survey 1999/2000

Has democracy become the only game in town? The evidence indicates that the answer is no. While table 6.14 shows that democracy was the political system with the strongest level of support in Latvia, it was significantly more muted than in the EU-15 or EU-25. Indeed, only

17.5% (47.4% in the EU-25) of the public evaluated democracy as a 'very good' system, with 70.7% (44% in the EU-25) opting for the more lukewarm 'fairly good' option. Thus support for democracy is not firmly entrenched for a majority of the population. Indeed, it is significant that a similar number of people (17.6%) evaluated 'strong leader' as a 'very good' form of government, with another 40.3% evaluating it as 'fairly good'. These levels of support are much higher than the EU-15 or ECE mean average. Thus it is clear that, in attitudinal terms, democracy is not consolidated in Latvia.

Table 6.15 – Do you think that it would best to get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader who can quickly decide everything? (% agreeing)

	Spring 1995	Autumn 1996	Spring 2000	Autumn 2001	Autumn 2004
Estonians	35	39	-	36	25
Estonian Russians	44	51	-	49	36
Latvians	40	45	35	35	30
Latvian Russians	48	52	46	43	44
Lithuanians	66	62	58	40	27
Lithuanian Russians	47	49	56	40	46

Source: New Baltic Barometers 1995-2005

The 'New Baltic Barometer' provides similar data over a longer period of time (table 6.15). It reveals that one-third of Latvians, and a larger number of Russian-speakers, have consistently supported authoritarian rule.

Table 6.16 – If parliament were suspended and parties banned, would you approve or disapprove? (% approving)

	Autumn 1993	Spring 1995	Autumn 1996	Spring 2000	Autumn 2001	Autumn 2004
Estonians	18	11	17	-	25	17
Estonian Russians	19	20	30	-	41	25
Latvians	20	33	38	39	39	25
Latvian Russians	20	28	44	37	36	30
Lithuanians	22	32	23	35	45	19
Lithuanian Russians	16	21	20	35	40	25

Source: New Baltic Barometers 1993-2005

Table 6.16 further emphasizes this point, showing that there has been a growing support for suspending or banning political parties until 2004, after which there was a sharp fall. Moreover, the most striking growth came between 1993 and 1995 – the era of the first popularly elected post-communist parliament. Strong support for banning parties indicates that they do not fulfill the qualitative function of linking the institutions of state to the population.

Table 6.17 indicates the institutions that the Latvian public holds in disrepute. It reveals that political parties were seen as the least professional public institution in 2004, and were also seen as being under the influence of business groupings. This again hints at one of the sources of the lack of support for democracy – corruption – and the perception that parties are the most corrupt institutions in Latvian political life.

Table 6.17 – Institutional performance evaluation (2004)

	According to the law, professionally	Under the Influence of business groupings	Employees are incompetent and ineffective	Hard to say
The Courts	34.2%	33.1%	24.6%	11.8%
Political Parties	8.9%	54.8%	29.2%	12.2%
The government	18.0%	41.7%	33.6%	11.1%
The parliament	17.0%	41.0%	33.0%	12.7%
The police	33.4%	30.2%	30.7%	9.2%
Civil service	20.1%	32.6%	34.2%	16.5%
Mass media	44.1%	37.8%	11.3%	9.8%
Local government	38.6%	30.7%	20.1%	13.4%

Source: Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2004

Indeed, corruption is a defining feature of modern Latvia. 85% of the public believe that all or most people are involved in bribe-taking and corruption in Latvia, compared with the CEE mean of 64% (table 6.18).¹⁷ And, as table 6.17 indicates, politicians are seen as particularly culpable.

¹⁷ And these figures are in line with the Transparency International data on perceptions of corruption in Latvia discussed in Chapter Two, which found that the perception of corruption in Latvia is very high.

Table 6.18 – How widespread do you think bribe-taking and corruption are in this country? (% positive) (2001)

	Almost all are corrupt	Most are corrupt	A few are corrupt	Almost none are corrupt	Don't know
Latvia	35	50	7	1	7
CEE Mean	24	40	26	1	9

Source: New Europe Barometer 2002

This lack of trust even applies to the procedural aspects of democracy. Table 6.19 reveals that only slightly over half the population believed that the 2002 parliamentary election was free.

Table 6.19 – Was the last parliamentary election free? (2004)

Yes	No	Don't Know
54.6%	22.4%	23.1%

Source: Baltic Social Sciences Institute 2004

Thus there is a high level of public disenchantment with democracy, and support for non-democratic systemic alternatives in Latvia. Support for parties and parliament is particularly low. Thus democracy is clearly not consolidated at the attitudinal or behavioural level. Moreover, the striking low level of trust in parties indicates that they are central to this disenchantment.

Gabriel Almond and Stanley Verba (1963) argued that political culture can produce three kinds of citizens: parochials, subjects and participants. Parochial citizens know little about politics and are apathetic towards government, with low confidence in their ability to effect political change. Subjects are more knowledgeable, yet also have little confidence in their ability to influence the system. Participants are knowledgeable about politics, and generally have a positive feeling towards the political system. Almond and Verba concluded that the ideal type of civic culture would contain a mix of subject and participant types (because an overwhelming number of participants would put huge strains on the system and possibly lead to overload), with a much smaller of parochials.

Naturally, any state contains all three types of citizens. The data presented in this chapter allows us to draw an aggregated picture of the Latvian public. It indicates that Latvia is dominated by subjects who are knowledgeable, interested, yet passive in terms of participation, and

parochials who are ignorant of political processes, uninterested and passive. Latvia lacks the dominant participant group that is needed to consolidate democracy.

There is still a causation issue to consider. Does national political culture lead to a particular type of political system? Or does a particular type of political system lead to a particular type of political culture? In reality, elements of both have contributed to Latvian political culture. Public apathy to politics can be partly explained as a reaction to the over-politicization of life in the communist regime. In the communist period politics dominated both the workplace (from factories plastered with party slogans to bureaucratic offices filled with portraits of Lenin and contemporary political leaders), communal places (again with posters and slogans) as well as the home (through a limited choice of TV and radio channels, politicized newspapers and literature). Elements of the Soviet era were also carried over into political parties and institutions e.g. the centralization of party decision-making, an elite-oriented approach to politics, as well as ties between the economic and public sector. Moreover, the tenor of the contemporary Latvian polity, with its constant accusations, and counter-accusations, of corruption and rent-seeking, continues to undermine support for the democratic system. Thus the public may believe that little has changed since the previous regime, and continues to be disenchanted with political life.

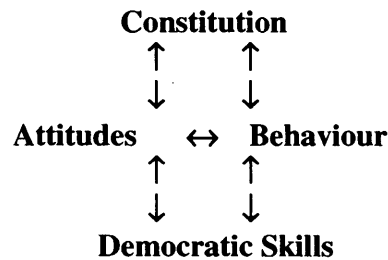
6.2 Whither Latvian democracy?

This thesis has argued that democratic consolidation is a complicated dynamic that cannot be simply measured at the procedural level. Thus the research focused on the qualitative aspects of a consolidated democracy, particularly political parties: 'the character of the parties in a political system is intimately related to the quality of its democracy' (Katz 1980, p.1). It has argued that Latvia lacks these qualitative aspects of democracy, and is thus not fully consolidated. This conclusion is in direct contrast to the findings of a number of organizations and scholars that rely on more procedural definitions of consolidation (e.g. Freedom House; Vanhanen 1997).¹⁸ However, the reliance on largely procedural data, such as the number of competitive elections or number of parties competing in elections, fails to capture the detailed nuances of democratization. Indeed, the attitudes and behaviour of both elite actors and the general public are crucial in

¹⁸ Freedom House produces annual surveys on political and civil liberties. Using a detailed check-list, they score each country from 1 to 7, with 1 as the highest score. They list Latvia as a consolidated democracy. <http://www.freedomhouse.org>. Tatu Vanhanens index of democratization is calculated by a formula of *competition x participation/100* wherein competition is calculated by subtracting the percentage of the votes won by the largest party from 100 (using whichever type of national election was more important under a given regime) and participation is the percentage of the total population that actually voted.

consolidating democracy. And these, in turn, are dependent on their democratic skills. This concluding section will recap the main arguments of the thesis, discuss the Latvian model of democracy and political parties, and consider prospects for future consolidation.

Figure 6.1 - Four Dimensions of Democratic Consolidation



The first chapter presented a model of the four dimensions of democratic consolidation (figure 6.1). It argued that the constitution was the basis for democratic activity, but was not enough to consolidate democracy. Rather, consolidation could only take place at the qualitative level – through the attitudes, behaviour and democratic skills of both political actors and the general public. However, these three dimensions have not taken root in Latvia for three main reasons.

First, the historical dimension of Latvian democracy plays an important contemporary role. Prior to 1991, Latvia had experienced just a few years of competitive democracy. Moreover, these years left a negative mark on the collective Latvian psyche. Political parties in the inter-war era were derided as unrepresentative, corrupt elite clubs. As a result, Latvians still perceive the authoritarian inter-war years from 1934-1939, as the golden era of the Latvian state. The Soviet period of Communist Party domination only hardened this stance against parties. As a result, the Latvian public does not have any deep-rooted, instinctive attitudinal support for democracy.

Second, this has also had an impact on the political elite. In constructing political organizations post-1991, the elite chose to build small, professional ‘catch-all’ models of party. Their main features are small membership, a centralized professional organization, and intense corporate links with party sponsors. In some cases, parties have been captured (or, indeed, created) by these corporate interests.

As a result, Latvia has adopted a model of democracy that is characterized by close ties between the political and business community. However, party membership is a prerequisite for appointment to senior administrative positions in nationalized utilities and enterprises indicating

that there also links between the party and the state. Thus Latvian political parties are at least partly rooted in the state, as is the case with other post-communist countries in Europe (van Biezen 2005). However, the lack of public-financing for parties means that Latvian parties also have a close relationship with the corporate world. At the same time, this means that they have few contacts and links with civil society or the general public. This leads to a volatile, and fluid, party system with a high turnover of political parties and a Latvian public that increasingly turns it back on political life.

Third, this situation has had an impact on Latvian political culture. The public is alienated from political process, and participation in intermediary institutions is very low. The attitudes and behaviour of both elite and public destroys, rather than reinforces, democracy. This is indicated by ongoing perceived, and actual, political, administrative and day-to-day corruption.

Thus, while it would be an exaggeration to state that democracy in Latvia has not progressed from the Soviet model, there are a number of features that do still bear a striking similarity. Economic and political interests remain intertwined, with governing parties frequently taking self-serving decisions. The general population remains isolated from the political process, performing the procedural function of voting regularly, but taking little further part in the political system. Indeed, society and particularly the small civil society institutions stand largely opposed to the government in a conflictual, rather than mutually supportive, stance.

In contrast to the tendency in Western Europe, parties in Latvia are not so much losing relevance, as fighting to gain it. Contemporary Latvian political parties look a lot like the party model advocated by Mosei Ostrogorski (1902) over 100 years ago, following his critical analysis of nineteenth century British and American parties. Ostrogorski envisaged parties as transitory organizations that unite individuals on an election-by-election and issue-by-issue basis. The frequent formation, merging, and splintering of political parties in the Latvian system certainly resembles this model. However, this is hardly conducive to democratic consolidation, because it fails to provide the stability and structure of a democratic party system, and particularly the qualitative elements of party – integration, mobilization and interest articulation.

And these elements are certainly crucial in a new democracy. As Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther (2001a, p.x) wrote:

‘In consolidated democracies, disaffection does not translate into delegitimation, because the *values* of democracy are so deeply rooted. However, the implications of disaffection are much more serious in countries where democracy is not

consolidated... Where the legitimacy of democracy is not deeply rooted at all levels of society, dissatisfaction and disaffection with democracy are much more likely over the long term to give rise to preferences for, or diminished resistance to, the return of some form of authoritarian rule... Where democracy is not rapidly legitimated by other means, however, weak political institutions, poor political performance, and the consequent cynicism about parties and politicians obstruct the consolidation – and even risk undermining the viability – of democracy’

Parties set the tone of a democracy, because they are the most visible, and central, part of the system. This is particularly the case in the early stage of the democratic transition, when parties play a ‘heroic’ role. At this point they embody the new found freedoms of the system. But they also have the opportunity to hinder the development of democracy through wrong choices, or failing to adapt to the new system. As Richard Rose and Neil Munro (2003, p.90) point out, without ‘an institutionalized party system to hold government accountable, democracy is incomplete.’

Latvian parties are not inclusive or representative. They have crafted laws (and weakened oversight mechanisms) that govern their narrow, typically corporate interests rather than those of society as a whole. After all, a characteristic of the Latvian political system is the proliferation of wealthy businessmen seemingly prepared to put aside their business interests and campaign for office at both national and regional levels, and then smoothly return to the corporate sector, even wealthier than they had been, at some point in the future.¹⁹ This leaves the impression that politics and government is a part of the business sector, and that the state is a business resource rather than a regulator. There is even a Latvian phrase that welcomes the wealthy into the political system, arguing that they are ‘so rich that they won’t steal’ or that they ‘will steal, but also let other people live’ (Sestdiena 2004, p.18).

As a result, money and corruption, rather than policy or ideology, is the dominant feature of Latvian democracy. Latvia is governed by small, wealthy, professional parties with low levels of democratic legitimacy, viewed by the public as little more than the tools of corporate interests. Populist campaigning around personalities rather than policies, and structuring ethnicity as the sole

¹⁹ Former Minister of Finance and current MEP (elected in 2004) Roberts Zīle (TB/LNNK) filed a financial declaration that revealed he was a millionaire property developer in addition to his political duties. Moreover, another major source of income was through his ownership of two small hydro-electric dams that the parliament had controversially sanctioned in the mid-nineties, against the wishes of environmental groups. Zīle has achieved this wealth despite being a full-time parliamentarian or minister, with a resultingly small salary, since 1993 (Lapsa and Jancevska 2005)

salient cleavage, has failed to consolidate the party system. Low participation, and a poor, weak civil society, coupled with a historically ambivalent attitude towards democracy and parties, has resulted in little oversight and means non-democratic systemic alternatives are seen as legitimate governing systems.

Writing in 1994, Philippe C. Schmitter argued that there were a lack of contemporary systemic alternatives to democracy, and as a result many countries may persist with the democratic system, but it will remain unconsolidated:

‘Elections are held; associations are tolerated; rights may be respected; arbitrary treatment by authorities may decline – in other words, the procedural minima are met with some degree of regularity – but regular, acceptable and predictable democratic patterns never quite crystallize. “Democracy” is not replaced, it just persists by acting in *ad hoc* and *ad hominem* ways as successive problems arise’ (Schmitter 1994, p.60).

This certainly resembles contemporary Latvian democracy. However, the potential for consolidation does exist. Legislative reform would force parties to adopt organizational structures more conducive to supporting democratic consolidation. First, an initiative to limit private and enhance state financing of parties would marginalize the role of small corporate interests (although not eradicate them as they would still own newspapers and electronic media). Limits on media advertising would also increase control over party income and expenditure. This, in turn, would encourage parties to step up membership recruitment drives, develop regional branches and links with civil society organizations, as well as seek alternative, grass-roots methods of campaigning.

Both contemporary Latvian democracy and political parties resemble the Potemkin villages that lined the Dnepr River to impress Tsarina Catherine and her court (Davies 1997, p.658). They have an elaborate, even impressive, procedural exterior in terms of party slogans, programmes, and electoral campaigns. However, they lack any qualitative substance. Latvian democracy can survive like this for an indefinite period (and the political conditionality of EU and NATO membership makes a slip into authoritarianism unlikely), but it does not provide the Latvian public with the responsive and representative government that they expected democracy to bring after the fall of communism in 1991.

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²⁰ SKDS is a polling company in Latvia.

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Annex

List of Latvijas Ceļš Ministers: 1993-2002

1993-1994 (3rd August 1993 – 15th September 1994):

1. Valdis Birkavs – Prime Minister
2. Georgs Andrejevs – Foreign Minister
3. Ojārs Kehris – Economics Minister
4. Uldis Osis – Finance Minister
5. Andrijs Gūtmanis – Transport Minister
6. Jānis Vaivads – Education, Science and Culture Minister
7. Egils Levits – Justice Minister
8. Māris Gailis – State reform Minister
9. Valdis Pavlovskis – Defence Minister
10. Ģirts Kristovskis – Interior Minister
11. Edvīns Inkēns- Special Tasks Minister
12. Jānis Platais – Budget Minister
13. Oļģerts Pavlovskis – European Union and External Trade Minister
14. Gunārs Meierovics – Baltic and Nordic States Affairs Minister
15. Andris Bērziņš – Labour Minister
16. Druvis Skulte – Privatization Minister
17. Vilis Krištopāns – State Income Minister
18. Normunds Zemvaldis – Health Minister

1994-1995 (15th September – 21st December 1995):

1. Māris Gailis – Prime Minister
2. Valdis Birkavs – Foreign Minister
3. Andris Piebalgs (later Indra Sāmīte) – Finance Minister
4. Ģirts Kristovskis (later Jānis Ādamsons) – Interior Minister
5. Jānis Vaivads (later Jānis Gaigals) – Education and Science Minister
6. Andris Gūtmanis – Transport Minister
7. Andris Bērziņš – Social Security Minister
8. Romāns Apsītis – Justice Minister
9. Vita Tērauda – State Reform Minister (until 30.06.95.);
10. Oļģerts Pavlovskis – European Union and International Trade Minister
11. Aija Poča – State Income Minister
12. Raimonds Jonītis – Industry and Privatization Minister
13. Druvis Skulte – Privatization Minister (until 20.03.95.);
14. Pēteris Apinis – Health Minister
15. Jānis Bunkšs – Local Authority Minister

1995-1997 (21st December 1995 – 13th February 1997, then 13th February 1997 – 7th August 1997)

Prime Minister Andris Šķēle (non-party)

1. Valdis Birkavs – Foreign Minister
2. Vilis Krištopāns – Transport Minister
3. Māris Gailis (later Anatolijs Gorbunovs) – Environment and Regional Development Minister
4. Jānis Gaigals – Education and Science Minister
5. Aija Poča – State Income Minister
6. Andris Bērziņš – Employment Minister

1997-1998 (7th August 1997 – 26th November 1998)

Prime Minister Guntars Krasts (TB/LNNK)

1. Valdis Birkavs – Foreign Minister
2. Vilis Krištopāns – Transport Minister
3. Anatolijs Gorbunovs – Environment and Regional Development Minister
4. Jānis Bunkss – Local Authority Minister
5. Aija Poča – State Reform Minister

1998-1999 (26th November 1998 – 16th July 1999)

1. Vilis Krištopāns – Prime Minister
2. Anatolijs Gorbunovs – Transport Minister
3. Valdis Birkavs – Foreign Minister
4. Jānis Gaigals - Education and Science Minister
5. Karina Pētersone – Culture Minister
6. Aija Poča – State Income Minister

1999-2000 (16 July 1999 – 5 May 2000)

Prime Minister Andris Šķēle (People's Party)

1. Anatolijs Gorbunovs – Transport Minister
2. Indulis Bērziņš – Foreign Minister
3. Valdis Birkavs – Justice Minister
4. Karina Pētersone – Culture Minister
5. Jānis Bunkšs – Special Tasks in Local Authority and Public Administration Refrom Minister

2000-2001 (5th May 2000 – 7th November 2002)

1. Andris Bērziņš – Prime Minister
2. Indulis Bērziņš – Foreign Minister
3. Anatolijs Gorbunovs – Transport Minister
4. Karina Pētersone – Culture Minister