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# Party System Institutionalization and the Quality of Democracy in Eastern Europe

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A horizontal banner image with a sunset or sunrise sky in shades of orange and blue. On the right side, there is a silhouette of a statue on a pedestal, with a figure holding a torch or staff. The text is overlaid on the left side of the banner.

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# Party System Institutionalization and the Quality of Democracy in Eastern Europe

Fernando Casal Bértoa<sup>1</sup>

*Focusing on parties and party systems must remain a basic if not the central theme for examining the quality of [...] liberal democracy*

Pridham (1990:2)

## Introduction

Almost two decades have passed since the Third Wave of democratization brought an avalanche of new, relatively unstable democracies into being in Eastern Europe. Although democracy and a market economy seem to have taken firm root, at least for the ten Eastern European countries currently members of the European Union (EU), in the light of the complicated post-communist legacy, this may have not been enough time for their political parties and party systems to institutionalize. Moreover, a well-rehearsed litany of complaints has been recited against the countries in the region encompassing, *inter alia*, weak governability and accountability, a representation deficit; corruption and clientelism, populism, and threats to democratic stability; raising once again the question, “How important the former (i.e. political parties and party systems) are for the quality of democracy?”

Reflecting Huntington’s famous critique in the second half of the 1960s, a preoccupation with weak institutions has been a recurrent theme in the (usually pessimistic) democratic literature of the past decade. In this vast and growing literature there is a widespread agreement that, whether in Africa (Kuenzi and Lambright, 2001; Lindberg, 2007), Asia (Johnson, 2002; Stockton, 2001), Europe (Lewis, 1994; Morlino, 1998) or Latin America (Dix, 1992; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995), few institutional developments are more critical to the consolidation and healthy functioning of democracy than the development of institutionalized political parties and party systems. Further, there is a general perception

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that “the contribution of parties [and party systems] gets increasingly important as the process [of democratization] evolves” (Randall and Svåsand, 2002:5). Examining the level of party and party system institutionalization constitutes then an essential task, given the fact that such institutions can in fact foment the quality of democracy (Diamond and Linz, 1989; Elster, Offe, and Preuss, 1998; Pridham, 1990; Mainwaring, 1998; Tóka, 1997).

The link between weak party/party system institutionalization and lower quality democracy has been examined in a myriad of countries and regions (see, e.g. Dix, 1992; Hicken, 2006; Johnson, 2002; Lewis, 2006; Mainwaring, 1999; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995; Markowski, 2000; Kuenzi and Lambright, 2001, 2005; Tóka, 1997). In general terms, the relationship between (party/party system) institutionalization and the operation of democratic institutions is considered to have neither a unidirectional or linear nature (Diamond, 1997; Huntington, 1968; Powell, 1982; Stockton, 2001; Wallis, 2003). Unfortunately, the majority of these studies takes the form of either single-country case studies or do not statistically test the relationship between institutionalization and the level of democracy (Stockton, 2001; and Thames and Robbins, 2007 are the only exceptions). Moreover, while most analyses view political parties and party systems as an independent variable or, at best, as an intervening variable, they almost always fail to operationalize the dependent variable, or to correlate the independent and dependent variables. Hence the conclusion of Foweraker (1998:675) that the “present state of comparative analysis does demonstrate, beyond reasonable doubt, that the institutional variation across regimes has significant implications for governability” is itself open to doubt. In this sense, what those comparative analyses demonstrate is, at best, variability in the independent variable and some conceptual grounds for supposing this has an impact on the dependent variable.

Seeking to begin to fill this gap in the literature, this paper attempts to statistically analyse the effect of weak party/party system institutionalization on the quality of democracy. The goals for this research are, therefore, two-fold. First, using Mair (2000) and Lewis (2006) as a foundation, assumptions are tested about the direction of the relationship between political party and competitive party system institutionalization and quality of democracy in Eastern European political systems relative to each other. Second, the challenge put forth by Mainwaring and Scully (1995) to extend this investigation into another region of the world by examining new democracies in Europe is pursued.

The rest of the paper will proceed as follows. First, I outline the conceptualization debate regarding party/party system institutionalization and the quality of democracy.

Second, I briefly review the literature explaining the hypotheses that both weak party and party system institutionalization should undermine the quality of a democracy. Third, I identify indicators for all the variables examined, with application to Eastern European democracies. Fourth, an empirical analysis of the relationship between party (system) institutionalization and the level of democracy is presented. Finally, the conclusion addresses the significance of the results achieved.

### **Party and party system institutionalization**

Any scholar who studies the institutionalization of political parties and party systems faces the problem of the unit of analysis. Should the main emphasis of a study be on individual political parties, party systems, or both? Are there differences between institutionalization of single parties and party systems?

The mainstream literature on the subject does not, in fact, differentiate between institutionalization of these two units. Beginning with the seminal works by Samuel Huntington (1965, 1968), most scholars approach the institutionalization of individual parties and party systems interchangeably, “the implication being that [since individual political parties constitute integral parts of the whole party system] the institutionalization of the party system directly depends on that of individual parties” (Meleshevich, 2007:16).

The relationship between these two notions is, however, not nearly so simple and deterministic: for while individual political parties may be institutionalized, their operation in a party system may not be, and *viceversa*. In this sense, Randall and Svåsand (2002:6) are correct when they argue that, although closely related, “individual party institutionalization and the institutionalization of the party system are neither the same thing nor necessarily and always mutually compatible”.<sup>2</sup> In fact, while in some instances the institutionalization of political parties, their organizational stability and continuity might prove conducive to party system institutionalization, in others they could be at odds with this, particularly in the case of young democracies.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this lack of conceptual clarity or absence of consistent analytical frameworks, research on (party and party system) institutionalization has thus far

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to deny, however, a possible theoretical and practical relationship between both phenomena.

<sup>3</sup> Randall and Svåsand point here to the so-called *unevenness* of party institutionalization (i.e. the party system might consist of individual parties at drastically different levels of institutionalization).

led to contradictory or at least inconclusive assessments on the relationship between institutionalization and democracy.<sup>4</sup>

For all the abovementioned reasons, in approaching the relationship between political institutionalization and the quality of democracy, the first problem which needs to be examined is the distinction between *party system institutionalization*, on the one hand, and *party institutionalization* on the other, and, with this, the allied problem of when precisely the latter also implies the former. In order to do so, it is necessary first to put some flesh on the bones of both concepts.

#### *Party System Institutionalization*

Although it may be difficult to believe given its central importance, the concept of party system institutionalization<sup>5</sup> has no established definition. The concept was first introduced by Mainwaring and Scully in their classic *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (1995). There, the authors defined the institutionalization of a party system as:

[The] process by which a practice or organization becomes well established and widely known, if not universally accepted. Actors develop expectations, orientations, and behaviour based on the premise that this practice or organization will prevail into the foreseeable future (1995:4).

According to the two authors, institutionalized party systems are characterised by four different dimensions: regular patterns of inter-party competition, strong party roots in society, electoral and partisan legitimacy, and solid party organizations. While their discussion of the four dimensions is sufficient, Mainwaring and Scully fail to provide objective measures for the last two dimensions (i.e. legitimacy and party organization).

Most authors follow Mainwaring and Scully's pattern of proposing a series of "dimensions" of party system institutionalization. Morlino (1995) claims that "structured" party systems must be stable in terms of electoral behaviour, partisan competition and political class; Bielasiak (2001), who is interested in the institutionalization of party systems in Eastern Europe and post-Soviet States, distinguishes three dimensions of stability: electoral democracy, political contestation, and political representation; Grzymała-Busse

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<sup>4</sup> See, among others, Kreuzer and Pettai (2003), Lewis (2006), Mainwaring and Scully (1995), Mainwaring and Torcal (2006), Mainwaring (1998, 1999), Meleshevich, (2007), Morlino (1995), Rose and Munro (2003), Shabad and Słomczyński, 2004), or Tóka (1997). Exceptions to this general rule are Lindberg (2007), Mair (2000), Stockton (2001), Markowski (2000), Randall and Svåsand (2002), and Welfling (1973).

<sup>5</sup> Other authors do prefer to talk about *party system* "structuring" (Morlino, 1995), "stabilization" (Birch, 2003; Bakke and Sitter, 2005; Krupavicius, 1999; Robert and Wibbels, 1999; Lane and Ersson, 2007), or "consolidation" (Horowitz and Browne, 2005).

(2002) suggests that institutionalization combines political freedom, party control of the political process, and policy-based party competition; and, even more explicit, Meleshevich (2007) conceives of it as involving both (external) autonomy and (internal) stability. Interestingly enough, there is only one exception to this principle of simply enumerating dimensions (i.e. Randall and Svåsand, 2002), but by and large this exception lacks an appropriate set of measures, weakening what is, otherwise, a thoughtful theoretical model.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear, then, that political scientists have conceptualized institutionalization in numerous ways. Most agree on some ingredients of the process but no two arrive at the same final combination of elements. Criticisms of the conceptual and operational approaches of these studies appear elsewhere (Casal Bértoa, 2007), but the fundamental problem that can be seen running through all these works is that they tend to pay very little attention to the notion of conceptualization. How, then, can we define the concept of party system institutionalization?

Strictly speaking, we can only speak of institutionalization when we can define what it is that has been institutionalized. Our first task then is, perhaps, insurmountable, to specify the “essence” of what constitutes a given party system. Sartori (1976:43-44) offers the clearest definition of this:

[T]he concept of system is meaningless [...] unless (i) the system displays properties that do not belong to a separate consideration of its component elements and (ii) the system results from, and consists of, the patterned interactions of its component parts, thereby [...] a party system is precisely the *system of interactions* resulting from inter-party competition.

This definition has four different implications. First, a party system must consist of more than a single party (otherwise there is no interparty competition). Second, a party system clearly involves something more than the sum of its component (i.e. political parties) parts, and incorporates some element of understanding of the mode of interaction between these parties. Three, the notion of pattern implies some degree of regularity in the interactions among political parties. Four, this pattern must be enduring – suggesting some continuity of inter-party interactions between elections.

Once the nature of what constitutes a party system has been established, then it becomes possible to define party system institutionalization, and, hence, to specify the

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<sup>6</sup> Another important exception is Welfling’s (1973) study of political institutionalization in Africa.

dimensions which can determine whether any given system is already institutionalized or still remains weakly institutionalized.

All meanings of the conception of institutionalization contain the idea of stability and persistence over time (Riker and Ordershook, 1973; Stinchcombe, 1968; Scott, 1995). Taking into consideration that the core of a party system is to be found in the patterns of interaction among its subunits (i.e. political parties), it seems clear that the most important and necessary attribute of party system institutionalization is stability in the rules and nature of inter-party competition. As Mainwaring and Scully stated in their seminal analysis of Latin American political parties, “where such *stability* does not exist, institutionalization is limited” (1995:4-5). In other words, the more stable the system (i.e., structured inter-interaction), the more institutionalized it is (Przeworski, 1975; Mair, 2000).

Bearing in mind all that has been said, and drawing on Huntington’s (1968:12) original definition of institutionalization as the “process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability”, I define party system institutionalization as *the process by which the patterns of inter-party competition and alliances (interaction) become routine, predictable and stable over time.*<sup>7</sup> Hence, in institutionalized party systems, voters face fixed choices among a manageable number of political parties, which relate to each other in a regular and predictable fashion, forming stable alliances. In this sense, a system of parties can be said to be institutionalized when it can deliver in a predictable manner durable governments based upon a firm allegiance between groups of citizens and their parties. As a consequence, in institutionalized party systems political actors develop a stable set of expectations and orientations about how decisions will be made and order maintained such that random shocks or deviant behaviours cannot alter the fundamental patterns of competition (which are presumed to prevail into the foreseeable future). This is also the reason why Sartori (1976) in his seminal work emphasized the need for a distinction between “structured” and “unstructured” party systems, the latter being in flux, presenting unclear and untested alternative to voters.

#### *Party Institutionalization*

Although widely employed in the literature, the concept of party institutionalization has often been poorly or ambiguously defined. Sometimes the notion is simply equated with

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<sup>7</sup> “Interaction” refers to the creation and dissolution of coalitions and alliances, or changing between behaviours of cooperation and competition.

that of party system institutionalization. Sometimes the term is simply used without further explanation. Hence, the lingering uncertainty about its “real” meaning.

Even if a number of scholars had employed the concept of institutionalization before, it was Huntington (1968) the first one who argued that it could well be applied to the analysis of political parties. Unfortunately, he did not spend that much time grappling with the concept and defining its precise meaning (just one sentence). Instead, he preferred to focus on the four indicators of the concept, namely: *adaptability*, *autonomy*, *complexity*, *coherence*.

Most scholars prefer to follow this pattern and merely suggest a series of “dimensions” or “ingredients” of institutionalization and then hasten to “operationalize” them. Janda (1980) suggests that an institutionalized political party must be “reified in the public mind”, and he immediately proceeds to apply this criterion – operationalized with six different variables - to the cross-national analysis of Western political parties; Panebianco (1988), a classic in the political science literature (Ware, 1996:94), applies the concept to the study of Western European political parties, identifying two different dimensions (i.e. *autonomy* and *systemness*); Dix (1992), who is interested in party institutionalization in Latin America, simply apply Huntington’s conceptual framework, although with a completely new set of operational indicators; Mainwaring and Scully (1995), clearly ignoring “the possibility for conflict between party and party system institutionalization” (Randall and Svåsand, 2002:7), incorporate in their voluminous work on Latin American party systems two dimensions (i.e. *stable party roots in society* and *party organization*) more appropriate to the study of party institutionalization than to the analysis of party systems *per se*; finally Jin (1995), in his study of party institutionalization in South Korea, includes the last two dimensions, while adding a further one (i.e. *party efficacy in the legislative process*).

As with the concept of party system institutionalization examined above, the fundamental problem running through all these studies is that they tend to pay very little attention to conceptualization. In fact, all of the abovementioned works are almost exclusively oriented toward an empirical assessment of institutionalization, but as we already know valid empirical analysis needs first a sound conceptual base. In this context, two studies are extremely remarkable, namely: Levitsky’s (1998) analysis of the transformation of the Justicialist Party in Argentina, and Randall and Svåsand’s (2002) analysis of the institutionalization of political parties in the “Third World”.



Well aware of the disjuncture between the initial conception of institutionalization and the way it has been elaborated and related to specific criteria by the majority of scholars, Levitsky suggests that “the concept of [party] institutionalization be unpacked” (1998:88). Thus, bearing in mind the predominant conceptualizations of institutionalization used in the literature of political parties, Levitsky distinguishes two different elements: (1) *value infusion* (i.e., the process by which an organization becomes infused with value beyond the technical requirement of task in hand), and (2) *behavioural routinization* (i.e., the routinization of the - formal or informal - “rules of the game” within a party). These are two different elements which do not necessarily occur or vary together. For this reason, political scientists interested in the study of party institutionalization should either conceptualize them separately, or clearly distinguish between them, when employed as part of the same concept.

Clearly influenced by Levitsky’s work, Randall and Svåsand distinguished four different dimensions of party institutionalization, understood as “the process by which [a] party becomes established in terms both of integrated patterns of behaviour and of attitudes, or culture” (2002:12). On the one hand, within the internal sphere,<sup>8</sup> both authors distinguish between *systemness*<sup>9</sup> (i.e., the increasing scope, density and regularity of the interactions that constitute the party as a structure) and *value infusion* which refers to the extent to which party actors and supporters acquire an identification with and commitment to a party. On the other hand, the external dimension includes *autonomy* (i.e., the degree of differentiation from other social groups and methods of behaviour), and *reification* which, capturing Janda’s notion, requires the party’s existence to be established in the public imagination (2001:80). Unfortunately, no appropriate indicators of the four dimensions above-cited are provided.<sup>10</sup>

As follows from this discussion, it becomes clear that the concept of “party institutionalization” is multifaceted, difficult to operationalize, and sometimes conducive to tautological argument. As a result, there is great deal of disagreement among scholars concerning the ways of conceptualizing the criteria of party institutionalization, their operationalization and measurement.

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that while internal aspects refer to developments within the party itself, external aspects have to do with the party’s relationship with society.

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly enough, they used the notion of “organization” instead of “systemness” in the first version of the 2002 article (see Randall and Svåsand, 2001:80).

<sup>10</sup> According to Randall and Svåsand (2002:15), “we are not [...] in a position to somehow compute and aggregate scores for parties on these different aspects of institutionalization in order to arrive at cumulative and comparative measure”.

Although no scholars have arrived at the same set of dimensions of party institutionalization, two broad areas of consensus concerning the elements of this concept seem to emerge from our analysis: the study of the institutionalization of a political party calls for a discussion of its *rootedness* and *systemness*. Party institutionalization involves then a combination of stable roots in society and firmly established and routinized organizational structures. In this sense, a party is more or less institutionalized to the extent that citizens in general and voters in particular infuse it with value, and party members behave in accordance with the procedures and norms established by the organization. Hence, party institutionalization can be defined as *the process by which parties evince consistent patterns of mass mobilization, internal organization and leadership succession*. In other words, when institutionalized, parties are expected to remain consistent with respect to party platform, ideology, label and organization, and therefore to maintain a fairly stable level of citizen support. This will clearly prevent them from disappearing from election to election, while helping to increase the legitimacy of the state partisan institutions such as the government, the parliament, the political class, etc.

### **The quality of democracy**

Similarly to the two phenomena previously studied, and as we will have the opportunity to see, the concept of “quality of democracy” is notoriously contested (Andreev, 2005). Even if some of the aspects of the quality of democracy had been the subject of empirical investigation before, it was Lijphart the first one who provided political scientists with a definition of the concept as “the degree to which a system meets such democratic norms as representativeness, accountability, equality and participation” (1993:149). In other words, in order to be considered a quality democracy, a polity not only has to fulfil a minimum of democratic principles, but it has to do so in a certain degree. Unfortunately, he did not spend that much time grappling with the notion. Instead, he preferred to focus on the different indicators of the concept, which not only were discussed insufficiently, but failed to provide a measure for all of the dimensions above-cited (e.g. accountability).

As in the case of our previous concept (i.e. institutionalization), the majority of scholars prefer to follow this pattern and simply refer to certain characteristics of the political (democratic) system itself, without examining the notion of “quality” itself. Putnam (1993) parallels the quality of democracy with institutional performance and government responsiveness; Lijphart (1999), once again, incorporates in his analysis of thirty-six

democracies such dimensions as female representation, electoral participation, satisfaction with democracy, and corruption; Altman and Pérez-Liñan (2002), who are interested in the functioning of democracy in Latin America, distinguish three aspects of quality: civil rights, participation, and competition; finally, Inglehart and Welzel (2008) suggests that “efficient” democracy combines formal democracy and elite integrity. In fact, the only exception to this principle of simply enumerating dimensions is Diamond and Morlino (2005), who in their introductory essay to *Assessing the Quality of Democracy* helpfully lay out a definition of the notion. However, while their discussion of the eight dimensions of quality is sufficient, the two authors fail to provide objective measures for the majority of them, weakening what is, otherwise, a solicitous theoretical model.

As it follows from the previous discussion, it seems clear that the normative and empirical implications of the concept, the lack of comparable information and, especially, the confusion with numerous terms that refer to similar things (“good” democracy, “effective” democracy, etc.) have made it difficult for scholars to agree on one definition (not to say measure) of the quality of democracy.

In this paper, and departing from Dahl’s (1971) minimum definition of democracy as entailing (1) a government responsive to citizen needs, (2) a set of institutionally protected rights and liberties, and (3) a process of contested elections with broad suffrage (Dahl 1971), I considered democratic quality to be characterised by “a stable institutional structure that realizes the liberty and equality of citizens through the legitimate and correct functioning of its institutions and mechanisms” (Morlino, 2006:7). In this sense, quality of democracy refers to the extent to which any given polity actualises its potential in terms of freedom, equality, accountability, responsiveness, and rule of law (Morlino, 2006).

### **On the relationship between institutionalization and the quality of democracy**

Comparative political theory points to a number of reasons why both party and party system institutionalization may foster the quality of democracy in a polity. Let’s see each of them in turn.

#### *Party system institutionalization and the Quality of Democracy*

According to the majority of scholars, few institutional developments are more dangerous to the healthy functioning of democracy than the development of weakly institutionalized party systems (Kitschelt et al., 1995; Mainwaring, 1999; Powell, 1982; Przeworski, 1975). According to Mainwaring and Torcal (2006), one of the main negative

consequences of low systemic institutionalization is the lack of programmatic representation. Thus, in weakly institutionalized party systems, political elites are more willing for the simply sake of power to overlook programmatic differences and furnish *ad hoc* political coalitions. As a result, citizens not only have problems to identify what the different political parties stand for, but also which parties are to be considered responsible for unwise or ineffective public policies (Birch, 2003). In the same vein, because in weakly institutionalized party systems voters find it almost impossible to “throw the rascals” out of office they may become increasingly frustrated with the system, rising the potential for voters to be attracted to populist parties and demagogic leaders, which not only tend to pursue policy measures with an eye toward publicity, but also may threaten the survival of the regime (Innes, 2002; Mainwaring, 1998).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in the tradition of Huntington (1968), O’Dwyer (2006) and Lewis (2006) theorized that fairly institutionalized party systems succeed to prevent, respectively, the patronage-led expansion of the state bureaucracy and corruption. Last but not least, some studies have hypothesized that the party system institutionalization contributes to the quality of democracy because it enhances the quality, stability, and predictability of the policymaking process (Dimitrov *et al.*, 2006; O’Dwyer and Kovalčík, 2007; Tommassi, 2006).

In conclusion, and bearing in mind that

Institutionalized party systems [...] increase democratic governability and legitimacy by facilitating legislative support for government policies; by channelling demands and conflicts through established procedures; by reducing the scope for populist demagogues to win power; and by making the democratic process more inclusive, accessible, representative, and effective (Diamond, 1997:xxiii)

it seems plausible to expect a positive correlation between the degree of party system institutionalization in a polity and a nation’s level of democratic quality (*Hypothesis 1*).

#### *Party institutionalization and the Quality of Democracy*

In one of the most famous quotes in the history of the analysis of political parties, Schattschneider (1942:1) wrote that “political parties created democracy and [...] modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties”. Although perhaps an extreme claim, few observers would deny that despite evident challenges to the position of political parties, such as the rise of new social movements and the extension of bureaucratic power,

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<sup>11</sup> The negative effects of fluid party systems for the good functioning of democracy in presidential (e.g., Latin America) or semi-presidential systems (e.g., Eastern Europe) is even higher, as charismatic leaders of minor parties running for the presidency have enormous chances of being elected.

democracy at the state level cannot operate effectively for very long without the organizing and channelling capabilities of institutionalized political parties (Diamond, 1989:21; Huntington, 1968; Mainwaring, O'Donnell, and Valenzuela, 1992).

More specifically, we may say that party institutionalization has positive implications for democratic accountability, both vertical and horizontal. In terms of the latter, politicians will be more accountable to party leaders in strongly organized political parties. In terms of the other, it seems clear that if party platforms come and go, appearing in one election and disappearing in the next, voters will surely encounter problems to perform any kind of retrospective evaluation of political parties and elites. Furthermore, as Zieliński, Słomczyński and Shabad (2005) have probed, if party organizations are weak, discipline is lax, and defections are common, accountability will be hampered as voters will find it almost impossible to punish legislators for poor performance or lack of representation. The latter aspect also points to inability of weakly institutionalized political parties to represent the interest of their voters. In fact, in systems where (generally badly organized) political parties lack stable roots in society, support for political organization tends to be low (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995). The problem is that in context like this, citizens may look for alternative (probably undemocratic) ways of representation, regardless of how well other institutions of the state are functioning (Innes, 2002).<sup>12</sup> Likewise, low levels of party institutionalization can have also negative consequences in terms of responsiveness: because party members see party platforms simply as an effective mean to fulfil their particular interests, and not as a tool to pursue common programmatic goals, they tend to act according to their own personal interests, and not to the preferences of voters (Levitsky, 1998). Finally, weakly institutionalized partisan organizations are more prone to be the prey of populist/charismatic leaders and become personal vehicles to power, with all the dangers this may have for the good functioning of democracy (e.g., personalistic control of candidate selection, lack of professionalization, etc.) and the consolidation of the regime (McGuire, 1997).

In conclusion, it follows from the above that since political parties can only satisfactorily fulfil many of their presumed democratic functions if the configuration of parties remains relatively stable and their intra-party organization endures, a positive

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<sup>12</sup> In this sense, it is important to note that the presence of well institutionalized party organizations, with their political connections, can help to stave off, or at make more difficult attempt to usurp power and implement an undemocratic regime (e.g. Spain in 1936).

relationship between party institutionalization and the quality of democracy is expected (*Hypothesis 2*).

## **Data and method**

The main goal of this paper is to test empirically for the effect party and party system institutionalization have on overall quality of democracy in a medium-N, cross-national framework. In our dataset, we include all those consolidated Eastern European democracies that have had a meaningful experience with democracy since the collapse of communism in 1989. *Consolidated* refers to all those political regimes which can already be labelled as “polyarchies”, as in theory the quality of democracy can only be examined in those polities fulfilling a minimum of democratic principles (Altman and Pérez-Liñan, 2002:1; Diamond and Morlino, 2005; Coppedge, 1997:179-180).<sup>13</sup>

Following the assumptions mentioned in the previous section about the importance of political parties and party systems in shaping the quality of democracy, this article tests the following two propositions: (a) as the degree of party system institutionalization increases, the quality of democracy increases; and (b) as the degree of political party institutionalization increases, the quality of democracy increases. To test these hypotheses, we must identify indicators of democratic quality and institutionalization as well as assess whether or not the latter accounts for any variation within the former’s values.

Because democracy scores are not available for every country in every year, a time series analysis will not be attempted. Cross-national comparisons will be made on the basis of the relative system and party institutionalization scores of each country with their relative quality of democracy scores in the period analysed.

The test of the relationship between variables is a simple one: analyze the correlation between the degree of party and party system institutionalization in these countries and the scores they receive in terms of democratic quality. Based on these findings, the best line of fit through the sample universe is examined. Three lines are attempted: linear, quadratic, and cubic; the line with the best fit best expresses the direction of the relationship. The value of this simple test is that it provides us with a visualization of the empirical relationship between cases. Due to the small sample size (9 countries), a more sophisticated regression technique will not be used in this paper.

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<sup>13</sup> Nations in Transit has an official minimum value (at 2.99 on a 1-7 scale) for a “consolidated” democracy. Consequently, all those Eastern European political regimes above the abovementioned threshold have been excluded from the analysis.

## Party system institutionalization in Eastern European democracies

The task of finding reliable and precise operational indicators for the empirical assessment of the conceptual scheme displayed above proves to be anything but easy. In this paper, and in order to analyse the institutionalization of party systems in new Southern and Eastern European democracies, I rely on Mair's (2000, 2007) model of party system analysis. There are three main reasons for this. In the first place, and more obviously, Mair's approach, advocating an interpretation of system institutionalization which addresses a party system's "core" (i.e., "the principal modes of interaction between parties and the way they compete with one another", 2006:65), enables party system institutionalization to be analysed independently of the static parameters of the subsystems (i.e. parties).<sup>14</sup> Second, through dealing with party system institutionalization in such terms, it becomes possible to evaluate different degrees of party system institutionalization.<sup>15</sup> Third, the latter can be done on the basis of a minimal number of robust indicators that "provide for large-scale geographic and inter-temporal comparisons" (Müller and Fallend, 2004:804).

According to Mair, the institutionalization of a party system occurs only when the patterns of interaction among political parties in successive periods of government formation become *predictable and stable* over time. In order to mark when a party system develops predictable and stable patterns of inter-party competition (for executive positions) and, thereby, to determine whether that system has institutionalized, he proposes to analyse three different, although clearly related, factors. The first is patterns of *alternations in government*: whether, in the case of a change of government, there is a total (wholesale) alternation of government in terms of its party composition, whether there is only partial alternation of this composition or whether there is no change at all.<sup>16</sup> The second factor, *innovation or familiarity of government alternatives*, indicates whether there are stable groups of parties that tend to govern together (familiarity) or whether there is a systemic tendency towards previously unseen party compositions being represented in the executive (innovation). The third factor that Mair proposes to analyse is party *access to government*. This is to indicate whether over a selected period of time all parties had a chance to enjoy

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<sup>14</sup> If party and party system institutionalization are not the same phenomenon, it seems obvious to operationalize the latter phenomenon with an eye to excluding indicators that measure aspects of party and not the system. This is something classical indicators (e.g., fragmentation, volatility) do not avoid.

<sup>15</sup> As Mainwaring and Scully (1995) originally maintained, party system institutionalization should be seen not as a dichotomous, but a continuous phenomena.

<sup>16</sup> As summarised by Müller and Strom (2000:12), the three criteria that are usually used to indicate a change of government or cabinet are (i) a change in the party composition; (ii) a change in the prime ministership; and (iii) new elections.

the spoils of office or whether some parties were permanently excluded from participation in government.

Based on these factors, Mair constructs two ideal types of party competition. The first type is the open structure, where there are (1) partial alternations of governments, (2) no stable compositions of governing alternatives and (3) access to government has been granted to all relevant parties. The closed structure presupposes that (1) alternations of governments are either total or none, (2) governing alternatives are stable over a long period of time, and (3) some parties are permanently excluded from participation in national government. Going back to the question of party systems institutionalization, it can be argued that a closed structure of party competition corresponds to an institutionalized party system, while an open structure of competition implies that the party system is weakly or not institutionalized.

[Table 1]

In order to minimize subjective judgements and opinions in the measurement of the elements of party system institutionalization, I quantitatively operationalize each of the factors suggested by Mair. Government changes receive a value of 1 on all those variables which correspond to a closed structure of competition, and a value of 0 on all those characterizing an open structure. The three variables are given equal weight in calculating the composite index of governmental closure. Being closed on one account (e.g. having wholesale alternation), but open on the other two variables (having innovative coalition and new parties) results in 33.3 percent on the overall dimension of stabilization. The values of individual government-changes are summed up and divided by the number of government changes experienced in the period under study.<sup>17</sup>

[Table 2]

Based on our own analysis, table 2 summarises the levels of systemic institutionalization in Eastern Europe. Our index seems to support the general view that the Hungarian and Czech party systems could be described as having the most stable party systems, as they clearly offer a higher measure of predictability to their voters. On the other hand, it also confirms the rather low levels of structuration displayed both in Bulgaria and Latvia.

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<sup>17</sup>A factor analysis of the governmental patterns of interaction in 23 “Second” and “Third Wave” European democracies revealed that the three variables align along one single principal component. For more details on the operationalization and calculation of the degree of institutionalization in Eastern European party systems, see Casal Bértoa (2007).



## Political party institutionalization in Eastern European democracies

The discussion in section 2 provides clear justification for our choice of the dimensions of the concept of party institutionalization. Hence, not only are we interested in examining the overall *rootedness* of political parties, we are also interested in their organizational *systemness*.

The degree of party institutionalization at large has been traditionally operationalized in several ways and using multiple indicators: party discipline (Kreuzer and Pettai, 2003; Panebianco, 1988; Shabad and Słomczyński, 2004); party identification (Dalton and Weldon, 2007; Mainwaring, 1998); party membership (Mair, 2005); levels of professionalization (Johnson, 2002) and personalism (Dix, 1992; Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006; Mény, 1990), the capacity of parties to sponsor parties cross-nationally (Rose and Mackie, 1988), the percentage of independent candidates (Birch, 1998; Moser, 1999; Protysk and Wilson, 2003), to name only a few.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, and notwithstanding their validity, none of the indicators seems to measure at the same time both rootedness and systemness. In order to achieve the latter, and because party (identification, discipline, professionalism, etc.) data is not available for every unit in every electoral period, I employ here Lewis' Index of Party Stabilization (IPS), which involves the progressive enhancement of the proportion of the total vote for political parties in a given election over time - by 20% for a party's second appearance in parliament, 40% for the third, 60% for the fourth, 80% for the fifth, and so forth (Lewis, 2006:574-575). Therefore, if a parliamentary party gets 35% of the votes in the first election, 40% in the second, and 10% in the third; a second parliamentary party gets 65% in the first election, 50% in the second, and 80% in the third; and a third party gets into parliament only after the second election with 10% of the vote; the IPS is calculated in the following way: for the first election  $35+65=100$ , for the second  $[48 (40+40*0.2)+60 (50+50*0.2)+10]=118$ , and for the third  $[14 (10+10*0.4)+112 (80+10*0.4)+12 (10+10*0.2)]=138$ . Then, the summed of the enhanced representation score in the three elections is divided by a notional total score of 360 (i.e. 100% for the first election, 120% for the second, and 140% for the third) and multiplied by 100. The logic is that, taking notice of both voter stability in voters' electoral preferences and the age of a party organization,<sup>19</sup> the

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<sup>18</sup> The absence of presidential elections in 4 of our 9 cases rules out a measure used elsewhere – i.e., the difference between presidential and legislative voting.

<sup>19</sup> Party age has been widely regarded by scholars as the most important measure of an organization (Dix, 1992; Huntington, 1968; Janda, 1980; Jin, 1995; Robert and Wibbels, 1999), with old parties considered to be more institutionalized than new ones. The logic is that, with some exceptions, effective institutions grow slowly, and the older and organization is, the more likely it is to endure even longer.

IPS measures the two dimensions of party institutionalization mentioned above. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics of the degree of party institutionalization in Eastern Europe.

[Table 3]

The above-displayed table does not greatly change the picture of institutionalization presented in Table 2, in as much as Hungary and the Czech Republic once again show stronger signs of political party institutionalization than the other Eastern European counterparts. It does, however, confirm that party and party system institutionalization, although closely related, are still distinct phenomena. From this perspective, weakly institutionalized Romanian, Slovenian and Bulgarian party systems count with the presence of more stable political parties than in other more institutionalized systems (e.g. Lithuania or Poland).

### **The quality of democracy in Eastern European democracies**

As Inglehart and Welzel have recognized, “the essence of democracy is that it empowers ordinary citizens” (2008:128). However, the means through which people are able to decide vary widely among democratic systems. This means that some countries will perform better than others in terms of democratic quality. It is in order to quantitatively measure the latter that an index is needed.

Although there are several ways of measuring democracy (Munck and Verkuilen, 2002; Przeworski, 2000), undoubtedly the single most widely-used measure of the quality of democracy in “Third Wave” democracies is the composite measure reported on annual basis by *Freedom in the World* of the extent to which political rights and civil liberties are widely distributed and securely guaranteed (e.g. Ekiert, 2003; Kitschelt *et al.*, 1999; Stockton, 2001; Vachudova, 2005). However, the Freedom in the World scores are an imperfect measure of the quality of democracy as they do not take into account all the dimensions of quality mentioned in section 3. In fact, out of the five dimensions of the quality of democracy, the Freedom in the World scores only fully refer to one (i.e. freedom) and partially to other two (i.e., equality and vertical accountability): rule of law, responsiveness and horizontal accountability are completely ignored by them. To overcome this problem, we use both the “corruption” and “judicial framework and independence” indices developed by *Nations in Transit*. These scores judge, respectively how corrupt the political, bureaucratic and economic practices of a country are, but also the degree to which citizens are equal before the law and to what extent the judicial power is independent. In this sense, the

Nations in Transit scores here reported fully measure a nation's rule of law, but also some aspects regarding three of the other four dimensions, namely: equality, horizontal accountability, and responsiveness (it is assumed that if political elites are not corrupt, they will respond better to the interest of voters in particular, and citizens in general). A first indication of the (content) validity (Adcock and Collier, 2001:538-540) of the latter is that the combined score of corruption and judicial framework and independence (from now on I will refer to it simply as "rule of law"),<sup>20</sup> is that it includes more dimensions than any other of the measures of democracy traditionally used (e.g., Freedom in the World, Polity IV, etc.). A second indication of the (convergent) validity (Adcock and Collier, 2001:540-542) of this later estimate is that it strongly correlates with the majority of the classical measures of democratic quality, namely: Freedom in the World, Bertelsmann Transformation Index, and Hadenius and Teorell's composite Index (2005).<sup>21</sup> Consequently, I operationalize "quality of democracy" (QoD) as the interaction between freedom rights and rule of law.

I measure freedom rights using the combined Freedom in the World (FiW) scores for civil and political rights.<sup>22</sup> Rule of Law is measured using the combined Nations in Transit (NiT) scores for corruption and judicial framework and independence. The scores from Freedom House (both FiW and NiT) range from 1 to 7 on each of the scales, with 1 indicating the highest and 7 the lowest level.<sup>23</sup> Since rule of law is considered to be a weighting factor and not a compensating factor,<sup>24</sup> I multiply (instead of adding) freedom rights by rule of law:

$$\text{QoD} = \text{Freedom rights} * \text{Rule of law}$$

This produces an index of the quality of democracy that has 49 as its maximum and 1 as its minimum. In order to ensure that my measure of the quality of democracy is subsequent in time to the institutionalization indicators and, at the same time, avoid endogeneity, I have collected the quality scores lagged by one year: therefore, the most

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<sup>20</sup> It is important to note here that prior to 2004, Nations in Transit reported measures of corruption and judicial framework and independence in a single composite score denominated "rule of law".

<sup>21</sup> Our measure of the "quality of democracy" scores correlate significantly ( $p < .01$ ) both with Freedom in the World (0.776) and Bertelsmann Transformation Index (0.823). It does also moderately correlate with Hadenius and Teorell's combined score (0.309, n.s.). Interestingly enough, although in the expected direction, it correlates very weakly with Polity IV (0.020, n.s.)

<sup>22</sup> On the validity of these indices compared to other democracy ratings see Bollen and Paxton (2000).

<sup>23</sup> On the use of continuous, rather than dichotomous, measures of democracy see Bollen and Jackman (1989), Elkins (2000) or Inglehart (2003).

<sup>24</sup> The idea of the "rule of law" as a weighting (not compensating) factor is taken from Inglehart and Welzel (2005, chapter 8).

recent Freedom House scores from 2008 are used, providing a measure of the quality of democracy in 2007.

[Table 4]

As Table 4 illustrates, Slovenia and Estonia display the higher levels of democratic quality among post-communist (consolidated) democracies, although Hungary and the Czech Republic closely follow suit. On the other side of the scale, the quality of democracy in Latvia and Bulgaria can be characterised as most certainly deficient.

### **Party system institutionalization and the quality of democracy in Eastern Europe**

Since an increasing score on the Freedom House indexes (both Freedom in the World and Nations in Transit) represents a decreasing quality of democracy, a negative correlation between the level of party system stability and a country's rating on the our index of democratic quality is expected by and would lend support to our first hypothesis that the degree of institutionalization of a nation's party system is associated with the quality of its democracy. A fairly strong negative correlation is found (-.501), although the results are not significant (table 5). However, this may simply be due to the rather low number of the cases being examined (just nine).

[Table 5]

When analysing the nature of the relationship between both phenomena, a cubic line of fit is found (figure 1), indicating that cases in the middle range of democratic quality rankings are fairly well distributed along the x axis, thereby creating a dip in the line. Thus, countries with the country with highest system institutionalization score (Hungary) displays a fairly high level of democratic quality. Countries in the midrange of system institutionalization rankings (Poland, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic) exhibit the greatest similarity in quality rankings, certainly suggesting that midranges of party system scores have less a straightforward effect on the functioning of democracy (Estonia being the main exception). Finally, and with the exception of Slovenia, cases with the lowest scores of institutionalization (Latvia, Bulgaria and Slovakia) are also among the lowest in terms of democratic quality.

[Figure 1]

Moreover, when dichotomizing the cases into halves along both axes, we find that three of the five cases ranked in the top half of system rankings are located in the top half of

democracy rankings, while in parallel three of the four less institutionalized systems fall in the bottom half of democracy rankings. In other words, while high levels of party system institutionalization are certainly associated with better functioning democracies (e.g. Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania), only very low levels of institutionalization are systematically associated with lower levels of democracy (e.g. Latvia, and Bulgaria).

On the other hand, and contrarily to what could have been expected, it is important to note that the relationship between party system institutionalization and the quality of democracy appears to be double-peaked, suggesting that countries pass through threshold points that have a positive effect on the quality of democracy just prior to passing through, followed by a marked decline just after passing through, before reaching a certain point where more institutionalization is certainly equivalent to a healthier functioning of democracy. As in Stockton's analysis of the relationship between party system institutionalization and the level of democracy in new Latin American and East Asian democracies, we also find that "countries pass through more than one threshold toward democracy [...] instead of the more common view [that there exists only a single threshold that when passed will lead to the [excellence] of democracy]" (2001:112).

Notwithstanding the latter, I am on safe ground when concluding that, in general there is a positive, although not linear, relationship between party system institutionalization and the quality of democracy; in other words, as the institutionalization of a country's party system increases, the quality of its democracy tends to improve.<sup>25</sup>

### **Party system institutionalization and the quality of democracy in Eastern Europe**

Bearing all the arguments put forward in section 4, a positive relationship between party institutionalization and the quality of democracy is expected. In contrast to what we have seen so far, the correlation coefficient, although in the expected direction, is everything but relevant (-0.182),<sup>26</sup> not to say significant (table 6), providing a very weak support for our second hypothesis that the degree of the institutionalization of political parties in a political system is associated with the quality of its democracy.<sup>27</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>25</sup> In fact, when I control for any of both of the two "outliers" (i.e. Estonia and Slovenia), the correlation coefficients immediately increase, acquiring significance ( $p < .05$ ) in the latter two cases (i.e. when I exclude only Slovenia or both countries at the same time).

<sup>26</sup> Please do remember what has been said about the fact that an increasing score on both of the Freedom House indexes represents a decreasing quality of democracy.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to note here that even if not relevant or significant, the relationship between party institutionalization and a nation's quality of democracy is still positive, contradicting Stockton's (2001:113-115) previous findings on the negative character of the abovementioned relationship.

although the best line of fit is still cubic (single peaked), the R-squared (0.138) is dramatically smaller in comparison to the test based on party system institutionalization scores.<sup>28</sup>

[Table 6]

These findings are important because not only question the general assumption the party institutionalization is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the quality of democracy (Diamond and Linz, 1989; Huntington, 1968; Mainwaring, O'Donnell and Valenzuela, 1992; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995); but also seem to question the main idea defended by some scholars that party assistance may help democracies not only to consolidate but flourish (see Burnell, 2006; Carothers, 2006).

However, this is not to say that party institutionalization does not have anything to do with the quality of democracy. As it result also from table 6, the institutionalization of the political parties conforming a party system seems to be positively (although not significantly) correlated with the stabilization and, therefore, institutionalization of that system as a whole (0.402). In fact, as it has been sustained elsewhere (Casal Bértoa, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c), a key prerequisite for party system institutionalization is having a party system whose member parties do not often change, are strongly rooted in society, and at the same time possess solid organizations (see also Mainwaring and Scully, 1995; Rose and Munro, 2003). For all these reasons, it seems reasonable and plausible to conclude that, although indirectly, party institutionalization also contributes to a nation's quality of democracy. Bearing in mind the latter, we may conclude with Diamond and Linz in that the degree of party institutionalization is still a "crucial [but indirect] consideration for democracy" (1989:21). In other words, if parties do not become institutionalized over time, a country's prospects for developing stable patterns of inter-party competition are limited, and consequently its quality of democracy is likely to suffer.

### **Conclusion**

Since Mainwaring and Scully (1995) trumpeted the importance of well institutionalized political parties and party systems for the consolidation and good functioning of democracy, numerous scholars have focused their efforts of the study of the relationship between institutionalization and democracy. Unfortunately, neither causation nor correlation between the two phenomena had been unambiguously demonstrated. This paper has sought to address this issue and bridge the gap by examining the relationship between party/party

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<sup>28</sup> Due to its lack of explanatory power, the figure illustrating the relationship between party institutionalization and the quality of democracy in young Eastern European democracies is not reported here.

system institutionalization and the level of democracy in 9 new Eastern European democracies.

The results of this analysis broadly support the traditional thesis that party and party system institutionalization are both important for the quality of democracy. However, while party system institutionalization seems to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the good functioning of democracy, it is only through the enhancement of the former that party institutionalization contributes (therefore, indirectly) to the quality of democracy in a polity. In any case, however, the relationship between institutionalization and the operation of democratic regimes may be considered to be neither unidirectional nor linear, demonstrating on the whole that the path toward democratic deepening is everything, but an easy one in which institutionalization and democracy go hand in hand.

If anything, the results suggest that more work needs to be done. First, it is necessary to extend the number of cases to allow for regression analysis as well as applying a more dynamic methodology. Second, because bivariate correlations give no indication of the direction of causality, an in-depth analysis of the sources and symptoms of institutionalization and democracy remains a necessary task. It is mainly for this reason that a case-study of those countries (outliers) where low levels of institutionalization are associated with relatively high levels democracy needs to be undertaken. Third, further research is needed to determine the specific threshold of institutionalization after which gains in quality of democracy level off. Finally, the absence of a significant direct correlation between party institutionalization and democracy may not be surprising, but nonetheless is important enough to be dealt with. In this sense, this analysis calls for an extension, so we may understand how the effects of institutionalization on the quality of a democratic polity may vary by region or regime type.

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## Tables

Table 1. Party system institutionalization (operationalization)

<b>Features</b>	<b>Institutionalized Party systems</b>	<b>Weakly institutionalized party systems</b>
<i>Alternation of government</i>	Wholesale/None (1)	Partial (0)
<i>Governing formulae</i>	Familiar (1)	Innovative (0)
<i>Access to government</i>	Closed (1)	Open (0)

Source: Adapted from Mair (1996:95)

Table 2. Party system institutionalization in Eastern Europe

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Time Span</b>	<b>Index of PSI (%)</b>
Hungary	1990-2006	77.8
Czech Republic	1993-2006	55.6
Lithuania	1992-2006	55.6
Poland	1991-2006	46.2
Estonia	1992-2006	44.4
Slovenia	1993-2006	33.3
Slovakia	1993-2006	33.3
Bulgaria	1991-2006	25.0
Latvia	1993-2006	23.8

Sources: All data on party systems and government formation are based on Müller-Rommel *et al.* (2004), but cross-checked with information provided by the *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbooks*, and by country experts and sources on the World Wide Web.

Table 3. Party institutionalization in Eastern Europe

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Electoral periods</b>	<b>IPS (%)</b>
Hungary	5	90.8
Czech Republic	5	86.0
Slovenia	4	84.8
Bulgaria	5	79.7
Estonia	4	75.5
Latvia	5	73.9
Lithuania	4	73.3
Slovakia	5	70.3
Poland	5	62.9

Sources: Lewis (2006), and own calculations.

Table 4. The Quality of Democracy in Eastern Europe

<b>Country</b>	<b>Democratic Quality Score (2007)</b>
Slovenia	1.88
Estonia	2.00
Hungary	2.38
Czech Republic	2.63
Lithuania	2.75
Poland	2.75
Slovakia	2.88
Latvia	3.57
Bulgaria	4.70

Sources: Freedom in the World (2007) and Nations in Transit (2007).

Table 5. Party system institutionalization and the quality of democracy

		<i>Quality of democracy</i>
<i>Party System Institutionalization</i>	Pearson Correlation	-.501
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.169
	N	9



Table 6. Party institutionalization and the quality of democracy

		Quality of democracy	Party System Institutionalization
Party Institutionalization	Pearson Correlation	-.182	.402
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.640	.284
	N	9	9

Figure 1. Party system institutionalization and the quality of democracy

