

**Workshop 1: The Nationalisation of Party Systems in Central and Eastern Europe,
directed by Ingrid van Biezen and Daniele Caramani**

Party System Institutionalisation in East-Central Europe: Empirical Dimensions and Tentative Conclusions

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Abstract

The nationalisation of party systems is a topic closely related to processes of party system institutionalisation, an area that has developed its own literature and dimensions of analysis. Institutionalisation is understood to comprise four main dimensions: the growth of stability in the rules and nature of inter-party competition, the development of stable roots in society that help ensure a measure of regularity in how people vote, the acquisition of legitimacy by parties and the electoral process, and the establishment of party organisation that have an independent status and some value in their own right. The idea of party system institutionalisation was first presented by S. Mainwaring and T. Scully in 1995 and has been developed in a range of other publications, mostly by Mainwaring with a number of different contributors. It was first developed in a Latin American context but has an obvious relevance to developments in other newly democratising countries. In terms of outcomes, party system institutionalisation is understood to have a strong impact on the quality of democracy and to reduce tendencies to clientelism, political populism and the growth of anti-politics sentiments, and to foster mechanisms of democratic accountability and effective policy formulation. Over the years, a substantial literature on the process of party system institutionalisation has been produced and, in recent years, a growing proportion of this has concerned systems in Central and Eastern Europe. This paper will, firstly, survey and evaluate some of the most recent literature with a view to establishing what light it sheds on the process in East-Central Europe and, secondly, identify and assess the key data that enable any judgement to be made on the course of this process in the region and to identify the contributions in this area of various data-bases relating to party politics.

Party system institutionalisation (PSI) can be claimed to be a major dimension both of political party and broader democratic development. The notion of an institutionalised party system was first presented in a book published in the mid-1990s, when four conditions for institutionalisation were specified:

first ('and most important') was stability in the rules and nature of inter-party competition, secondly, parties had to have 'somewhat stable roots in society' that helped provide a basic measure of regularity in how people vote, third, major political actors had to accord legitimacy to parties and the electoral process, fourthly, party organisations had to acquire an independent status and value of their own.¹

There is a close correspondence here with the process of party system nationalisation as the progressive formation and integration of electoral behaviour, issues, alignments, and party organisations that is the topic of this workshop – with the variables acting in this context, of course, at national level and on a territorial plane rather than in one focusing on social implantation and a major concern for legitimacy. A recent study of the levels and dynamics of institutionalisation of party systems in the former republics of the Soviet Union pays, therefore, close attention to levels of party nationalisation as a good indicator of institutional autonomy.² Equally, the related areas of study draw on common sets of data – I. van Biezen and D. Carmani thus link levels of structuration and volatility of party systems with contrasting experiences of national democratic politics in their analysis of cleavage politicisation.³

Existing analysis suggests that levels of party system institutionalisation and degrees of party nationalisation are both lower in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) than in established democracies, with the same groups of countries scoring in similar ways on the different scales.⁴ Opinions differ, however, on whether party systems in the new democracies of CEE are significantly institutionalised – and even whether they exist at all in some countries.⁵ If there is no consensus on the state of party system institutionalisation in CEE, it is also the case – as Mainwaring and Zoco have recently pointed out – that little is also known

¹ Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press (1995), pp.4-5. The conditions remained largely unchanged in subsequent formulations.

² Andrey A. Meleshevich, *Party Systems in Post-Soviet Countries*, Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp.77-85.

³ 'Cleavage structuring in Western vs Central and Eastern Europe: state formation, nation-building and economic modernisation', paper prepared for ECPR Joint Sessions in Helsinki (2007), workshop on Politicising Socio-Cultural Structures: Elite and Mass Perspectives on Cleavages, p.36.

⁴ Daniel Bochsler, 'The nationalization of political parties', *CEU Political Science Journal 1*, pp.14-16.

⁵ A range of views on this issue is presented and discussed by Paul G. Lewis, 'Party systems in post-communist Central Europe: patterns of stability and consolidation', *Democratization* vol.13, 4 (2006), pp.563-5.

about what causes PSI.⁶ While analyses of party systems proliferated from the later 1980s, Mainwaring remarked in 1998, political scientists had not done much to advance the nature of the study or challenge the way in which party systems were typically thought about or compared.⁷ Analyses of West European and US party systems had long dominated the theoretical literature, but in that context there was relatively little cross-national variation in institutionalisation and thus little general interest in directing attention to the phenomenon. A similar remark has been made about the study of party and party system nationalisation.⁸ In the context of party system institutionalisation, things did not greatly change in the following decade. Even now those concerned with the comparative study of party systems and their development still tend – particularly if the bulk of their work has focused on the established Western democracies – in effect to ‘read off’ party systems from the relatively high levels of democratic development and consolidation that have been achieved in CEE, and thus often to assume a degree of PSI that does not really exist on the ground.

Recent work in this area has not been lacking, although some aspects of PSI are more intensively researched than others. Electoral volatility is generally the best covered area⁹ although there are also other foci of analysis: partisanship¹⁰, party stability¹¹, ideology¹², patterns of representation and effectiveness¹³, cleavage patterns¹⁴, and electoral systems¹⁵. Mainwaring and Torcal have recently presented a broader overview of the PSI process, but still focus on just two of the four dimensions of PSI.¹⁶ Apart from this, attempts to present a

⁶ Scott Mainwaring and Edurne Zoco, ‘Political sequences and the stabilization of interparty competition: electoral volatility in old and new democracies’, *Party Politics* vol.13, 2 (2007), p.155.

⁷ Scott Mainwaring, ‘Party systems in the third wave’, *Journal of Democracy* July 1998, p.67.

⁸ M. P. Jones and S. Mainwaring, ‘The nationalization of parties and party systems: an empirical measure and an application to the Americas’, *Party Politics* vol.9, 2 (2003), p.158.

⁹ Mainwaring and Zoco, ‘Political sequences’; Jan-Erik Lane and Svante Ersson, ‘Party system instability in Europe: persistent differences in volatility between the west and east’, *Democratization* vol.14, 1 (2007); Margit Tavits, ‘The development of stable party support: electoral dynamics in post-communist Europe’, *American Journal of Political Science* vol.49, 2 (2005).

¹⁰ Russell J. Dalton and Steven Weldon, ‘Partisanship and party system institutionalization’, *Party Politics* vol.13, 2 (2007).

¹¹ Lewis, ‘Party systems’.

¹² Shale Horowitz and Eric C. Browne, ‘Sources of post-communist party system consolidation: ideology versus institutions’, *Party Politics* vol.11, 6 (2005).

¹³ Jack Bielasiak, ‘Party competition in emerging democracies: representation and effectiveness in post-communism and beyond’, *Democratization* vol.12, 3 (2005).

¹⁴ Ian McAllister and Stephen White, ‘Political parties and democratic consolidation in post-communist societies’, *Party Politics* vol.13, 2 (2007); Jakub Zielinski, ‘Translating social cleavages into party systems’, *World Politics* vol.54 (2002 January).

¹⁵ Jack Bielasiak, ‘The institutionalization of electoral and party systems in post-communist states’, *Comparative Politics* 2002 (January).

¹⁶ Scott Mainwaring and Mariano Torcal, ‘Party system institutionalization and party system theory after the third wave of democratization’, in *Handbook of Party Politics* (ed. Richard S. Katz and William Crotty), London, Sage Publications (2006). Apart from electoral volatility they also discuss the social rootedness of

more comprehensive analysis of PSI and the different factors involved in it have been notable by their absence.

The measures of PSI are in themselves quite simple although when it comes to operationalisation a more complex set of issues is raised. On the face of it they also seem to encompass a range of key variables relating to the development and stabilisation of party systems even if, as Wolinetz points out, they refer less to the ways in which parties relate to one another than to how they enlist the support of the electorate and structure it politically.¹⁷ The idea of a party system used in this context is a standard one, ‘the set of patterned interactions in the competition among parties’.¹⁸ This is little different from the classic Sartori definition, which refers to the ‘system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition’.¹⁹ The focus on institutionalisation leaves open the question of whether a set of patterned interactions or such a system exists in the first place – an issue not without relevance in contemporary CEE – but this is not one I will pursue in the current context.

Existing evidence on PSI is patchy – fuller in some areas than others and diverse in its implications. With respect to electoral volatility and the stabilisation of patterns of inter-party competition (**Condition 1**) Mainwaring and Zoco found that CEE party systems (using the term loosely – irrespective of whether there is anything really systematic about them) are highly fluid, like most of those inaugurated after 1978. This date generally marked the emergence of television as a major factor in election campaigning that enabled politicians to avoid the arduous chore of intensive party-building but also had the effect of leaving a gap that parties previously filled by helping to form strong civic identities and political loyalties. Compared with other cohorts of new democracies, party systems in those inaugurated post-1978 therefore show fewer signs of stabilising over time, a feature associated with several perverse outcomes for party politics. Large numbers of citizens in such polities tend to believe, for example, that parties persistently fail them and they become increasingly disillusioned, disaffected and often hostile towards party organisations. By way of response, their elected representatives tend to engage in collusion and develop predatory attitudes in

parties – although mostly in terms of patterns of presidential voting, which is of less relevance to the CEE context.

¹⁷ Steven B. Wolinetz, ‘Party systems and party system types’, in *Handbook of Party Politics*, p.53. See also P. Webb and S. White, ‘Conceptualizing the institutionalization and performance of political parties in new democracies’, in P. Webb and S. White (eds), *Political Parties in New Democracies*, Oxford: OUP (2007).

¹⁸ Mainwaring and Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions*, p.4.

¹⁹ Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: a Framework for Analysis*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press (1976), pp.43-4.

their professional activity, further feeding civic disillusion and popular anti-political attitudes.²⁰ From this perspective, the process of PSI receives a permanent setback.

Van Biezen and Caramani find clear evidence of high electoral volatility in East-Central Europe, although at lower levels by the time of the fifth and sixth elections.²¹ Lane and Ersson have also identified higher levels of electoral volatility in CEE than in Western Europe from 1990 onwards. However, as they also detect a significant impact of socio-economic modernisation on net volatility they expect it to decrease as post-communist economic development continues to make progress. While, too, Western Europe has seen rising volatility since the early 1990s they foresee increasing convergence between such aspects of party system instability in the different regions of Europe.²² Tavits also identifies high electoral volatility in Eastern Europe and a tendency for it to increase in the early years of democratic transition. But she also finds it decreasing once the democracies have had time to mature, and argues that the electoral arena begins to move towards stabilisation after about eleven years of democratic experience, a process facilitated by the growth of supportive institutional structures and good economic performance.²³ Bielasiaik's data, on the other hand, show a further increase in average volatility even in the fifth round of democratic elections in Eastern Europe.²⁴ In common with Tavits, Mainwaring and Torcal also find that GDP per capita is a powerful predictor of electoral volatility but argue (in line with Mainwaring's later analysis) that the main explanation is not a modernisation argument but one rooted in the different social conditions under which early democratisations occurred and the party systems of established democratic regimes were inaugurated. Weak institutionalisation and high volatility, they argue, 'could go on for an extended period'.²⁵

While there is substantial consensus on the high levels of electoral volatility in CEE, then, there is disagreement about its extent and the direction of change. One obvious reason for this is the slightly different data sets and groups of countries chosen for analysis. Mainwaring with both Zoco and Torcal (using Comparative Study of Electoral Systems: CSES and World Values Study: WVS data²⁶) includes eleven countries, Tavits covers fifteen and Lane and Ersson seventeen. Bielasiaik includes ten countries in his East European set and a further eight in that covering the former Soviet Union. This also raises doubts about the

²⁰ Mainwaring and Zoco, 'Political consequences'.

²¹ 'Cleavage structuring', p.16.

²² Lane and Ersson, 'Party system instability'.

²³ Tavits, 'Development of stable party support'.

²⁴ 'Party competition in emerging democracies', p.338.

²⁵ 'Party system institutionalization and party system theory', p.209.

²⁶ Home websites at <http://www.cses.org/> and <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>.

democratic nature of some polities and how far the conditions really are in place for the development of a system composed of authentically competitive parties.²⁷ There will also be technical differences in way in which the different parties are taken into account (cut-off points for party size and electoral strength, for example) and perceptions of separate party identity (when does a party change sufficiently for it to be regarded as a different entity?): see Table 1. Different forms of statistical manipulation will introduce a further effect and the coverage of different time-periods will also change the picture. There are, finally, questions of judgement and expectation that enter into any predictive activity. Lane and Ersson, as well as Tavits, expect steady economic growth to impact on electoral activity in a relatively unproblematic way while Mainwaring and his collaborators see a clear qualitative change having occurred in the conditions under which party systems develop (or fail to do so) in new democracies. As reported above, their analysis of volatility is thus set in a far richer account of the changing nature of party politics overall.

Table 1: Mean Volatility Since 1990 (%)

	Lane and Ersson	Mainwaring and Zoco
Czechia	17.9	25.7
Slovakia	22.0	-
Slovenia	22.6	38.2
Romania	24.2	53.0
Hungary	25.2	25.1
Bulgaria	27.7	36.8
Poland	27.8	46.6
Estonia	32.2	45.4
Latvia	43.0	56.2
Lithuania	45.2	49.1

The table is simply presented to illustrate the different data used to calculate overall outcomes – much of the literature just reports statistical outcomes, so in those cases there is no way of knowing what data are actually used; despite the differences shown above, note that there is general agreement in the overall ranking – although the case of Romania stands out (hardly a competitive pluralist system for much of the period anyway).

The simple factor of time means that all these items of analysis are now somewhat dated. Four elections took place during 2006 in the four new EU member states alone, and two more were held in 2007 (Estonia and Poland). Volatility in the most recent elections has yet be taken account of, but was yet higher in the 2005 Polish election on several scores.²⁸ On

²⁷ See Paul G. Lewis, *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, London, Routledge (2000), pp.125-9.

²⁸ Radoslaw Markowski, 'EU membership and the Polish party system', in *The European Union and Party Politics in Central and Eastern Europe* (ed. Paul G. Lewis and Zdenka Mansfeldová), Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan (2006), p.129.

the face of it, however, this round of elections showed some signs of unusual stability. In contrast to the established CEE tendency of governments losing elections, half of those held in 2006-7 were won by incumbent parties (Hungary, Latvia, Estonia). Even in Poland, the 2005 election saw the same six parties being returned to parliament with no new entrants in 2007 either.

Investigation of the contemporary conditions for PSI in new CEE democracies will obviously benefit from study of the most recent data but even then, in an area where extensive analysis of electoral volatility has already been conducted, it may still be queried whether Condition 1 has been fully investigated in anything like a comprehensive fashion. Studies of electoral volatility produce only limited data on how far stability in the rules and nature of inter-party competition has been established. They provide some information about stability in electoral competition, but they primarily shed light on the nature of elector-party relations and the degree of regularity in voter choice. They do not generally provide a basis for pronouncements about party system stability in terms of the pattern of relations between electoral contenders or what Mainwaring calls 'continuity in the components that form the system'.²⁹ It is a factor prominent in an approach that focuses more directly on relations between parties than on party-voter links.

It is in this context that James Toole has applied Mair's model of the structure of inter-party competition to estimate the level of party system stabilisation in East-Central Europe.³⁰ On two out of three measures the structure of competition for government in Hungary and the Czech Republic was already found to be closed by the late 1990s, a situation that reflected a relatively advanced stage of party system stabilisation – particularly over the short time span considered. Stabilisation was less advanced in Poland, where the structure of competition was only closed on one count. Relevant factors here were found to be party systems in Hungary and the Czech Republic with more stable membership (i.e. fewer parties entered or left the system at each election), lower levels of fractionalisation and an electoral system that secured an appropriate balance between disproportionality and fractionalisation (the original Polish system having been highly dysfunctional in this respect). Despite having been conducted at a relatively early stage, the continuing relative stability of the Hungarian and Czech party systems suggests that the analysis identified some important factors in PSI. But it is also a very different way of approaching Condition 1 from that which focuses on volatility, a fact

²⁹ Scott P. Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press (1999), p.24.

³⁰ 'Government formation and party system stabilization in East Central Europe', *Party Politics* vol.6, 4 (2000).

indicating that different techniques and methodologies need to be employed to develop a more comprehensive analysis. Apart from wide-ranging statistical analysis, then, the way that parties operate in specific systems also needs to be examined – particularly if variations within CEE party systems are to be identified as well as cross-regional differences.

Condition 2 for PSI concerns the success that parties have in putting down relatively stable roots in society. In this respect citizens need to develop some attachment to a party and party labels should have some meaning for the voters they are intended to attract, which in party system terms means that consistency in the relative ideological position of the different parties needs to develop.³¹ This is also linked with parties' ability to survive, as the fact that individual parties endure suggests that they have captured the long-term loyalties of some social groups.³² Analysis that contributes to an understanding of this PSI condition has recently been conducted by Dalton and Weldon on the basis of CSES data. Not surprisingly, they suggest that partisan attachment is generally stronger in older democracies, is less intense for younger generations in new democracies and develops less successfully through the years.³³ Their further analysis, on the other hand, seems to lead to some ambiguous and (to my mind) rather confused conclusions.³⁴

Neither is their database likely to shed much light on differential developments within CEE in this respect. Ten CEE countries are covered in some way in the two CSES modules, but only three (Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic) are covered in both modules, thus giving the possibility of tracing the development of partisan attachment. Module 1 shows Poland (together with Russia and Ukraine) to have a relatively high level of attachment which then declines in Module 2. The Hungarian and Czech levels of attachment start lower but then increase, which at least seems to accord with Toole's findings concerning PSI Condition 1 (as well as more intuitive perceptions). Surprisingly, too, Module 1 shows Slovenia to have a very low level of partisan attachment, surpassing only Belarus of all the cases mentioned (Table 2).

A second analysis in this area confronts the issue of the programmatic or ideological structuring of party competition, which involves consideration of spatial models of voting, social cleavage theory and location on a left-right continuum. In this context Mainwaring and

³¹ Mainwaring and Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions*, p.5.

³² Mainwaring, 'Party systems in the third wave', p.73.

³³ 'Partisanship and party system institutionalization', pp.185-6.

³⁴ 'Where partisan learning can occur...these effects are stronger in new democracies. *It is not that citizens in new democracies are not learning partisanship, rather, it is that the conditions where partisan learning can occur are lacking...* This presents a bit of a chicken and egg problem...If elites can build a functioning

Torcal find a strong correlation between ideological voting and the stability of interparty competition overall. Such voting patterns are, however, much weaker in most post-1978 competitive regimes, personalistic attachments possibly being the most convincing explanation for this tendency. Nevertheless, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic show high levels of ideological structuring but still have moderate to high electoral volatility.³⁵ On the basis of a study of twenty-three post-communist democracies, Horowitz and Browne also highlight the strength of ideological voting in the process of party system consolidation and argue in effect that PSI depends on ideological consolidation as much as on institutional rules like electoral systems or strong presidencies.³⁶

A further contribution in this area focuses on parties and the process of democratic consolidation, although in practice its attention is more directed towards the representation of social cleavages and party system consolidation from this perspective. CSES data is again used, and only six post-communist countries fall within the ambit of the study. The general conclusion is that parties operate to represent social cleavages less effectively in post-communist countries, although representation is already thought to be working quite effectively in view of the short period for which competitive parties have been working (particularly, once again, in Hungary and the Czech Republic).³⁷ There are, however, certain doubts about the relevance of this analysis to the purported focus of the study – left-right self-placement is used as a surrogate measure of party support, for example, and the appropriateness of this substitution may be questioned (as it is, indeed, by the authors themselves in fn.8). Generally speaking, then, the evidence for PSI Condition 2 – the extent to which parties have rooted themselves in society – is quite patchy. If the key point is how far voters have developed an attachment to a party, the direct evidence is quite thin and inconclusive. CSES data provide the main guidance, and it seems to me that questions of ideological structuring approach the topic in a somewhat tangential manner. CSES data on partisanship, which are generally quite dated, may also be supplemented by the European Election Survey (EES)³⁸, which has not otherwise been used in the publications referred to (see Table 2).

democratic party system, then partisanship should follow', *ibid*, p.192. Whether partisan attachment is actually developing in new democracies and PSI is making progress therefore appears to be quite opaque.

³⁵ 'Party system institutionalization and party system theory', p.211.

³⁶ 'Sources of post-communist party system consolidation', p.702.

³⁷ McAllister and White, 'Political parties and democratic consolidation'.

³⁸ Home website at <http://www.europeanelectionstudies.net/>.

Table 2: Percentage of Population Feeling Close to a Party

	1996/8 (CSES Module 1)	2001/2 (CSES Module 2)	2004 (EES)
Czech Republic	44.7	57.9	62.7
Slovakia	-	-	56.5
Bulgaria	-	42.7	-
Poland	48.4	37.6	50.8
Estonia	-	-	40.5
Latvia	-	-	39.6
Romania	44.4	-	-
Hungary	34.9	52.3	37.6
Lithuania	30.6	-	-
Slovenia	20.1	-	33.6

By way of conclusion about information shedding light on Condition 2 for PSI, then, it seems clear that a relatively high proportion of Czechs show an increasing attachment to a party, which certainly fits with other data on the country's party system. But data on Hungary, where one might have expected similar developments, turn out to be mixed. Limited information on Slovakia suggests a high level of PSI, which seems quite questionable, while Slovenia scores surprisingly low. Indices for Poland are mixed and quite inconclusive (perhaps EES taps different attitudes for some reason). All in all the data on partisanship are very limited, and more regular scores would be needed for a more convincing account of party attachment and its overall trajectory to be constructed.

PSI **Condition 3** concerns the acquisition of legitimacy by political parties and the electoral process. At present I cannot think of any recent publications that address this issue on a comparative empirical basis, neither does there seem to be much material that can be brought to bear on it. CSES Module 1 had a question in the appropriate area but it was not repeated in Module 2. Nevertheless, if people support the democratic system and answer positively to a question on whether political parties are needed in such a political order, that would seem to be a reasonable expression of legitimacy sentiments. WVS data provide information on whether people value the possession of a democratic system while CSES asked whether democracy was better than other forms of government, which gives some guidance to sentiments on the first topic (Table 3). The data from 1996/7 on whether parties are necessary to make the democratic system work is rather more limited.

Support for democratic principles seems to vary roughly in line with other conceptions of PSI, with the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Hungary all ranking quite high, while variation in the endorsement of parties is somewhat wider (Table 4). The findings with regard to

Table 3: How Many Value Democracy (%)?

	WVS (1995/9)	CSES (2001/2)
Czech Republic	87.6	74.7
Slovenia	81.6	-
Slovakia	81.5	-
Hungary	80.8	75.6
Romania	77.6	-
Latvia	77.5	-
Poland	76.5	69.4
Estonia	75.5	-
Lithuania	68.4	-
Bulgaria	68.2	53.5

Romania are most surprising here, and the fact that the country hardly had a competitive pluralist system in the mid-90s again raises questions about the comparability of the data. Apart from that, the general ranking of Czechia, Hungary and Poland is in line with previous findings, while the score for Slovenia is quite low. However, these findings are now dated (1996/8) and give no idea of change or development. It might be argued that questions about feelings of confidence and trust in parties provide equivalent information, and Eurobarometer³⁹ and WVS findings might therefore be of some use here (Table 5). In terms of PSI and general perceptions of party system development the relatively high ranking of Hungary through to 2004-6 is not surprising here, nor is that of Estonia and Slovenia in general terms. More surprisingly, Romania again scores quite high and the Czech Republic rather low. Less surprising are the low scores of Poland and Latvia. Overall trajectories are another matter, particularly in relation to the decline in levels of trust seen in Hungary (although such scores seem to fluctuate considerably over the years and different sources are used here). Other countries, on the other hand, generally show more stability and less striking change.

Table 4: Percentage of Population Thinking that Parties Are Necessary For Political System

	Generally necessary	Generally unnecessary
Romania	75.9	10.4
Czech Republic	72.4	6.1
Hungary	69.4	9.1
Poland	61.3	10.3
Slovenia	57.5	15.3
Lithuania	50.0	19.8

³⁹ Home website at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm.

Table 5: Feelings of Confidence/Trust in Parties (%)

	1995/8 (WVS)	2001/3 (Eurobar)	2004/6 (Eurobar)
Hungary	19	29	19
Estonia	22	13	18
Slovenia	13	16	16
Romania	13	14	13
Czech Republic	14	12	12
Lithuania	12	8	10
Slovakia	21	10	8
Bulgaria	27	9	8
Latvia	9	9	8
Poland	11	11	6

In relation to PSI **Condition 4** – the development of party organisations that are valued and have an independent status – comparative CEE data is almost totally lacking. In an article introducing a recent symposium on party system development issues Joseph LaPalombara notes with reference to CSES data that, ‘Rich though these materials and the research based on them may be, they leave us with scant information regarding the internal organizational nature and dynamics of political parties’.⁴⁰ Individual studies of different aspects of party organisation appear on occasion,⁴¹ but it is hardly possible to produce any comprehensive overview. As editors of a recent comparative work on party development in new democracies which spans Eastern Europe and Latin America, Webb and White also find it hardest to summarise the information on party organisation development given the ‘patchy or imprecise nature of much of the data’.⁴² They point to the relative organisational strength of communist or former communist parties, but this is now a declining asset. In view, too, of the swift demise and marginalisation of the Polish SLD – once thought to be a prime example of a successfully reformed communist party – this may be less of a significant factor in the PSI process in East-Central Europe than the authors suggest. Condition 4 thus produces the greatest challenge in the search for data to conduct comparative analysis of PSI.

What do these perspectives suggest about the state of PSI in contemporary CEE? On the basis of roughly a decade’s experience of post-communist pluralism and competitive party politics, some general proposals were made about levels of party system development and

⁴⁰ ‘Reflections on political parties and political development, four decades later’, *Party Politics* vol.13, 2 (2007), p.150.

⁴¹ For example, Lukáš Linek and Štěpán Pecháček, ‘Low membership in Czech political parties: party strategy or structural determinants?’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* vol. 23, 2 (2007), Maria Spirova, ‘Political parties in Bulgaria: organizational trends in comparative perspective’, *Party Politics* vol.11, 5 (2005).

⁴² *Party Politics*, p.356.

consolidation throughout the region. In 2000 I suggested that the process was more advanced in Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic – as well as in Lithuania, where this view was soon proved to be erroneous as the 2000 election ushered in a period of major party system change.⁴³ A few years later Francis Millard similarly wrote that Hungary, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic could loosely be described as having ‘stable party systems offering a measure of predictability to their voters’, with Estonia also appearing to have reasonably durable parties.⁴⁴ Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic also had the most enduring parties throughout this period, with Poland and Latvia showing the greatest fluidity.⁴⁵ The data presented above generally substantiate these conclusions. Mean volatility measures (Lane and Ersson, Mainwaring and Zoco, and van Biezen and Carmani) are uniformly low for Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic, although other countries (particularly Slovakia) do not seem to have that different a record according to some measures. Toole found the structure of competition in Hungary and the Czech Republic to be closed at a relatively early stage.

CSES data showed Czechs and Hungarians to have rising levels of party attachment from the mid-1990s, although EES findings did not show this continuing for Hungary into 2004. Slovenia did not score highly in this area at all. In the area of party competition, the Czech Republic also had a level of ideological structuring, while representation also seemed to be working effectively in Hungary and the Czech Republic. WVS and CSES data show a high value being attached to democracy in Hungary, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic – as well as Slovakia. Rather old (Module 1) CSES data also showed Czechs and Hungarians – in the rather surprising company of Romanians – strongly endorsing the role of political parties in the democratic regime. Levels of confidence in parties were relatively high in Hungary, particularly in more recent years, reasonably so in Slovenia but less the case in the Czech Republic. Empirical data relevant to the different dimensions of PSI thus generally substantiate earlier views expressed about party system consolidation in Hungary and the Czech Republic, although somewhat less in Slovenia. But the degree of empirical support that can be found for the original proposals is not particularly striking.

What, if any, conclusions can be drawn about the study of PSI overall? Firstly, even where it does exist, comparative data over time is pretty limited. Information on electoral volatility presents the fewest problems, and can obviously be updated with successive elections. Further work nevertheless needs to be conducted to produce a fuller picture of the

⁴³ Lewis, *Political Parties*, p.133.

⁴⁴ *Elections, Parties, and Representation in Post-Communist Europe*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan (2004), pp.143, 153.

⁴⁵ Lewis, ‘Party systems’.

pattern of inter-party competition. Survey data – CSES, WVS, EES, Eurobarometer – can be drawn on for analysis of Conditions 2 and 3, and some analysis (not necessarily wholly convincing) has already been conducted and published with respect to Condition 2. Even then, evidence for partisanship is pretty limited and restricted to three time-shots at most for the post-1996 period. Material on legitimacy is even more restricted, and that for organisation yet more so.

Eurobarometer surveys are run more frequently, and yearly snapshots of popular trust in parties and related topics like satisfaction with democracy are produced. They suggest either that there is still major fluidity in such sentiments in some countries – including those where other studies point to higher levels of institutionalisation – or that such snapshots are not always reliable and that there may be a significant degree of arbitrariness in the survey results. Were, for example, Hungarians really twice as likely to trust parties in 2006 than they had been in 2005? There were also major shifts recorded in Hungary between 2002 and 2003, and one cannot but wonder why sentiments should seem to be so more fluid there than in other countries. In a similar way, 70 percent of Poles were reported to be satisfied with democracy in 2002 – but only 22/23 percent the following year and as few as 16 percent in 2004. In this case, Hungary and other countries showed less dramatic shifts. These might, of course, be accurate reports of popular sentiments – but in that case much will depend on which year the survey is conducted in, an issue of some importance for studies like CSES, EES and WVS where only a few surveys are conducted each decade. If the scores provide an accurate reflection, too, they are hardly likely to provide much evidence of institutionalisation, where a significant degree of stability is a defining characteristic.

Our understanding of PSI in the new CEE democracies is as yet quite limited. But it may also be concluded, secondly, that no really conclusive results have been produced in relation to Latin America, which provided the context for the elaboration of the concept and initial discussion of the conditions underpinning the process. Some progress has been made in analysis of African party systems, where the relevant processes were thought to be broadly comparable but where mainstream conceptualisations were not immediately or directly applicable.⁴⁶ Empirical analysis and discussion so far has, moreover, generally concentrated on cross-regional comparison – generally between old (or established) and new (or developing) democracies – rather than intra-regional contrasts which provide, amongst other things, the prime focus of our study. But PSI at least produces a promising framework for

⁴⁶ S. L Lindberg, 'Institutionalization of party systems? Stability and fluidity among legislative parties in Africa's democracies', *Government and Opposition* vol. 42, 2 (2007), p.221.

analysis and fruitful basis for discussion in this area, and in some ways shows more of an advance than the understanding of CEE party systems themselves. There is still much general talk of post-communist party systems with little general consensus of whether they exist in any real sense or how they might actually be constituted.

There are, thirdly, methodological and technical questions to be confronted in the use of statistical and computerised databases, which are far more widely used in US-based political studies of CEE than in the European context. Their use is highly valued in some contexts, while others see the use of complex and apparently sophisticated statistical manipulation as productive of ambiguous and potentially misleading results. Critical views are not necessarily the result of methodological tribalism or technical ignorance, as some interesting articles in this area have recently shown. Rein Taagepera argues, for example, that ‘Passive postdictive thinking, made easy by computerisation and canned programmes, is crowding out creative predictive thinking’.⁴⁷ Stephen Coleman suggests that ‘False positives – finding statistically significant results that are not actually true – appear to be much more common than previously recognised’.⁴⁸ Josep Colomer also draws attention to ‘egregious examples’ of predictive activity in the electoral context that provide little in terms of substantive output.⁴⁹

But it is, fourthly, the case that available databases do provide material that is not otherwise available. If not from the sources mentioned above, it is not clear where any data on issues like partisanship and legitimacy might come from. In some cases, too, CSES Modules provide further evidence that is likely to bear on PSI but does not yet seem to have been used in published analyses. Low electoral turnout in Poland is a well-known feature, while the relatively low level of party membership in the same country has also been documented in several comparative studies. The reluctance of Poles to engage with party politics also, however, now seems to be associated with more general disengagement from the political sphere and a low propensity to join with others in areas of common concern. CSES Module 2, for example, shows that fewer Poles than Hungarians or Czechs are inclined to ‘work with others who share concern for an issue’, that they are less likely to participate in activity to persuade others about a matter of concern, that Poles are significantly less likely than Czechs – though not Hungarians – to take part in a protest or demonstration. They also score lower than Bulgarians on all these counts: Table 6.

⁴⁷ ‘Predictive versus postdictive models’, *European Political Science* vol.6, 2 (2007), p.115.

⁴⁸ ‘Testing theories with qualitative and quantitative predictions’, *European Political Science* vol.6, 2 (2007), p.125.

Table 6: Percentage Likely to Participate in Parapolitical Activity

	Czech Republic	Hungary	Bulgaria	Poland
Work together over shared concern	14.8	13.4	11.7	3.8
Activity to persuade others about matter	25.6	15.3	7.0	6.8
Participation in protest or demonstration	9.1	2.8	3.6	2.5
Make contact with official or politician	6.3	4.8	3.2	4.5

According to WVS, Poles are just less interested in politics than other nations. Polish scores were also lower than those recorded for Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia – with only Romania scoring below Poland (with 39.2% expressing interest in 1998): Table 7.

Table 7: Percentage Interested in Politics

Czechia	Slovakia	Hungary	Lithuania	Bulgaria	Poland
55.8 (1997)	–	–	44.0 (1997)	42.3 (1997)	42.0 (1997)
69.4 (1999)	57.8 (1998)	49.7 (1998)	45.1 (1999)	48.7 (1999)	41.6 (1999)

Aggregation of the available data does not, however, just suggest that countries like Poland and Bulgaria are broadly rejectionist of party politics and generally wary of the political arena. Those more favourably disposed to party politics and less suspicious of contemporary institutions overall also display somewhat different perceptions of party government and show different attitudinal sets, indications of which can be seen in Table 8. Hungarians seem to have the greatest trust in parties, but do not necessarily feel very close to any particular one and are not greatly satisfied with the existing democratic process. Slovenians, on the other hand, are considerably more satisfied with democracy though somewhat less trustful of political parties. Czechs, too, endorse their democracy quite strongly and feel closer to one particular organisation, although are somewhat more mistrustful of parties overall. Romanians, somewhat anomalously, seem to be quite confident of their parties but are not generally impressed by their democratic system. At the other end of the scale Poles, in common with the citizens of several other states, exhibit little trust in parties although (with Latvians) are not that dissatisfied with democracy overall. Despite their misgivings, too, Poles do not seem to find it too difficult to identify with a particular party

⁴⁹ ‘What other sciences look like’, *European Political Science* vol.6, 2 (2007), p.140. See also the discussion in K. M. Slomczynski and I. Tomescu-Dubrow, ‘Representation of post-communist European countries in cross-national public opinion surveys’, *Problems of Post-Communism* vol. 53, 4 (2006), pp.42-52.

although, unlike Czechs and Hungarians, they were less likely to identify with one in 2002 than in 1996.

Table 8: Attitudes Towards Party Government (Percentages)

	Confidence/trust in parties (2001/6): Eurobarometer av.	Feeling close to one or more party (1996/2002): CSES average	Satisfaction with democracy (2001/6): Eurobarometer av.
Hungary	18.8	43.6	39.6
Estonia	15.3	—	37.0
Slovenia	16.0	—	50.4
Romania	13.8	—	24.7
Czechia	12.0	51.3	45.1
Lithuania	9.2	—	31.6
Slovakia	9.0	—	21.9
Bulgaria	8.8	—	19.6
Latvia	8.6	—	40.0
Poland	8.3	43.0	32.9

While there is as yet no agreement on the question of whether party systems exist in the different CEE countries at all – and if so, what they actually look like – there is probably a fair measure of agreement that systematic party competition does at least exist in Hungary and the Czech Republic. It is, equally, often suggested that party systems do not really exist in the normal sense in Poland, Latvia, Bulgaria, Slovakia or Lithuania. If this distinction is accepted, the data shown here also suggest that the countries which actually do have political systems also possess stronger conditions their institutionalisation (PSI). This might seem obvious, but I think there is a significant distinction to be made here.

It might also be the case the conditions are assembled in slightly different ways in different countries – with Hungary more confident of its parties but somewhat sceptical of democratic practices overall, conditions that are reversed in the (Czech Republic, and perhaps Slovenia). At the other end of the scale electoral volatility and party system fluidity is greater in Poland, while people do not trust parties and are unwilling to join or vote for them – but they are still quite supportive of democracy and not greatly dissatisfied with the way it works overall. The latter conditions do not seem to be in place, however, in Bulgaria, Slovakia or Romania.