

Political Parties in a Comparative Perspective

Institutions and Party Systems

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Before we start, one important question



Last week

Last week, we...

- ...discussed why we compare in political science
- ...experienced what building an association does to decision-making
- ...briefly elaborated why there are parties

Plan for today

Again, the session is split into two:

1. We'll begin by summarizing the necessity of parties.
2. We learn how institutions contribute to the emergence of parties.
3. ...and how to summarize empirical papers

Why parties are still important?

“European democracies are not only parliamentary democracies but also party democracies.” (Müller 2000, p. 309)

“political parties created democracy and [...] modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties.” (Schattschneider and Pearson 2004, p. 1)

According to Saffon and Urbinati (2025), why are parties important for democracy?

Why parties are still important?

Parties...

- offer channels for citizens' influence in politics
- they introduce multiple issues to politics and, by that, make compromise more likely (unlike factionalism)
- parties enable political careers, regulating politicians' democratic self-determination
- they are part of a democratic socialization process

...and as some of you might have realized by yourselves, parties greatly reduce transaction costs (Müller 2000)

Parties in the chain of delegation

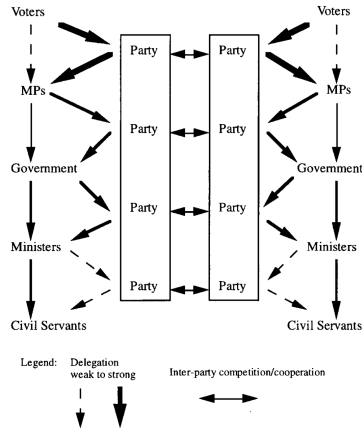


Figure: Parties' influence on different levels of delegation (Müller 2000, p. 312)

What is an institution?

What do we mean when we talk about institutions?

What is an institution?

“Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (North 1990, p. 1).

They differ in various aspects...

- formal vs. informal (written vs. customs)
- created vs. evolving (Constitution vs. common law)

Institutions are not organizations (groups of individuals pursuing similar goals) but they shape how organizations function.

Tavits 2008 – Party Systems in the Making

Feedback on your first (?) empirical reading.

- what was easy?
- what was difficult?

Tavits 2008 – Party Systems in the Making

In groups of four, summarize the core findings of Tavits (2008). [5 minutes]



Figure: Add your results to the whiteboard <https://flinga.fi/s/F4LA6HW>

How to summarize a paper

In the remaining sessions of the seminar, we'll often start with this scheme to summarize the readings (unless we deal with review articles):

- **Relevance, Gap and Question:**
- **Main Argument:**
- **Data and Method:**
- **Results:**
- **Implications:**

Each group receives one of the sub-dimensions. You get five more minutes to formulate a response to the sub-dimension.

Relevance

Usually, authors try to motivate their research based on two dimensions

- **theoretical relevance:** new party emergence may have (negative) consequences for the quality of representation
- **empirical relevance:** new party emergence frequently happens, particularly in the region of Eastern Europe

Gap

Just because it's relevant does not mean, there's a gap in the literature. How does Tavits (2008) justify her study?

Gap

1. lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework
2. no consideration of temporal dimension
3. while emergence has been tried to explain, success of new parties remains understudied

Research Question

Why do new parties keep emerging and winning votes in new democracies?

Theoretical argument

How does Tavits (2008) try to explain the emergence of new parties?

She builds a three-dimensional argument. New parties emerge...

- ... when institutional entry costs are low
- ... benefits of holding an office are high
- ... and parties can expect voters support

In sum: **institutions matter** (in addition to people)

On the costs of forming a party

What are potential costs parties are facing when entering politics?

- Party registration rules
- Electoral systems

On the benefits of forming a party

What shapes the benefits parties have when entering politics?

- Extent of influence (presidential vs. parliamentary system)

Question by Ole: Why should the benefit of forming a new party be significantly higher just because the head of the executive branch is elected in a direct manner by the citizens?

On the probability of electoral support

Which factors determine the probability of being supported?

- Time since democratic transition
- Economic crises

“Given such uncertainty, every potential entrant is perceived as having as good a chance of winning as any other and voters can only vote sincerely.” (Tavits 2008, p. 117).

Is this true? Why? Why not?

On new parties' success

In addition to the determinants of new party challenge, for their success, a few more factors are suggested

- prior turnout
- share of ethnic minorities
- 'against all' option on ballot

Why? Do these seem plausible?

Data

- Which data does Tavits (2008) use?
- How does she measure the dependent variable (DV)?
- How does she operationalize the independent variables (IV)?

Data

- Data source: original data on 44 **parliamentary** elections in Central Eastern Europe
- DV 1: number of new parties (> 0.3 vote share, splinter and newly formed); DV 2: vote share of new parties
- IVs:
 - **costs:** deposit (0/1), petition (continuous), public financing (0/1), disproportionality (continuous), electoral system type (PR/mixed)
 - **benefits:** power of president (continuous)
 - **chances:** length of democracy, economic performance; for success: turnout change, ethnic heterogeneity, non-governmental parties and against all option

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Are you convinced by the operationalization of the variables? (@ Frieda: 'What is a new party?')

Methods

- they use regression models
 - poisson regression for the number of parties (so-called count model)
 - linear regression for the success of parties

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Differences are mainly in modelling → regression models will be central in this seminar

OLS regression

This is not a method class **but** to make sure we are all on the same page:

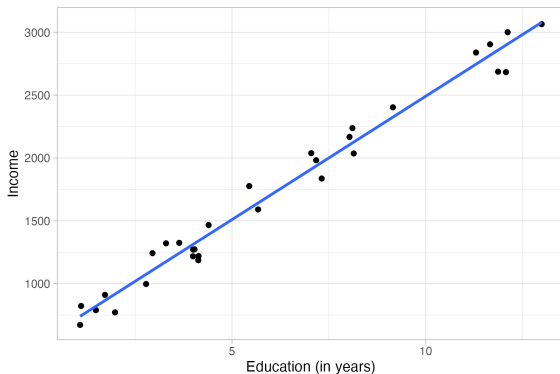


Figure: Hypothetical relationship between education and income

Results

Variable	Model 1†	
	<i>b</i> (robust SE)	% change in expected counts
Deposit	− 0.053 (0.074)	− 5.2
Petition	0.024* (0.016)	2.4
Public financing	0.397*** (0.147)	48.8
Mean district magnitude	0.002*** (0.0006)	0.3
Mixed	− 0.193 (0.144)	− 17.6
Presidency	0.070*** (0.018)	7.3
Log (Length of democracy)	− 0.309*** (0.122)	− 26.6
Inflation	− 0.0003 (0.001)	
GDP growth	− 0.009 (0.009)	
Unemployment	0.006 (0.013)	
Constant	1.898*** (0.152)	
χ^2	33.89 ($p = 0.42$)	
Wald	997.07***	
<i>N</i>	44	

Figure: Emergence of new parties

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Figure: Emergence of new parties

Costs and benefits influence new party emergence, as well as the consolidation of the democracy; economic factors do not.

Results

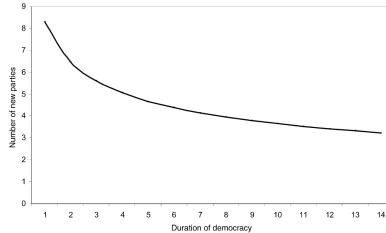


Figure: Effect of democratic consolidation on emergence of new parties

The more consolidated a democracy becomes, the less new parties form.

Results

Variable	Model 3
Turnout change	0.026** (0.013)
Ethnic heterogeneity	0.007** (0.003)
Unemployment	0.048* (0.034)
GDP growth	-0.001 (0.011)
Inflation	0.001 (0.003)
Against all	-1.001*** (0.288)
Non-governmental parties	-0.111*** (0.014)
Log (Length of Democracy)	-0.117 (0.407)
Length of Democracy	
(Length of Democracy) ²	
Number of new parties	0.206*** (0.027)
Constant	1.769*** (0.613)
R ²	0.59
Wald	770.72
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Figure: Success of new parties

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Figure: Success of new parties

Example interpretation: With a change in the turnout by one percentage point, the average vote share of new parties increases by 2.6% ($0.026 * 100$). This effect is significant at a 5% level.

Implications

Taking a step back from the several specific results, what's the main implication of this paper?

Implications

Electoral institutions shape the likelihood and success of new parties.

This means:

- the rules of the games substantially shape actors' motivations
- those who can change the rules determine the fate of other parties

This brings us to the complementary reading by Boix (1999)
(Mark)

Setting the rules of the game

- ruling parties have incentives to revise electoral rules if new (strong) forces emerge
- focus: from plurality systems to proportional systems
- two conditions are important:
 1. strength of the new competitor
 2. how much can ruling parties coordinate?

Setting the rules of the game

Explaining the Selection of Electoral Rules in the Interwar Period and New Democracies after 1945.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	AVERAGE EFFECTIVE THRESHOLD		
	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3
Constant	-13.03 (22.51)	-18.13 (14.40)	30.02* (4.70)
Threat ^a	-11.27* (3.39)	-34.07* (15.82)	-13.24* (3.89)
Strength of Socialism ^b		57.70 (45.86)	
Effective Number (N) of Old Parties ^c		7.31 (4.50)	

Figure: Effects of threats (socialist vote * fragmentation of conservative camp) and strengths of old parties on introduction of more proportional system in new democracies after 1945

What's new in the other complementary reading by Blondel (1968)
@Parichehr

Party Systems and Patterns of Government in Western Democracies

THE IDEOLOGICAL SPECTRUM OF PARTIES IN WESTERN DEMOCRACIES

	Comm.	Soc.	Lib./Rad.	Agr.	Christ.	Cons.
Group 1						
Two-party systems						
United States			L L			
New Zealand		L	e			L
Australia		L	e			L
United Kingdom		L	e			L
Austria		L	e?		L	
Group 2						
Two-and-a-half-party systems						
Germany		L	s		L	
Belgium		L	s		L	
Luxemburg		L	s		L	
Canada		s	L			L
Eire		s	L			L
Group 3						
Multi-party systems with one dominant party						
Denmark		L	s/m	s		s/m
Norway		L	s	s	s	s/m
Sweden		L	s/m	s		s/m
Iceland	s/m	s/m	M			L
Italy	M	s	s		L	s
Group 4						
Multi-party systems without dominant party						
Netherlands		M	s		M	s
Switzerland		M	M		M	s
France	M	s/m	s		s	M
Finland	M	M	s	M		s

Figure: Ideological composition of party systems

→ This is the connection to next week!

To prepare for next week...

- Next week, we'll talk about a second stream of literature explaining the emergence of political parties: cleavages
- **Main reading**
 - **Ford R and Jennings W** (2020) The Changing Cleavage Politics of Western Europe. *Annual Review of Political Science* 23 (Volume 23, 2020), 295–314. ISSN: 1094-2939, 1545-1577. DOI: [10.1146/annurev-polisci-052217-104957](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-052217-104957)
 - **Boix C** (2009) The Emergence of Parties and Party Systems. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Ed. by C Boix and SC Stokes. 1st ed. Oxford University Press, 499–521. ISBN: 978-0-19-956602-0 978-0-19-157748-2. DOI: [10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566020.003.0021](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199566020.003.0021), only section 2.1!

To prepare for next week...

- **Complementary readings**

- **Lipset SM and Rokkan S (1967)** *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. [Free Press](#) – only Introduction (pp. 1-65) → not recommended for essay task
- **Kitschelt H (1995)** Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies: Theoretical Propositions. *Party Politics* 1 (4), 447–472. ISSN: 1354-0688, 1460-3683. DOI: [10.1177/1354068895001004002](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068895001004002)
- **Walsh KC (2012)** Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective. *American Political Science Review* 106 (3), 517–532. ISSN: 0003-0554, 1537-5943. DOI: [10.1017/S0003055412000305](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000305)

Thank you for your attention!
Any further questions?

Literature



Blondel J (1968) Party Systems and Patterns of Government in Western Democracies. *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* **1** (2), 180–203.
JSTOR: [3231605](#).



Boix C (1999) Setting the Rules of the Game: The Choice of Electoral Systems in Advanced Democracies. *American Political Science Review* **93** (3), 609–624.



Boix C (2009) The Emergence of Parties and Party Systems. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Ed. by C Boix and SC Stokes. 1st ed. Oxford University Press, 2009, 499–521.



Ford R and Jennings W (2020) The Changing Cleavage Politics of Western Europe. *Annual Review of Political Science* **23**, 295–314.

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-  **Lipset SM and Rokkan S (1967)** *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. Free Press, 1967.
-  **Müller WC (2000)** Political Parties in Parliamentary Democracies: Making Delegation and Accountability Work. *European Journal of Political Research* **37** (3), 309–333.
-  **North DC (1990)** *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge University Press, 1990. 164 pp. Google Books: [oFnWbTqgNPYC](#).
-  **Saffon MP and Urbinati N (2025)** Parties As Agents of Equal Political Freedom. *Political Theory* **53** (3), 380–406.

Literature



Schattschneider EE and Pearson SA (2004) *Party Government: American Government in Action*. 1st ed. Routledge, 2004.



Tavits M (2008) Party Systems in the Making: The Emergence and Success of New Parties in New Democracies. *British Journal of Political Science* **38** (1), 113–133.



Walsh KC (2012) Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective. *American Political Science Review* **106** (3), 517–532.