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POLITICAL SEQUENCES AND THE STABILIZATION OF INTERPARTY COMPETITION

Electoral Volatility in Old and New Democracies

Scott Mainwaring and Edurne Zoco

ABSTRACT

This article examines why some democracies and semi-democracies develop relatively stable party systems, while others continue to be roiled by high levels of electoral volatility. It is the first broadly cross-regional analysis of electoral volatility, and it is based on the most extensive data assembled on electoral volatility. Our most original finding is that competitive regimes inaugurated in earlier periods have much lower electoral volatility than regimes inaugurated more recently, even controlling for a variety of other factors that have been hypothesized to affect electoral volatility. Parties had very different functions according to when democracy was inaugurated, and these congenital differences had long-term effects on the stabilization of party competition. What matters for the stabilization of party competition is when democracy was born, not how old it is. Our results support social science approaches that emphasize historical sequences and path dependence.

KEY WORDS ■ democratization ■ electoral volatility ■ party system ■ political parties

Introduction

In his classic work, Giovanni Sartori (1976) argued that one of the key developments in democratic politics was the emergence of an institutionalized ('consolidated' in his terminology) party system. We agree with that judgment. Concern with party system institutionalization and its consequences has grown in the past decade (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995).

Yet little is known about what causes party system institutionalization. This is the central question of this article: why do some democracies and

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semi-democracies develop relatively stable party systems, while others continue to be roiled by high levels of electoral volatility? Notwithstanding the burgeoning interest in party system institutionalization and its consequences, little has been done on how institutionalization occurs and why it varies so much across countries.

We focus on one aspect of party system institutionalization: the degree to which competitive political regimes develop stable patterns of interparty competition. We measure the stabilization of interparty competition through countries' medium- to long-term mean electoral volatility.

Relative to previous work, this article is distinctive in three ways. First, this is the first broadly cross-regional analysis of electoral volatility, and it is based on the most extensive data assembled on electoral volatility. We use a broader sample of countries (47 countries), with greater variance on the dependent variable (electoral volatility) and the explanatory variables than previous work. The country breadth and historical sweep of the data are useful for theoretical reasons as well as empirical ones. The large variance in the dependent and independent variables makes it easier to test competing hypotheses. Even more fundamentally, cross-regional work that includes both old democracies and post-1978 competitive regimes¹ poses new theoretical questions. Thus, rather than focusing on why European party systems freeze, as Lipset and Rokkan (1967) did in their seminal work, we ask what explains the remarkable contrasts in the stability of party systems. Our country selection includes many post-1978 regimes as well as many advanced industrial democracies.

Second, we cover a more extended time period than previous multivariate analyses of electoral volatility. The long time frame and multivariate analysis enhance causal explanations of the stabilization (or lack thereof) of electoral competition.

Third, some of our substantive arguments are new. Our most original finding is that competitive regimes inaugurated in earlier periods have much lower electoral volatility than regimes inaugurated more recently, even controlling for a variety of other factors that have been hypothesized to affect electoral volatility. This finding reflects a period effect and a sequence effect. The period effect is that, in earlier competitive regimes, parties incorporated new citizens into the political systems. They had powerful identities, and the citizens who were mobilized by them developed strong attachments to them. Parties in later democracies were less central in mobilizing and creating new citizens. They did not form the encompassing social networks that working class and Christian Democratic parties did in the early decades of the twentieth century, and they did not win the profound allegiance that these earlier parties forged. The sequence effect is related to the emergence of television as a major actor in enabling candidates to win election in competitive regimes created in recent decades. When television emerges as a major campaign vehicle before parties are well entrenched, political actors have less incentive to engage in party-building. It is easier

and – in the short term – more effective to use the modern mass media than to build a party.

Our results support social science approaches that emphasize historical sequences and path dependence (Collier and Collier, 1991; Pierson, 2004; Ragin, 1987; Thelen, 1999). Whereas most work on these issues has used qualitative methods, we argue that a quantitative examination of path dependence has compelling advantages.

Why Does a Stable Party System Matter?

A relatively stable party system has several important consequences for democratic politics. First, it fosters more effective programmatic representation. Contemporary representative democracy is based on the idea that citizens choose representatives who will advance the interests of their constituents or of the country (Manin, 1997; Manin et al., 1999; Pitkin, 1967). Democratic theory and empirical research have long established that most citizens need information shortcuts in order to make programmatic representation effective. Few want the cumbersome task of closely watching electoral campaigns and monitoring politicians so as to make a well-informed electoral judgment. In well-institutionalized party systems, most citizens use the information shortcuts provided by party labels (Downs, 1957; Hinich and Munger, 1994). In these systems, politicians' party affiliations convey considerable information about their ideological and programmatic preferences.

In systems with high volatility, party labels provide weaker programmatic cues. Parties that were electorally significant in one election get crushed in the next, while new parties emerge. Citizens are less likely to be able to identify what the parties are and where they stand, with adverse consequences for programmatic representation (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006).

Second, persistent high volatility introduces more uncertainty regarding electoral outcomes, and it probably weakens some democratic regimes. Przeworski (1986) famously wrote that democracy is the institutionalization of uncertainty. The level of uncertainty about who will govern and what kind of government and policies are likely, however, is attenuated with a stable party system and heightened with high volatility. A stable party system makes clear what the range of governing options is and usually provides considerable structure to democratic politics (Sartori, 1976). In contrast, with high volatility, the entry barriers to new parties are lower, and the likelihood that personalistic anti-system politicians can become the head of government is much higher. Such uncertainty proved inimical to democracy until the 1980s, when the end of the Cold War reduced the stakes of political conflict and facilitated the post-1989 expansion of democracy and semi-democracy in the world. Even in the post-Cold War context, the much higher level of personalism in volatile party systems can pave the way

toward authoritarianism (e.g. President Alberto Fujimori in Peru in 1992) or toward the erosion of democratic regimes (e.g. President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela since 1998).

In party systems with persistent high volatility, political outsiders come to power more easily. Political actors are less certain about the parameters of the game. Political outsiders with ambivalent (or worse) attitudes toward democracy come to power, as did Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998 and Alberto Fujimori in Peru in 1990. Both presidents emasculated checks and balances and presided over the degradation of democracy in their countries (Mayorga, 2006; Tanaka, 2006).

Third, high electoral volatility alters elite strategic calculations in presenting candidates for political office and citizens' strategic voting behavior (Moser, 1999, 2001; Sartori, 1986). Information cues are less clear with weakly institutionalized systems, and voters have less information about likely outcomes. As Moser (2001: 4) argued: '[E]lectoral system effects typically found in established democracies may not hold . . . in countries with weakly institutionalized party systems, and poorly developed sources of political information.' For example, in Russia, because of the uncertainty of electoral outcomes generated by high volatility, voters and politicians do not make the strategic decisions that lead to two-party competition at the district level that is usually found in simple plurality, single-member districts. Instead, there is a high supply of competing candidates and a great dispersion of the vote (Moser, 1999, 2001).

Electoral Volatility in 47 Countries

Electoral volatility refers to the aggregate turnover from one party to others, from one election to the next (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Birch, 2003: 119–35; Madrid, 2005; Pedersen, 1983; Roberts and Wibbels, 1999; Shamir, 1984; Tavits, 2005). It is computed by adding the absolute value of change in percentage of votes gained or lost by each party from one election to the next, then dividing by two.² Volatility reflects both changes in voters' electoral preferences and elite-driven changes such as party mergers and schisms and party-switching by individual politicians.

Table 1 reports electoral volatility for the lower chamber for 47 democracies and semi-democracies. We include all countries that were part of the first wave of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) surveys,³ provided that as of 2003 they had experienced at least three consecutive lower chamber elections when the country's Polity 2 score was 0 or higher.⁴ Countries with a Polity 2 score of –1 or less had authoritarian regimes, which do not allow free and fair elections. Their control of elections favors the governing party and tends to limit electoral volatility, so it is often misleading to compare electoral volatility between democratic and authoritarian regimes.

Table 1. Electoral volatility in 47 countries

	<i>Elections included for volatility</i>	<i>Elections included in multivariate analysis</i>	<i>Year democracy was inaugurated</i>	<i>Mean volatility since inauguration of democracy^a</i>
United States	1946–2002	1952–2002	1800	3.3
Switzerland	1943–2003	1951–2003	1848	6.5
Australia	1946–2001	1901–34, 1951–2001	1901	6.6
Austria	1945–2002	1945–1949, 1953–2002	1945	6.6
United Kingdom	1945–2001	1951–2001	1837	6.8
Finland	1917–2003	1917–1929, 1930–2003	1917	7.4
Germany	1949–2002	1949–2002	1949	8.7
Sweden	1911–2002	1911–14, 1917–44, 1952–2002	1909	9.0
Belgium	1945–2003	1950–2003	1944	9.2
Norway	1945–2001	1945–49, 1953–2001	1945	10.2
Greece	1974–2000	1974–2000	1974	10.4
New Zealand	1946–2002	1951–2002	1857	10.6
Ireland	1923–2002	1951–2002	1921	10.9
Denmark	1945–2001	1945–47, 1950–2001	1945	11.2
Netherlands	1945–2003	1945–48, 1952–2002	1945	11.7
Canada	1945–2004	1953–2004	1867	11.9
Colombia	1958–2002	1958–2002	1957	12.5
Iceland	1946–2003	1953–2003	1944 ^b	14.0
Italy	1946–2001	1946–2001	1945	15.1
Portugal	1975–2002	1975–2002	1975	15.2
France	1946–2002	1951–2002	1946	15.3
Japan	1952–2000	1952–2000	1952	16.2
Chile	1989–2001	1989–2001	1990	16.7
Spain	1977–2000	1977–2000	1976	17.0
Taiwan	1992–2001	1992–2001	1992	20.4
Brazil	1986–2002	1986–2002	1985	21.8
Israel	1949–2003	1951–2003	1948	22.1
Mexico	1988–2000	1988–2000	1988	22.7
South Korea	1988–2000	1988–2000	1987	24.6
Argentina	1983–2001	1983–2001	1983	24.9
Hungary	1990–2002	1990–2002	1990	25.1
India	1951–1999	1951–99	1950	25.5
Czech Republic ^c	1990–2002	1990–2002	1990	25.7

Continued over

Table 1. Continued

	<i>Elections included for volatility</i>	<i>Elections included in multivariate analysis</i>	<i>Year democracy was inaugurated</i>	<i>Mean volatility since inauguration of democracy^a</i>
Venezuela	1958–2001	1958–2001	1958	31.4
Thailand	1992–2005	1992–2005	1992	34.7
Ecuador	1979–1998	1979–1998	1979	36.4
Bulgaria	1990–2001	1990–2001	1990	36.8
Bolivia	1985–2002	1985–2002	1982	38.0
Slovenia	1992–2000	1992–2000	1991	38.2
Philippines ^d	1992–1998	1992–98	1986	41.9
Estonia	1992–2003	1992–2003	1991	45.4
Poland	1991–2001	1991–2001	1989	46.6
Lithuania	1992–2000	1992–2000	1991	49.1
Russia	1993–1999	1993–1999	1992	50.0
Romania	1990–2000	1990–2000	1990	53.0
Latvia	1993–2002	1993–2002	1991	56.2
Ukraine	1994–2002	1994–2002	1991	59.2

Sources: Available upon request from the authors.

^a For democracies inaugurated before 1902, volatility since 1945.

^b Iceland became democratic in 1918 according to Polity 2 scores, but it attained independence in 1944.

^c 1990–93 is for Czechoslovakia.

^d We do not have data for the 1987, 2001 and 2004 elections. Results for 1992 are based on 174 districts.

We also included the countries for which Bartolini and Mair (1990) and Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) assembled data on volatility, again provided that the countries had a minimum Polity score of at least 0 for at least three consecutive lower chamber elections. Table 1 includes all elections since the inauguration of a competitive regime for 41 regimes that were born after 1901 and did not suffer a breakdown or a foreign military occupation. Only the most recent democratic period is counted in countries where there was a democratic breakdown or a foreign military occupation.⁵ Table 1 also includes all post-1945 elections for six democracies inaugurated in 1901 or earlier that have not experienced a democratic breakdown or foreign military occupation since this inauguration. In the multivariate regression analyses, for these six countries we included only post-1945 elections because of the difficulty of finding some economic data for earlier periods.

The variance in the stability of interparty competition is huge. In the United States, the results of the previous House of Representatives election serve as an excellent predictor of subsequent election results by party, erring on average by only 3.3 percent. In contrast, in Ukraine the identical procedure offers little predictive capacity with an average error of 59.2 percent (18 times greater than in the United States). Lipset and Rokkan (1967) characterized

the Western European party systems as ‘frozen’. By comparison, most party systems in post-1978 competitive political regimes are highly fluid.

Table 1 also shows the year of inauguration of the democratic or semi-democratic period. To operationalize the inauguration of a new democracy or semi-democracy, we used a Polity 2 score of 0 or higher. This threshold does not indicate the existence of full democracy, but it requires a competitive political regime that does not sharply curtail electoral volatility.

Hypotheses, Measurement and Methods

To explain why some democracies develop stable party systems while others do not, our analysis focuses on macro-political factors, structural and organizational factors and economic performance as predictors of volatility. We examine six different kinds of theoretical explanations: stabilization over time (H1), institutional (H2 and H3), economic (H4 and H5), sequence and timing (H6), structural (H7) and organizational (H8). We test these hypotheses with multivariate regressions. Electoral periods (the period from one election to the next) are the unit of observation; each electoral period in a country is one observation.

H1: Electoral volatility diminishes over time. In a classic article, Converse (1969) argued that as individuals aged their partisan attachments became stronger. He argued that the length of support for a party and of exposure to elections explained deepening attachment over time to parties. By implication, newly established party systems would become more stable over time as voters had more time to identify with parties. Some authors have argued that post-communist regimes are similarly encouraging the growth of partisanship (see Brader and Tucker, 2001; cf. Kitschelt et al., 1999: 96). In addition, one might expect that with the passage of time parties would win over some relatively stable clientele groups, routinize their electoral appeals and build a more stable base. Other research, however, has cast doubts that party systems become more stable over time (Bielasiak, 2002; Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006; Rose and Munro, 2003; Shamir, 1984: 49).

We measure time with the number of years from the inauguration of democracy or semi-democracy until a given election in that country. For example, if democracy was inaugurated in 1983, in 1991, the number of years since the inauguration of democracy is 8. We expected the effect of time on the stabilization of electoral competition to diminish after about 30 years so we imposed an upper limit of 30 on this variable.⁶ If H1 is correct, the coefficient for Years of Democracy should be negative; as the number of years since the inauguration of democracy increases, volatility should decrease.

H2: Electoral volatility increases as party system fragmentation increases. Pedersen (1983) argued that as party system fragmentation increases, electoral

volatility should increase. With more parties, there should be less ideological/programmatic space between parties; hence the distinctions among ideologically contiguous parties are less clear-cut. With less important differences between ideologically contiguous parties, voters are more likely to shift from one party to another. Volatility should be higher under these circumstances (Bartolini and Mair, 1990: 130–45; Roberts and Wibbels, 1999; Tavits, 2005).

We measured party system fragmentation with the effective number of parties (ENP) (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979), measured in votes. The ENP in the first of the two elections that constitute an electoral period is the value for that observation. If H2 is correct, the coefficient for ENP should be positive.

H3: Presidentialism fosters higher electoral volatility. Presidential systems personalize the vote for the head of government. They might therefore be more vulnerable to political outsiders with anti-party proclivities. The incentives to develop party organizations and to build enduring ties between parties and voters might be weaker, leading to higher electoral volatility. In contrast, in parliamentary systems the assembly elects the head of government, making parties the gateway to controlling executive power. Presumably, the incentives to building strong linkages between parties and voters should be stronger in parliamentary systems, leading to lower electoral volatility.

We define presidential systems as those in which the head of government is elected by direct popular vote (or by an electoral college that is selected by direct popular vote and has limited autonomy) for a fixed term of office. We code this variable as 0 = other; 1 = presidential. Semi-presidential systems and hybrids such as the Swiss system also offer strong incentives to building enduring linkages between voters and parties and hence are coded 0. The coefficient should be positive.

H4: Low economic growth fosters high electoral volatility. Poor growth might influence electoral volatility and the stabilization of a party system. Poor economic performance can have devastating effects on governing parties (Remmer, 1991; Roberts and Wibbels, 1999) and hence boost electoral volatility. We measured economic growth (H4) with change in per capita income from the year of the first election in the electoral period to the year before the second election. The coefficient should be negative; higher growth should produce lower volatility.⁷

H5: High inflation fosters high electoral volatility. High inflation, especially at the magnitude many Latin American countries experienced in the 1980s and early 1990s, can have corrosive effects on governing parties and boost volatility. We measured mean annual inflation for the electoral period from the year of the first election in the electoral period to the year before the second election. We used the log of inflation because we expect a non-linear

effect.⁸ An increase from 0 percent to 50 percent inflation would predictably have a far greater effect on volatility than an increase from 950 percent to 1000 percent. The hypothesized coefficient for inflation is positive.

H6: Electoral volatility is lower in democracies that were inaugurated earlier. Mainwaring (1999: 225–33) and Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) advanced a sequence explanation for why some party systems become more institutionalized than others. Parties in post-1978 democracies are less dominant in structuring democratic politics than parties in the emerging democracies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Pizzorno, 1981; Schmitter, 2001). Democracies that were created by the early twentieth century had stronger party organizations, and voters had stronger attachments to parties. These stronger attachments helped forge stable patterns of party competition.

If this argument is correct, then the time when a competitive political regime was inaugurated should have an effect on electoral volatility that is independent of Converse's (1969) argument about time and the development of partisanship. Most competitive regimes inaugurated before 1950 would have lower volatility from the outset. Most competitive regimes inaugurated in the post-1978 period would continue to have high volatility even over time.

We measured H6 with the log of the age of a country's democracy as of 2005 because we expect a diminishing effect over time.⁹ Whereas the independent variable for H1 (years since the inauguration of democracy) changes from one electoral period to the next, the independent variable for H6 (Age of Democracy as of 2005) is constant for all electoral periods for a given country. If H6 is correct, the coefficient should be negative; older democracies will have lower volatility.

H7: Electoral volatility is lower in competitive regimes with a higher percentage of the labor force employed in manufacturing, mining, construction and transportation. According to Lipset and Rokkan (1967), party systems stabilize because individuals develop attachments to parties on the basis of their social locations – their religion, class, residence (urban or rural) and culture (core versus minority culture) (see also Bartolini and Mair, 1990). If this theory is correct, more sharply defined social cleavages should encourage a more stable party system and lower electoral volatility. H7 examines this theory with respect to class cleavages. Class cleavages should be stronger in democracies with a higher percentage of the labor force in traditional blue-collar activities, lending greater stability to the party system. Conversely, individuals in the informal sector might be less likely to establish a partisan linkage because of the absence of organizational influences in the work place. Because large informal sectors almost always imply a low share of the labor force in manufacturing, mining, construction and transportation, this is a second structural reason for H7.

For most countries, reliable long-term longitudinal data are not available for the percentage of the economically active population (EAP) in manufacturing, mining, transportation and construction (H7) and for union density (H8). Moreover, the methodology for reporting these data differs somewhat across countries. Because of these two data limitations, we used data for one point in time (the early 1990s) and treated these variables as constants within a given country. Most countries' relative positions in the percentage of the EAP in these activities and in union density were probably fairly stable over time, so this data limitation should not dramatically affect results.

H8: Electoral volatility is lower in competitive regimes that have higher unionization density (the number of unionized workers divided by the total number of paid employees). According to Bartolini and Mair (1990: 231–8), strong 'organizational encapsulation' (i.e. strong linkages between voters and parties via organizational attachments) favors party system stability. Organizational encapsulation creates bonds between citizens and parties, hence promotes stability in interparty competition. They include unionization density as one of their measures of organizational encapsulation.

Results and Interpretation

There is no ideal way to compensate for violations of some of the assumptions of regression analysis that are associated with panel data (Wilson and Butler, unpublished). In light of this situation, we report results from two different methods of estimation: the random effects model (REM) and generalized estimating equations (GEE) models with an autoregressive (AR1) specification (GEEAR1). The GEEAR1 is perhaps theoretically the most appropriate model. The REM has the advantage of being more widely used in political science and of having an r^2 value. The results with REM are similar to those with GEEAR1.¹⁰

Models 2.1 and 2.2 show the impact of the independent variables for which we have time-series data. The year when democracy was inaugurated, per capita growth and the effective number of parties have an impact on volatility.

An increase of 1 in the effective number of parties produces a modest increase of 1.2 percent in a country's predicted volatility (Model 2.2); this impact is consistent with previous findings (Bartolini and Mair, 1990: 131–45; Pedersen, 1983; Roberts and Wibbels, 1999; Tavits, 2005). With more parties in the system, there are more choices to which voters can defect. Substantively, this effect is moderate. Contrary to the implicit implications of some literature, presidentialism did not have a statistically significant effect on the stabilization of party systems.

Poor economic growth boosts electoral volatility, but the effects are modest. Each increase of 1 percent in per capita GDP generates a predicted

Table 2. Determinants of electoral volatility

	<i>Model 2.1</i> <i>RE</i>	<i>Model 2.2</i> <i>GEEAR1</i>	<i>Model 2.3</i> <i>GEEAR1</i>
Constant	57.06*** (7.20)	53.16*** (5.94)	65.27*** (8.78)
Years of Democracy	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.08)
GDP growth	-0.86*** (0.17)	-0.71*** (0.17)	-0.62** (0.21)
Inflation (log)	-1.87 (0.96)	-0.66 (1.12)	-2.70* (1.26)
ENP	1.64*** (0.36)	1.20** (0.36)	0.73 (0.51)
Presidentialism	2.20 (2.63)	2.99 (1.76)	-0.06 (1.90)
Age of Democracy (log)	-24.91*** (3.87)	-22.34*** (3.21)	-17.97*** (3.54)
EAP (circa 1993)			-0.51*** (0.14)
Union density			-0.03 (0.02)
N	484	484	342
R ²	0.42		

Note: Dependent variable is electoral volatility; standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Stata does not provide an R² for GEEAR1 models.

decrease of 0.7 percent in volatility. Madrid (2005), Roberts and Wibbels (1999) and Tavits (2005) also found an effect of per capita growth on electoral volatility for different samples. Poor economic performance thus contributes to high electoral volatility (Remmer, 1991). Inflation was not statistically significant. This negative finding is consistent with Madrid (forthcoming) and Roberts and Wibbels (1999) for Latin America, but contrary to the findings of Tavits (2005) for post-Communist Europe. Against theoretical expectations, the number of years since the inauguration of democracy did not influence volatility.

Because it has not previously been tested, the most interesting finding is the impact of when democracy was inaugurated. This variable has the highest level of statistical significance and the greatest substantive impact. In a simulation based on Model 2.2, if we set Years of Democracy, GDP growth, inflation and ENP at their means and assume a non-presidential system, the model predicts huge differences in volatility based on Age of Democracy. Expected volatility is 30.7 percent for a democracy born in 1992, 29.3 percent for one born in 1990, 24.4 percent for one founded in

1980, 15.9 percent for one established in 1945, 10.5 percent for one born in 1900 and 6.7 percent if democracy was inaugurated in 1850.

Electoral volatility is on average far greater in newer competitive regimes than in the older ones. For the 47 countries in Table 1, the mean electoral volatility of the 16 democracies inaugurated by 1945 is 9.4 percent. The mean volatility of the 10 competitive regimes inaugurated between 1946 and 1976 is 17.0 percent, and the mean for the 21 regimes inaugurated after 1977 is 36.6 percent.

Why is the birth date of democracy so important in fostering stable inter-party competition? This variable stands for differences in the role that parties played in different waves of democracy. Two such factors are important.

First is a period effect. In the early democratizing countries, parties were vehicles of social and political integration of masses of new citizens (Chalmers, 1964; LaPalombara and Weiner, 1966; Pizzorno, 1981). They pushed for the extension of the franchise and thereby created new citizens. They built encompassing organizations and solidified strong loyalties, often rooted in labor unions, religious identities, farmers' associations and other organized social blocs. Parties were important not only politically, but also as sources of social identity. The linkages between parties and social organizations such as unions were strong. Citizens developed strong allegiances to parties, and these allegiances were transmitted from one generation to the next. The stronger loyalties and organizations in the earlier cases of democratization helped parties build deep roots in society and helped stabilize patterns of interparty competition.¹¹ These loyalties to parties have affected generations of citizens. The creation of organizations that rewarded supporters with symbolic meaning, selective incentives and programmatic benefits enabled parties to remain at the core of democratic politics. These factors explain why early democratization and the early development of solid parties had effects that have endured for generations. Political loyalties at the citizen level and organizational carriers thus explain this particular form of path dependence.¹²

In most late democratizing countries, parties have been less central in the struggle to expand citizenship, and they never had the far-reaching social functions or fostered the strong identities that they did in the early democratizers. As Schmitter (2001) aptly put it: 'Parties Are Not What They Once Were.' The differences in what parties did at different moments in the history of democracy – especially how important they were for creating citizenship – help explain the stronger organizations and loyalties that parties built in the earlier cases of democratization. In many later democracies, populist leaders, many of whom had cavalier attitudes toward parties, incorporated the masses politically (Collier and Collier, 1991).

The second key difference between the older and post-1978 competitive regimes is a sequence effect. The role of the mass media, especially television, differs in later cases of democratization. In the old, well-established democracies, parties became deeply rooted in society before the emergence

of television. As we noted above, parties integrated their supporters into the political systems. In contrast, in post-1978 democracies in countries with weak democratic heritages, television became a mass phenomenon before parties were deeply entrenched in society. Candidates for executive office can get their messages across on television without the need to rely on well-developed party organizations (Sartori, 1989), allowing the emergence of personalistic candidates. There is less incentive to invest in party-building when television is a more useful vehicle for winning election.

In 1988, in an interview with one of the authors of this article, then Senator and later President of Brazil (1995–2002) Fernando Henrique Cardoso stated that to win political office in his country, owning a television station was worth more than a political party. This insightful comment has permeated the logic of party competition in most post-1978 competitive regimes. Through television, a candidate can reach the public instantaneously and without building an organization. Building a party is an arduous task with an uncertain electoral payoff. For the history of liberal democracy until the 1980s, the answer to John Aldrich's (1995) question, *Why Parties?* was obvious to political candidates: parties provided a huge, almost indispensable electoral advantage.¹³ In many post-1978 competitive regimes, this advantage is marginal or non-existent.

Our results support arguments about the importance of historical sequences and path dependence in political processes (Collier and Collier, 1991; Dahl, 1971; Pierson, 2004; Ragin, 1987; Shefter, 1994; Thelen, 1999). The timing of the creation of democracy had a major impact on the kinds of parties that emerged and on the stabilization of party systems; what happened long ago has a strong impact on party politics today. Without taking timing and sequence into effect, we would fail to understand why some democracies develop stable party systems while others do not.

In Model 2.3, we add the independent variables for EAP and union density. (The number of observations declines because of missing data.) The percentage of the EAP engaged in manufacturing, mining, transportation and construction has a statistically significant impact on volatility. Each increase of 10 percent in the share of the labor force employed in these activities produces an expected decrease of 5.1 percent in electoral volatility. Thus, the data support this structuralist argument about the stabilization of electoral competition. Union density does not have an impact on electoral volatility, in contrast to the findings of Bartolini and Mair (1990: 231–8).

Most findings remain consistent with those in Model 2.1. One puzzling exception is that inflation has a statistically significant but *negative* effect on volatility; higher inflation produces lower predicted volatility. In addition, ENP is no longer significant. The results with EAP and union density are suggestive but not conclusive because of the lack of time-series data in our dataset.

Why Does Electoral Competition not Stabilize Over Time?

In this section, we further explore the surprising finding that, once the birth year of democracy is controlled for, democratic party systems do not become more stable over time. Table 3 provides a more detailed view of the trend in volatility for the 41 democracies inaugurated in 1909 or later. It presents data on deviation from a country's mean volatility by electoral period for up to 32 years after the inauguration of a competitive political regime.

The results point in the same direction as in Table 2. If party systems started out with high volatility and gradually stabilized, volatility should start out above the mean and should subsequently dip below the mean. A positive number in Table 3 indicates that volatility for a given electoral period was above the mean for the dataset; a negative number indicates the reverse. For these 41 countries, volatility was slightly higher (1.15 percent) in the first electoral period of democracy than the mean for the history of democracy. After the first electoral period, volatility fluctuates below the mean for the dataset up to the 11th electoral period. With the exception of a modest downward trend in volatility from the first electoral period to the sixth, the results do not support the idea of stabilization over time.

A test for the difference between means indicated that only one electoral period, the sixth, has statistically lower volatility than the first, which had the highest volatility relative to countries' mean volatility. Even the sixth electoral period, when volatility was on average for the 21 countries 4.3 percent lower than their mean volatility in Table 1, was barely statistically different at $p < 0.10$ from the first electoral period ($p = 0.082$ in a two-tailed t -test). Thus, the duration of competitive regimes has little or no impact on

Table 3. Mean deviation from countries' mean electoral volatility by electoral period after the inauguration of democracy

<i>Electoral period after the inauguration of democracy</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>	<i>Mean deviation from countries' mean electoral volatility</i>
First	41	1.15
Second	41	-0.75
Third	36	-2.09
Fourth	28	-0.34
Fifth	23	-3.87
Sixth	21	-4.31*
Seventh	21	-0.32
Eighth	18	-3.17
Ninth	17	-2.57
Tenth	11	-2.15
Eleventh	6	-1.30

*Significant at $p < 0.10$ compared to the first electoral period.

the stabilization of electoral competition. By implication, high volatility sometimes goes on for an extended period (Rose and Munro, 2003).

Because we tracked electoral volatility for a maximum of 32 years in Table 3 yet measured volatility for a longer period of time in Table 1, the mean deviation in Table 3 from a country's mean volatility in Table 1 is not equal to zero (it is -1.43 percent). The fact that the mean is consistently below zero for the 2nd to the 11th electoral periods reflects *increasing* volatility for the average country that has had more than 11 electoral periods. These are old, long-established democracies – a set of democracies whose electoral volatility has increased slightly in recent decades (Dalton et al., 2000).

Why does the duration of democracy not have more of an effect on the stabilization of electoral competition? Theories that predict the gradual strengthening of party identification over time (Converse, 1969) or the stabilization of electoral competition (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) assume that most citizens are satisfied enough with their preferred parties to stick with them over time. They assume that party representation functions as it is supposed to in democratic theory (Manin, 1997; Pitkin, 1967) – that parties and politicians will provide enough public goods or constituency service to reasonably satisfy most citizens. But this assumption has proved wrong in many post-1978 competitive political regimes. In these countries, large numbers of citizens believe that parties persistently fail them – a possibility that most theoretical literature on parties and representation has neglected (Mainwaring et al., 2006). Many governing parties have failed to deliver what citizens seek from their governments, creating disillusionment with these parties. Citizens jettison one party after another. In some countries, politicians engage in collusion, disappointing citizens at best and defrauding them at worst. Rather than delivering public goods or selective goods for their constituents, as competing versions of democratic theory hold, many representatives engage in predation (Guevara Mann, 2001).¹⁴ Under these circumstances, rather than developing growing attachments to parties as Converse (1969) predicted, citizens grow increasingly disaffected or hostile (Mainwaring et al., 2006). They reject parties and turn to political independents and outsiders; they grow disaffected; or they seek non-partisan involvements.

In many competitive political regimes where citizen disgruntlement with parties is rampant, party labels become less useful for political elites. Politicians have little reason to remain faithful to party labels if the labels become a hindrance to winning election, as has been the case for many politicians in Poland (Zielinski et al., 2005). Under such circumstances, politicians are more likely to shift from one party to another. Frequent supply side changes, as political elites shift from one party to another, as new parties form and old ones disappear, or as parties merge or split, have contributed greatly to high electoral volatility in many post-1978 democracies (Birch, 2003: 119–35; Kreuzer and Pettai, 2003; Rose and Munro, 2003).

Moreover, in Latin America many parties were programmatically unreliable in the 1980s and 1990s, as they undertook substantial programmatic shifts in response to economic crises (Stokes, 2001). Where these programmatic betrayals failed to produce good results, citizens abandoned the parties that implemented these policies. In most of Latin America, parties are programmatically diffuse, so voters have weak programmatic reasons to remain faithful to parties.

Consistent with the finding that the growing longevity of competitive regimes does not produce the stabilization of electoral competition, most of the 41 competitive regimes inaugurated after 1901 have not experienced huge shifts in electoral volatility from one election to the next (Table 4). The correlation between countries' scores in the first electoral period in Table 1 and the second is 0.68 ($N = 41$); between the second and third periods it is 0.64 ($N = 36$); between the third and fourth periods it is 0.62 ($N = 28$); and between the fourth and fifth periods it is 0.73 ($N = 23$). Even over an extended period, some of the correlations remain moderately strong. For example, the correlation between volatility in the first and the seventh periods is 0.58 ($N = 21$). A few countries exhibit marked declines in volatility over time (e.g. Brazil beginning 1994), while a few manifest notable increases over time (e.g. Colombia beginning 1990, Italy beginning 1994, Venezuela beginning 1993), but volatility is fairly stable in most countries. Most countries in our dataset started out with stable party systems and retained them, or they started out with high electoral volatility that did not markedly diminish.

The fact that when democracy was created strongly affects contemporary party systems indicates path dependence. The question is why this path dependence exists; as Thelen (1999) observed, much of the literature that invokes path dependence fails to explain it. In this case, elite incentives and

Table 4. Correlations of electoral volatility for the first seven electoral periods after the inauguration of democracy

	<i>N</i>	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>4th</i>	<i>5th</i>	<i>6th</i>	<i>7th</i>
1st	41	1.000						
2nd	41	0.681***	1.000					
3rd	36	0.651***	0.641***	1.000				
4th	28	0.559***	0.459**	0.619***	1.000			
5th	23	0.577***	0.363	0.347	0.730***	1.000		
6th	21	0.499**	0.304	0.201	0.501**	0.635***	1.000	
7th	21	0.583***	0.428	0.324	0.499**	0.381	0.632***	1.000

Note: The row and column headings refer to the number of the electoral period after the inauguration of democracy. The first period after the inauguration of democracy measures volatility from the first election to the second. Cell figures are the Pearson correlations between countries' volatility in the first electoral period after the inauguration of democracy and their volatility in the second electoral period, etc.

** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

mass loyalties explain path dependence. In the early democracies, elites relied on parties to win elections, so they had incentives to invest in party-building. In most post-1978 democracies, candidates rely extensively on media images and messages, and they have less reason to invest in an organization. The strong mass loyalties engendered by parties in early democracies endured because of political socialization from generation to generation and because strong parties, once established, could continue to reward their followers. In later democracies, strong loyalties to parties never formed on a mass basis.

Conclusion

The creation of a stable party system has important consequences for democratic politics, yet the question of why some competitive political regimes develop stable party systems while others do not has received little attention. The timing and sequence of the formation of democratic regimes and parties are critical explanatory variables. The timing argument is that citizens in new democracies are less attached to parties than they were in earlier generations of democratic polities. Parties in old competitive regimes helped create citizens. Socialist, labor, social democratic and Christian Democratic parties formed organizations and networks that forged strong linkages between voters and these parties. In addition, these parties created capillary electoral organizations. The sequence argument is that political elites have less incentive to invest in party-building in later competitive regimes. Politicians can win election through the mass media and by employing modern campaign consultants.

The critical determinant of the stabilization of electoral competition is when democracy was born, not how old it is. By implication, it would be foolhardy to expect the kinds of parties with strong identities and dense networks that emerged in the early part of the twentieth century to be reproduced in the new democracies of the twentieth-first century. Nor is it necessary that such parties emerge for democracy to function well. However, the high volatility of many post-1978 competitive party systems does have troubling consequences for programmatic representation and potentially for democratic stability. Social movements, non-governmental organizations and interest groups can articulate interests, but neither they nor independent (non-partisan) political candidates are full substitutes for parties as mechanisms of representation. One realistic but troubling possibility is that party systems in many post-1978 democracies will continue to be roiled by high electoral volatility, with adverse consequences for democracy but with little or no movement toward a stabilization of the party system.

While the birth date of democracies has a strong impact on electoral volatility, the age of democracies has almost no discernible impact. Converse (1969) argued that citizens would gradually come to identify more with

parties, but in many post-1978 democracies they have come to reject parties more over time. As Dalton and Welden argue in their article in this issue (Dalton and Weldon, 2007), the gradual development of a partisan identification depends on conditions that do not exist in many post-1978 competitive regimes.

As hypothesized on the basis of the literature on economic voting and previous literature on electoral volatility, poor performance in economic growth also boosts electoral volatility, but the effect is modest. This finding helps explain the high mean volatility of post-1978 democracies, many of which have experienced poor economic growth. For our set of countries, surprisingly, inflation had no clear impact on volatility.

Our results indicated a modest impact of the effective number of parties on electoral volatility. Because the effective number of parties is strongly influenced by electoral rules, this means that formal institutions affect the stabilization of electoral competition. Some social scientists counterpose arguments that emphasize path dependence or sequences to those that emphasize the incentives created by formal institutions. Our findings show complementarity rather than conflict between these two approaches to explanation – specifically between the institutional effects of the fragmentation of the party system and the sequence and timing effects of early democratization.

The results support claims about the distinctive nature of post-1978 party systems compared to the party systems of the advanced industrial democracies (Mainwaring, 1999; Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006). Most post-1978 party systems have much higher volatility than the advanced industrial democracies, and they are not becoming more stable over time. This empirical distinctiveness of the post-1978 party systems raises the relatively new theoretical questions that we have examined here. Why do party systems not stabilize over time? Why do partisan identities not solidify over time, as Converse (1969) suggested in his pioneering work?

Finally, our analysis supports claims about the importance of sequences and path dependence in political processes. Most advocates of such arguments have employed qualitative methods. There are, however, powerful advantages to testing hypotheses about historical sequences through quantitative methods, as we have done here. Claims about the effects of path dependence and historical sequences that are based solely on qualitative evidence are often less rigorous than is optimal. Testing through quantitative methods allows for better assessment of competing hypotheses and for a better evaluation of the magnitude of effects. For this reason, quantitative testing can enrich the analysis of historical sequences and path dependence. The reverse is also true: thinking about historical sequences is necessary for a quantitative analysis of some important issues. Without considering timing and sequence, quantitative scholars would misspecify some equations and fail to understand some causal processes.

Notes

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- 1 We refer to post-1978 democracies because the first democracies in the third wave of democratization, Portugal, Greece and Spain, have become more alike in important respects to the older democracies of Western Europe than to the post-1978 democracies of Latin America and the post-Soviet region. These Southern European democracies are stable; the countries have come to enjoy high standards of living; and the party systems have low volatility.
- 2 When a party split into two or more parties from election T1 to T2, we compared its T2 total with the largest split-off. We treated the smaller new splinter party as if it had no votes in election T1. When two or more parties merged and created a new organization, we calculated volatility using the original party with the highest percentage. If two or more parties merged for election T2, but competed in election T1 as separate parties, we assumed that the one(s) with fewer votes disappeared in election T2. We gave a zero value to this party in T2 and counted its share of the vote in T1 as its percentage of change. When a party changed its name but had an obvious continuity with a previous party, we counted them as being the same organization. We usually treated independents as a category because we lacked the data needed for comparing individuals' results from one election to the next. In cases in which minor parties were grouped together as 'others', we treated them as one party. For the 14 countries that have two different electoral systems for the lower chamber, we used the data from one of the systems. Ukraine and Russia: we used party list votes with the exception of Ukraine 1994 (single-member districts), and we treated the 'against all' category as non-valid votes. Mexico: we used the plurality votes with the exception of 1988, when we used the PR results. Bolivia and Thailand: we used only the list votes after the introduction of mixed systems for the elections of 1997. Italy and New Zealand: only the list votes after the introduction of mixed systems in 1994 and 1996, respectively. Ecuador: we used results for deputies selected in a countrywide district, not the separate results for federal deputies elected in provincial-wide districts. Hungary, Lithuania and the Philippines: we used party list votes in all elections. Japan: only plurality votes after the 1994 electoral reform. Taiwan and South Korea: we used only single-member district votes in all elections.
- 3 The editors of this special edition of *Party Politics* asked us to include the CSES countries to enhance comparisons across articles.
- 4 See Gurr et al. (1990) and Jagers and Gurr (1995) on the Polity scores. They coded scales of institutionalized democracy and institutionalized autocracy. Both scales range from 0 to 10. We subtracted the autocracy score from the democracy score, thus creating a scale from -10 (highly authoritarian) to 10 (very democratic). Of course, there is no precise cut-point in the Polity scores between authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes. The zero cut-point excludes cases in which elections were so controlled as to limit volatility. In a few cases we used the updated Polity scores rather than Polity 2 because of greater accuracy. Polity 2 codes Iceland's competitive regimes as beginning in 1918, but we used 1944, the year of independence.

- 5 We did not include Bangladesh because of incomplete electoral results.
- 6 We also ran the empirical analyses using two alternative specifications for the Years of Democracy variable: a logged form and the square root (both without the upper maximum of 30 years). Theoretically, we prefer the linear form of this variable with the maximum of 30 years because, in Converse's argument, the establishment of partisan identities should grow steadily for an extended period of time, then taper off. The linear form with the upper maximum of 30 years is most consistent with this expectation. Results were highly consistent regardless of the empirical specification for this variable, and the r^2 was marginally higher with the linear form.
- 7 For per capita GDP growth and inflation, we created one variable specific to the electoral period and a cumulative variable that measured per capita growth and inflation since the inauguration of democracy (or the beginning of our dataset) for up to 25 years. We ultimately did not use the cumulative variables because of problems of multicollinearity with the period-specific variables. The Pearson correlation coefficients between the short-term and cumulative variables were 0.76 for inflation and 0.74 for growth.
- 8 It is not possible to calculate a log from a negative value. To minimize the number of missing cases, we assume that inflation below 1 percent per year including deflation has an impact on electoral volatility that is indistinguishable from that of an inflation rate of 1 percent. We recorded all such cases as having a logged inflation of 0.
- 9 We also ran the regressions using this variable in an unlogged form. The r^2 was higher with the variable logged. Thus, for both theoretical and empirical reasons, we report the results with the logged form.
- 10 See Wilson and Butler (forthcoming) on the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to regression with panel data. The random effects model assumes that unobserved country-specific effects are not correlated with other independent variables. This assumption is violated in most panel data involving countries (Wilson and Butler, forthcoming). The GEE models with AR1 error specifications have the advantage of allowing for the fact that errors might be temporally correlated within countries. Because of some minor gaps in information for seven countries (see column 2 of Table 1), to avoid losing all observations for those countries we used the 'force' option on Stata for GEEAR1.
- 11 Parties are not weaker in all respects than they were two or three generations ago, but they are less important today than in earlier times as fundamental creators and anchors of political and social identities (see Pizzorno, 1981; Schmitter, 2001).
- 12 As Thelen (1999) observed, many analyses that invoke path dependence fail to specify the mechanisms by which an initial starting point has long-term repercussions.
- 13 Parties also provided a means of organizing legislatures (Aldrich, 1995: 29–45).
- 14 The literature on legislators' motives has largely focused on their desire for re-election and on 'progressive ambition', that is, their desire to move into higher political positions. It has rarely examined predation as a motive for seeking political office (Guevara Mann, 2001).

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