

**POLITICAL PARTIES OR PARTY SYSTEMS?  
ASSESSING THE “MYTH” OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND  
DEMOCRACY**

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Reflecting Huntington’s preoccupation with weak institutions in the second half of the 1960s, party (system) institutionalization has remained a recurrent theme in the (usually pessimistic) democratic consolidation literature (Pridham, 1990). Among scholars there seems to be a widespread agreement that whether in Africa (Kuenzi and Lambright, 2005; Lindberg, 2007), Asia (Johnson, 2002; Hicken, 2006), Europe (Lewis, 1994; Morlino, 1998) or Latin America (Dix, 1992; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995), few institutional developments are more critical to the consolidation and healthy functioning of democracy than the institutionalization of both political parties and party systems (Diamond and Linz, 1989; Tavits, 2005). As a result, party (system) institutionalization has traditionally been considered to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the consolidation of democracy (Mainwaring, 1999).

Interestingly enough, however, and despite having become one of the most repeated assumptions in the democratization literature, such close relationship between institutionalization and democracy has never been proved beyond a myriad of countries (Johnson, 2002; Mainwaring, 1999; Markowski, 2001) and/or regional (Lewis, 2006; Kneuer, 2011) studies. In fact, when tested in a larger number of cases, “the correlation [has proved to be] not as impressive as theory predicts” (Basedau, 2007:125), not to say negative (Stockton, 2001) or even inexistent (Thames and Robbins, 2007), putting into question Huntington’s and Mainwaring’s seminal concerns about the benefits of both party and party system institutionalization for the consolidation of democracy.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding what has been said, and taking into consideration that the relationship between institutionalization and democracy may not be as unidirectional or linear as expected (Schedler, 1995; Wallis, 2003), the current paper revisits the abovementioned assumption but differs from previous studies in the following manner. First of all, it draws a clear distinction between party and party system institutionalization. Secondly, it improves the way in which both phenomena have been operationalized, by measuring the whole process of institutionalization, rather than at one point in time. Thirdly, it employs an original

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<sup>1</sup> For a criticism of the positive relationship between institutionalization and democratic consolidation, see Tóka (1997) or Chabal and Daloz (1999).

dataset comprising all European democratic political regimes since 1848, allowing for both geographical and chronological comparisons. Finally, it makes use of a different method enabling to accurately identify to what extent party and/or systemic institutionalization are to be considered necessary and/or sufficient conditions for the consolidation of democracy.

Trying to fulfil all the above-cited goals, the paper is structured in four different sections. The first one re-considers the conceptualization debate regarding party/party system institutionalization. Section two presents the dataset as well as explains the methodology employed. The third section identifies adequate indicators for all the variables examined. After briefly reviewing the literature discussing the different mechanisms linking institutionalization and democracy, the final section examines the veracity of the necessary, but not sufficient, relationship between party (system) institutionalization and democratic consolidation. In the conclusion, the implications of the main findings of the paper are addressed.

### **Party and Party System Institutionalization**

Any scholar studying the institutionalization of party systems faces the problem of the unit of analysis: political parties, party systems, or both? Surprisingly enough, and notwithstanding an ever growing number of systematic comparative works and countless case-studies, most scholars (e.g. Kreuzer and Pettai, 2003; Lewis, 2006; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995; Rose and Munro, 2009; Shabad and Słomczyński, 2004; Tóka, 1997; etc.) still approach the institutionalization of individual parties and party systems as two interchangeable and synonymous concepts, “the implication being that [since individual political parties constitute integral parts of the whole party system] the institutionalization of the party system directly depends on that of individual parties” (Meleshevich, 2007: 16).

The relationship between these two notions is, however, not nearly so “simple and deterministic” (Markowski, 2001:56): while individual political parties may be institutionalized, their operation in a party system may not be. In this sense, Randall and Svåsand are correct when they argue that, although closely related, “individual party institutionalization and the institutionalization of the party system are neither the same thing nor necessarily and always mutually compatible” (2002:6). Moreover, they “could be at odds” (2002:8), particularly in the case of young democracies. As a result of this lack of conceptual clarity or absence of consistent analytical frameworks, research on (party and party system) institutionalization has thus far led to contradictory or at least inconclusive assessments on the relationship between institutionalization and democracy. It is for this

reason that I will turn to the distinction between these two phenomena first, trying to put some flesh on the bones of both concepts.

### *Party System Institutionalization*

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

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

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

Most authors follow Mainwaring and Scully's pattern of proposing a series of "dimensions" of party system institutionalization. Morlino (1998) claims that "structured" party systems must be stable in terms of electoral behaviour, partisan competition and political class; Bielasiak (2001), who is interested in the institutionalization of party systems in Eastern Europe and post-Soviet States, distinguishes three dimensions of stability: electoral democracy, political contestation, and political representation; Kreuzer and Pettai assert, from a different perspective, that systemic institutionalization "is ultimately shaped by the interaction of both politicians' organizational affiliations and voters' electoral choices" (2003:81); and, even more explicitly, Meleshevich (2007) conceives of it as involving both (external) autonomy and (internal) stability. More recently, Lindberg (2007) simply puts institutionalization on a level with stabilization. Interestingly enough, there is only one exception to this principle of simply enumerating dimensions (i.e. Randall and Svåsand, 2002) but by and large and notwithstanding its originality, such exception constitutes no more than a thoughtful theoretical model, as it does not provide us with any means of operationalization.

It follows from this brief analysis, then, that political scientists have conceptualized systemic institutionalization in numerous ways. Most agree on some dimensions of the notion

but not many arrive at the same final combination. Criticism of the conceptual and operational approaches of these studies appears elsewhere (Casal Bértoa, 2011), but the fundamental problem running through all these works is that, more preoccupied with an empirical assessment of institutionalization, they tend to pay very little attention to conceptualization *per se*. However, as we know from the literature, for an empirical analysis to be valid it is essential first to establish a sound conceptual base (Della Porta and Keating, 2008). Only then scholars can take care of matching such conceptual framework with the most appropriate measures (Adcock and Collier, 2001). How, then, can we define the concept of party system institutionalization?

Strictly speaking, we can only speak of institutionalization when we are able to define what it is that has been institutionalized. Our first task then is, perhaps, insurmountable to specify the “essence” of what constitutes a given party system. Sartori offers the clearest definition of a party system as “the *system of interactions* resulting from inter-party competition” (1976:44). This definition has three main different implications. First, a party system must consist of more than a single party (otherwise there is no inter-party competition). Second, a party system clearly involves something more than the sum of its component parts (i.e. political parties). This way it incorporates some element of understanding of the mode of interaction between the latter. Third, the notion of “system” implies some degree of regularity, suggesting some continuity of inter-party interactions between elections (Sartori, 1976:43).

Once the nature of what constitutes a party system has been established, it becomes possible to define party system institutionalization and, hence, to specify the dimensions which can determine whether any given system is already institutionalized or still remains under-institutionalized.

As is clear from what has been said, all meanings of the conception of institutionalization contain the idea of stability and persistence (Riker and Ordershook, 1973). In fact, if we take into consideration that the core of a party system is to be found in the patterns of interaction among its units, that is, political parties (Mair, 2006), it seems clear that the most important and necessary attribute of party system institutionalization is stability in the rules and nature of inter-party competition (Lindberg, 2007). Indeed, as Mainwaring and Scully stated in their seminal analysis of Latin American party systems, “where such *stability* does not exist, institutionalization is limited” (1995:4-5). Therefore, the more stable the system, the more institutionalized it becomes (Mair, 2001:35).

Bearing in mind all what has been said, and drawing on Huntington's (1968: 12) original definition of institutionalization as the "process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability", I define party system institutionalization as *the process by which the patterns of interaction among political parties become routine, predictable and stable over time.*<sup>2</sup> In other words, a system of parties can be said to be institutionalized when political parties cooperate, collaborate and colligate in a standardized and structured way - a way that is independent of the relevant issues in each moment and which random shocks cannot alter (Mainwaring, 1998). On the contrary, in under-institutionalized party systems political parties are incapable of interacting in any patterned manner, failing to present voters with clearly stable political alliances and, therefore, predictable governmental alternatives (Mair, 2001:39).

#### *Party Institutionalization*

Although widely employed in the literature, the concept of party institutionalization has been often poorly and/or ambiguously defined; while some scholars have used the term without further clarification, others – as we have previously seen - have tended to simply equate it with that of systemic institutionalization. The result has been a lingering uncertainty about its "real" meaning.

Although the notion of institutionalization had been previously employed in relation to political organizations, Huntington (1968) was the first scholar to apply it to the analysis of political parties. Unfortunately, he did not dedicate much time to its definition (just one sentence), and preferred to focus on its (four) dimensions: namely, *adaptability, autonomy, complexity, coherence.*

Most scholars have preferred to follow Huntington's seminal approach of merely suggesting a series of dimensions of institutionalization, hastening to operationalize them. For some, the notion of party institutionalization is uni-dimensional. But while for Janda a party is institutionalized exclusively when it is "reified in the public mind" (1980:19), for Rose and Mackie (1988) electoral continuity (i.e. more than three national elections) is the only dimension. For the majority, party institutionalization needs to be treated as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. However, while for Panebianco (1988) party institutionalization has only two dimensions (i.e. *autonomy* and *systemness*), for Harmel and Svåsand's (1993) or McGuire (1997) the concept has a tri-dimensional character: namely, routinization, rootedness and reification. Jin (1995) agrees also with the first two, adding a different "party

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<sup>2</sup> For a similar understanding, please see Bakke and Sitter (2005) or Mair (2001).

efficacy in the legislative process” as a third dimension. Other scholars, like Dix’s (1992), simply adopt Huntington’s conceptual framework but incorporating a completely new set of operational indicators.

As with the concept of party system institutionalization examined above, the fundamental problem running through most of these works is that they tend to pay little attention to conceptualization *per se* as they are almost exclusively oriented toward an empirical assessment of institutionalization. However, it should not be forgotten that any valid empirical analysis needs first a sound conceptual base. In this context, two studies are extremely remarkable, namely: Levitsky’s (1998) analysis of the transformation of the Justicialist Party in Argentina, and Randall and Svåsand’s (2002) analysis of the institutionalization of political parties in the “Third World”.

Well aware of the disjuncture between the initial conception of institutionalization and the way it has been elaborated and related to specific criteria by the majority of scholars, Levitsky suggests that “the concept of [party] institutionalization be unpacked” (1998:88). Thus, bearing in mind the predominant conceptualizations of institutionalization used in the literature of political parties, Levitsky distinguishes two different elements: (1) *value infusion*, encompassing rootedness, and denoting a “shift from the pursuit of particular objectives through an organization to the goal of perpetuating the organization *per se*” (1998: 79); and (2) *behavioural routinization*, which covers stable patterns of organization, pointing to entrenched forms of intra-organizational interaction.

Clearly influenced by Levitsky’s work, Randall and Svåsand distinguished four different dimensions of party institutionalization, understood as “the process by which [a] party becomes established in terms both of integrated patterns of behaviour and of attitudes, or culture” (2002:12). On the one hand, within the internal sphere, both authors distinguish between *systemness* (i.e., the increasing scope, density and regularity of the interactions that constitute the party as a structure) and *value infusion* which refers to the extent to which party actors and supporters acquire an identification with and commitment to a party. On the other hand, the external dimension includes *autonomy* (i.e., the degree of differentiation from other social groups and methods of behaviour), and *reification* which, capturing Janda’s notion, requires the party’s existence to be established in the public imagination (2001:80). Unfortunately, as in the case of systemic institutionalization, they failed to put their own concept to the test, therefore falling prey to exactly the same failure they criticize.

As follows from this discussion, it becomes clear that the concept of party institutionalization is “multifaceted, difficult to operationalize, and sometimes conducive to

tautological argument” (Gunther and Hopkin, 2002: 193). However, and despite the fact that no two scholars have arrived at the same set of dimensions, two broad areas of consensus seem to emerge: party institutionalization involves a combination of both stable roots in society as well as firmly established/properly routinized organizationally structures. And if we are going to accept, as do the majority of scholars, that institutionalization is characterized by *rootedness* and *systemness* (Webb and White, 2007: 11), then it becomes possible to establish a common definition of party institutionalization which is then understood as *the process by which parties reproduce consistent patterns of mass mobilization and internal organization*. In other words, when institutionalized political parties are expected to remain stable both at the level of popular support (at the moment of elections and between elections) as well as in terms of their label, political ideology, and organizational structure.

### **Method and Data**

The main goal of this paper is to empirically test if either party or party system institutionalization, or both, should be considered necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for the consolidation of democracy, as the bulk of the scholarly literature maintains. Traditional statistical analysis, based on correlational and linear-additive models, are unable to provide a proper answer to this question, but Boolean algebra certainly does (Caramani, 2009; Ragin, 2008).

Although constantly referred to in the literature, it has not been until recently that scholars have started to emphasize the relevance of necessary conditions (Goertz and Starr, 2003; Goertz, 2006). Because this type of conditions have to be fulfilled every time an outcome is present (see table 1), necessary conditions are essential to “the process of coaxing generalizations from empirical evidence (Ragin, 2003:179) and, therefore, should be examined appropriately.

[Table 1 around here]

Traditionally scholars would simply try to cluster the different cases available into the two-by-two table displayed above. So if some cases would fall in box 2 while box 1 remained empty, the specific condition was considered to be necessary for the outcome. If this was not the case, the necessary character of the condition would be denied (Caramani, 2009). Currently, and thanks to Ragin’s (2008) Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method, it is possible not only to establish if a condition is necessary for the outcome, but also to qualify such statement (e.g. “almost always”). For this Ragin’s measurements of consistency and

coverage are essential.<sup>3</sup> While the consistency threshold recommended in the literature for necessary conditions is 0.9, for “almost necessary” conditions is just 0.8 (Ragin, 2003, 2008).

These same measurements will also help me to assess at the same time if a certain condition is (or is not) sufficient for the outcome, with the latter taking place every time the former is present. And this is so because coverage scores for necessity also work as consistency scores for sufficiency as well as necessity consistency figures display the coverage of sufficient conditions (Ragin, 2008).

In order to test the relationship between party (system) institutionalization and democracy, I have built a new dataset comprising 60 democratic European political regimes between 1848 and 2013 (December, 31<sup>st</sup>). Because I am interested in the impact party competition has on the consolidation of democracy, a country is considered to be democratic only when (1) it displays at least a score of 6 in the Polity IV index, (2) universal (male) suffrage elections have been held at least once, and (3) governments are formed (and rely) on a parliamentary majority, rather than on the exclusive will of the head of state.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, and because time has proved to be as important for both party (Dix, 1992) and party system institutionalization (Mair, 1997) as for democratic consolidation (Huntington, 1991), I will only analyze here the first twenty-three years after the (re-)inauguration of democracy, as defined above. This will allow me to evaluate analogous periods and avoid faulty comparisons (Casal Bértoa and Mair, 2012:105).<sup>5</sup>

### **How to Measure Institutionalization? A New Approach**

#### *Party system institutionalization*

Traditionally party system institutionalization has been measured using two different indicators: the number of parties and/or electoral volatility. As it has been explained elsewhere (Casal Bértoa, 2011), I believe that neither of these two classical indicators really captures the notion of systemic institutionalization. On the one hand, and because they are measured only at the time of elections, both indicators fail to capture what is a process, not

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<sup>3</sup> Consistency indicates to what extent instances of the outcome constitutes a subset of the condition, while coverage gauges the importance of a consistent subset. While in the former the number of cases where both the condition and the outcome are present is divided by the number of cases with the outcome, in the latter the denominator refers to the number of cases with the condition (Ragin, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> The only European democracies excluded from the analysis have been: pre-WWI/inter-war Greece and post-WWII Czechoslovakia. The former due to the lack of available data, the latter because democracy collapsed not even after a year from the moment it was re-inaugurated.

<sup>5</sup> The idea is to avoid situations in which time constitutes the main explanatory variable. Thus, it would be unfair to compare Hungary or any post-communist democracy in 2013 with the UK or any other traditional Western European democracy in the same year as in the latter political parties had four times more time than in the former to interact and, therefore, create a cumulative experience helping them to routinize their behavior making it more predictable and stable.



just a property (i.e. at one point in time). On another hand, and although the number of parties gives us important information about the so-called “streams of interaction” (Sartori, 1976), it totally fails to address partisan interaction per se. The fact that we have four parties today and six parties tomorrow does not tell us anything about how parties cooperate/compete. Moreover, even in the very straightforward case when we have the same number of parties in two consecutive elections, their identity may be totally different giving path to different (less stable/predictable) interactions. Finally, and because there is both a supply- and a demand-side in electoral volatility (Rose and Munro, 2009), Pedersen index is inadequate to clearly distinguish between party (supply-side) and systemic (demand-side) institutionalization.

For all these reasons, in this paper I will rely on Mair’s (1997) notion of “party system closure” and, more particularly, in Casal Bértoa and Enyedi’s (forthcoming) operationalization of it. There are five main reasons for this, namely:

- a) Considering the structure of inter-party competition for government “the most important aspect of party systems” (Mair, 1997:206), it enables to focus on the fundamental “core” of any party system: namely, the process of partisan interaction;
- b) It operationalizes institutionalization at the systemic level independently of the static parameters of its units, making a clear distinction between party and party system institutionalization;
- c) It is eminently suited for “large-scale geographic and inter-temporal comparisons” (Müller and Fallend, 2004:804); and perhaps, more importantly,
- d) It allows for an evaluation of the *process* of institutionalization on a yearly basis, and not only at the time of elections (e.g. fragmentation or volatility measures),
- e) It has proved to be superior to other similar operationalizations, both in terms of validity and reliability (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi, forthcoming).

Building on Mair’s (1997) considerations that institutionalized party systems are characterized by (1) wholesale (i.e. total or none) alternations of governments, (2) familiar governing formulae and (3) closed (i.e. to a limited number of parties) governmental access, Casal Bértoa and Enyedi (forthcoming) have created a composite index of party system institutionalization (iPSI) which, combining all these three factors, also takes time under consideration.

[Table 2 around here]

As it follows from table 2, the degree to which governing alternations of political parties are wholesale is captured by the so-called Pedersen index of ministerial volatility, which adds the net change in percentage of ministers (including the prime minister) gained

and lost by each party from one government to the next, and then dividing by two. However, and because wholesale alternation (both total and none) can be reflected by scores at both extremes of the MV scale (both 100 and 0, respectively), if the MV initial score obtained according to the formula described above is lower than 50 (i.e. perfect partial alternation), the former figure will be subtracted from 100. If MV is higher than 50, the IGA will be equal to the initial MV score.

The second and third criteria are calculated by the percentage of ministers belonging, respectively, to familiar combination of parties and old governing parties, with the caveats presented in the table above. The time component, so important in any measurement of institutionalization as a process, is captured by taking into consideration all the years a particular cabinet has endured.<sup>6</sup> Finally, and in order to avoid measuring incompatible scores, the standardized (z-) score of the three indicators are combined into one unique measurement of party system institutionalization (i.e. iPSI), paying due attention to *stability* as its sole dimension.

#### *Party institutionalization*

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

The degree of party institutionalization at large has been traditionally operationalized in several ways and using multiple indicators: party identification (Dalton and Weldon, 2007); levels of professionalization (Johnson, 2002) and personalism (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2006), the capacity of parties to sponsor parties cross-nationally (Rose and Mackie, 1988), the percentage of independent candidates (Moser, 1999), to name only a few. Unfortunately, and notwithstanding their validity, none of the indicators seems to measure at the same time both rootedness and systemness. Not even the most widely used indicator of party institutionalization, that is, the average age of “relevant”<sup>7</sup> parties (Huntington, 1968; Jin, 1995; Tavits, 2005). This indicator not only may exclude very well rooted and routinized party organizations, even if with limited electoral support (i.e. <10 percent of the vote), but also fails to capture the process of party development by measuring the level of

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note here that if two or more cabinets are formed during the same year, then the averages of the scores for the different above-cited government features are considered (Casal Bértoa and Enyedi, forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Usually those with more than 10 percent of the votes at a given election (Mainwaring, 1998; Robert and Wibbels, 1999). Conversely, Lewis’ IPS considers all political parties with parliamentary representation at least twice.

institutionalization at just one point in time. Moreover, this indicator clearly discriminates against new democracies, favouring countries with a previous democratic experience. Last but not least, the average age may well hide the fact that only one or two parties are well institutionalized, while the others are not.<sup>8</sup>

For all these reasons I turn here to Lewis' (2006) Index of Party Stabilization (IPS), which "weights and 'rewards' the electoral achievement [*rootedness*] of parties in a sequence of elections" through the progressive enhancement (*systemness*) of the proportion of the total vote for political parties in a given election over time - by 20% for a party's second appearance in parliament, 40% for the third, and so forth (Lewis, 2006:574-575). Therefore, if a parliamentary party gets 35% of the votes in the first election, 40% in the second, and 10% in the third; a second parliamentary party gets 65% in the first election, 50% in the second, and 80% in the third; and a third party gets into parliament only after the second election with 10% of the vote; the IPS is calculated in the following way: for the first election  $35+65=100$ , for the second  $[48 (40+40*0.2)+60 (50+50*0.2)+10]=118$ , and for the third  $[14 (10+10*0.4)+112 (80+10*0.4)+12 (10+10*0.2)]=138$ . Then, the summed of the enhanced representation score in the three elections is divided by a notional total score of 360 (i.e. 100% for the first election, 120% for the second, and 140% for the third) and multiplied by 100. The logic is that, taking notice of both voter stability in voters' electoral preferences (*rootedness*) and the age of a party organization (*systemness*), the IPS measures the two dimensions of party institutionalization altogether.

### **Institutionalization and Democracy: Reality or Myth?**

Paraphrasing Schattschneider (1942) few scholars would currently question that modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of stable parties and party systems. The idea it that while

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

the institutionalization of political parties themselves is considered to have positive implications not only for democratic accountability and responsiveness, but also in terms of the linkage between citizens and the state (Diamond and Linz, 1989; Mainwaring, O'Donnell,

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<sup>8</sup> Randall and Svåsand (2002:9) point here to the so-called *unevenness* of party institutionalization (i.e. the party system might consist of individual parties at drastically different levels of institutionalization).

and Valenzuela, 1992). Moreover, and as Mainwaring has constantly repeated, the problem is when institutionalization does not take place, neither at the supra- nor at the infra-level, citizens may become increasingly frustrated with the (democratic) system, leading not only to high levels of social dissatisfaction (e.g. mass demonstrations) and political disengagement (e.g. low turnout), but also to the appearance (and electoral success) of populist parties and demagogic leaders threatening the survival of the regime (1998, 1999; see also Innes, 2002; McGuire, 1997). It is for these reasons that when dealing with the question of democratic survival and collapse both types of institutionalization need to be approached complementarily.

[Figures 1 and 2 around here]

Based on the indicators explained in the previous sections, figures 1 and 2 summarise the levels of party and party system institutionalization in Europe since 1848, with countries where democracy collapsed in capitals. A first look at the figures reveals that both political parties and party systems in Europe have institutionalized at different rates and in different ways. Secondly, while there seems not to be geographical difference in terms of systemic institutionalization, political parties in the Western part of the continent seems to have institutionalized at a faster pace than their Eastern European counter-parts during the same period (i.e. 23 years). This points to a third, and definitively more important observation, notwithstanding the expected (positive) correlation ( $r = .369$ , sig. at 0.01) between both party and systemic institutionalization (Casal Bértoa, 2011), party and systemic institutionalization levels do not exactly correspond, therefore justifying the need for a close examination of these two processes independently from each other.

#### *Party system institutionalization and democracy*

One of the first interesting findings that follow from figure 1 is that, compared in their infancy, post-communist party systems do not stand as extremely inchoate in comparison with their Western and Southern European counterparts (at least at the time of their infancy). Although it is true that among the under-institutionalized (i.e.  $iPSI \leq 0$ ) European party systems post-communist countries constitute a clear majority, most of the Eastern European party systems are to be found on the higher part of the institutionalization (i.e.  $iPSI > 0$ ) ranking. Some, like Romania, Georgia, Kosovo or Ukraine can be considered to be strongly (i.e.  $iPSI > 1$ ) institutionalized. Montenegro, together with three classics in the list (i.e. Switzerland, Austria and Malta), is to be classified as “over-institutionalized” (i.e.  $iPSI > 3$ ).

Another important discovery is that among all those democracies that did not collapse, the earlier a polity democratized the better. In the sense that party system

institutionalization tends to be stronger among the first democratised polities. Thus, it is not only that the oldest democracy in Europe has the most institutionalized party system, but most post-WWI party systems tend to be more institutionalized than post-WWII and post-fascists democracies, in this order. This seems to confirm previous findings that the earlier the “time of transition” the higher the systemic institutionalization (Casal Bértoa and Mair, 2012; Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007).

In terms of the relationship between party system institutionalization and the consolidation of democracy in Europe, a quick look at figure 1 seems to disconfirm the often repeated statement that “party system institutionalization is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the consolidation of democracy”. In fact, up to ten post-communist countries, two micro-states (i.e. San Marino and Andorra) and post-1983 Turkey have managed to have their democracies consolidated despite having more or less under-institutionalized party systems. Moreover, party system institutionalization does not even come close to be an “almost necessary” condition for the consolidation of democracy in Europe. Indeed, the necessity test reveals a consistency score of 0.71 far from the 0.8 threshold recommended in the literature.

What the previous analysis certainly reveals, though, is that party system institutionalization should be considered as a “sufficient”<sup>9</sup> condition for the consolidation of democracy as democracy never collapsed in countries where the structure of partisan interactions had achieved a certain “minimum” degree of stabilization. Indeed, and contrary to what Stockton (2001:112, 117) maintained, figure 1 seems to suggest the existence of a threshold of systemic institutionalization ( $iPSI \geq 0.5$ ) that when achieved will certainly guarantee the consolidation of a nation’s democratic regime.

In fact, the only country where democracy collapsed despite having an institutionalized party system, but under the above-cited threshold, is inter-war Austria. Here external factors like the post-Versailles crisis and the Great Depression, together with the political pressures from Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, mostly contributed to Dollfuss “self-coup” in March 1933 (Gerlich and Campbell 2000:53-56; Berg-Schlosser, 2002:314). But even in this instance it is possible to observe, especially after August 1930, an increase in the frequency of partial (and between elections) alternations as well as the appearance of previously unseen patterns of competition/collaboration.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Coverage equals to 0.97.

<sup>10</sup> Thus, in an unprecedented move, representatives of the extreme right-wing “Pro Patria” Bloc were granted access to government in September 1930. Less than three years later (i.e. in January 1932), the nationalist

Interestingly enough, the results are very similar no matter what other operationalization of party system institutionalization is used. Thus, employing Pedersen's index of electoral volatility (TEV) and 15 percent, traditionally considered to be the threshold to identify "earthquake" elections, as a cutting point also renders party system institutionalization as a sufficient (0.92) rather than necessary (0.51) condition for democratic consolidation. Laakso and Taagepera's "effective number of parliamentary parties" (ENPP)<sup>11</sup> also points to the former as an "almost sufficient" (0.83), but in no way necessary (0.73) condition.

However, it could well be that previous scholars had put so much weight in the process of institutionalization due to the impact low systemic institutionalization has had on the collapse of democracy in Latin America, Africa or even inter-war Europe. Still, we should remember that causation is not essentially symmetric, meaning that party system under-institutionalization could be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for democratic collapse, even if its opposite is not. It clearly follows from figure 1 that this has been the case since the nascent of modern democracy in Europe in 1848. Thus, and with the only exception mentioned above, all other instances of regime collapse display low levels of systemic institutionalization. Moreover, a detailed analysis of the process of party system development in those 15 cases clearly reveals in almost all cases (post-WWII Turkey and Russia being the only exceptions) an increasing progression towards unpredictability, meaning higher frequency of partial alternations, innovative formulae and newly formed parties in government in the years preceding the collapse of the democratic regime. In consonance with what has been said, the necessity tests reveal a consistency score of 0.93, well above the 0.9 threshold.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, the "sufficiency hypothesis" is totally rejected with independence of the indicator employed.

[Table 3 around here]

A confirmation of the previous results is also to be found in table 3, which cross-tabulates the percentage of countries with institutionalized party systems and democratic survival or collapse according to the different waves of democratization in Europe.<sup>13</sup> What

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Greater German People's Party (GDVP) would be excluded from a coalition government between the Christian Social Party (CS) and the Rural Party (LB) for the first time.

<sup>11</sup> Here the cutting point is an ENPP of 4, which distinguishes "extreme pluralist" (ENPP $\geq$ 4) party systems from the rest, either "limited pluralist" (ENPP between 3 and 3.9), two-and-a-half (ENPP between 2.5 and 2.9) or bi-party (ENPP $<$ 2.5) systems (see Mainwaring and Scully, 1995:31-32).

<sup>12</sup> TEV, although not ENPP (0.53), also points to the lack of systemic institutionalization as an "almost necessary" (0.8) condition for the collapse of a democracy.

<sup>13</sup> "Democratic waves" are considered here to be clearly distinguishable periods, separated by a major event or "structural juncture" (e.g. World War, end of the Cold War, etc.), in which a clearly identifiable group of

the above table reveals, however, is that while still relevant, the positive impact of party system institutionalization for democratic consolidation has decreased over time. Thus, we have passed from a period (before WWII) where it was both a necessary and sufficient condition, to a period (during the Southern European wave) where it was a sufficient and “almost necessary” condition, to a final (i.e. current) period when it is a sufficient, but not necessary, condition for the survival of democracy. This seems to undoubtedly correlate with one of the initial findings that earlier democracies tend to have higher institutionalized party systems. Interestingly enough, if there is one thing that has remained constant all the way since 1848 is the necessary relationship between a lack of systemic institutionalization and democratic collapse.

#### *Party institutionalization and democracy*

Contrary to what has been previously observed, in terms of party institutionalization there seems to be a clear geographical cleavage between East and West. In fact, and as it follows from figure 2, only five out of nineteen Eastern European democracies are considered to have institutionalized (i.e.  $IPS > 85$ ) political parties. Moreover, even Montenegro, which is the post-communist country with the strongest (i.e. institutionalized) political parties, occupies a discrete twenty-second position, very far from those Western (e.g. Austria, Italy, Finland, Sweden, etc.) and Southern (e.g. Spain, Cyprus) European nations where political parties could be considered to be over-institutionalized (i.e.  $IPS > 95$ ).

Another important difference in relation to what was said before is that although political parties tend to be more institutionalized in earlier democratization waves, the contrast is not as straightforward as in the case of systemic institutionalization. Thus, and even if it is true that most countries democratized during the Third and Fourth Waves display very high levels of party institutionalization, there are instances of the contrary: e.g. the French 5<sup>th</sup> Republic or post-1983 Turkey. Moreover, political parties did not manage to institutionalize, at least during the first twenty-years of democracy, in post-WWI Ireland and Luxembourg as well during the French 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic. And what is also very revealing: the majority Southern European political parties clearly outperform most of their First and Second Wave counterparts.

Do these different findings between party and party system institutionalization extend to the relationship between the former and democracy? The answer is definitively yes.

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countries (e.g. Southern European, post-communist, etc.) is (re-)incorporated to the family of democratic nations. In this context I definitely differ from Huntington's (1991) classification which distinguishes only three different waves of democratization separated by two “authoritarian” counter-waves or periods of democratic regression.

Indeed, a quick look at figure 5 seems to suggest that party institutionalization is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the consolidation of democracy. Thus, not only there have been countries where democracy collapsed despite high levels of party institutionalization (e.g. post-1946 and post-1961 Turkey, inter-war Finland, the Weimar or the Austrian 1<sup>st</sup> Republics), in most post-communist countries democracy has survived despite the presence of very weakly institutionalized political parties (mainly in Georgia, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia, but also in Bulgaria, Moldova or Lithuania). Necessity (consistency = 0.56) tests do not but to confirm the latter. And although party institutionalization comes close, with 81 percent of the cases consistent with the argument of sufficiency, the fact is that with only 55.6 percent of the cases covered by the condition, it is possible to consider it as a trivial and, therefore, not relevant “almost sufficient” condition.<sup>14</sup>

[Table 4 around here]

In a similar vein, there seems not to be any causal relationship, either of necessity or sufficiency (consistency = 0.4 and 0.17, respectively) between democratic collapse and party under-institutionalization. Indeed, the fact that almost as many regimes with under-institutionalized political parties have survived as well as collapsed (figure 1) seems to suggest the almost trivial, if not inexistent, relationship between party institutionalization and democracy. This is something that is clearly visible in the last row of table 4, which shows a very similar percentage for both consolidated and failed democracies with institutionalized political parties, but not only. Thus, and even if after WWI regimes with institutionalized political parties tended to survive in a greater extent than those with under-institutionalized political parties, the differences are not very significant (roughly 30 per cent at its most).

### **Conclusion**

Summarizing an almost unanimous belief within the democratization literature, Mainwaring stated nearly fifteen years ago that “democracy is likely to have shortcomings if a moderately institutionalized party system does not emerge after democratic government has been in place for some time” (1999:6). Although never properly tested, the “assumption” that party system institutionalization was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the consolidation of democracy became one of the most popular among both party politics and regime transition scholars. To the point that, driven by the conceptual assimilation embedded in Mainwaring’s (alone, with Scully or with Torcal) theoretical framework, such essential

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<sup>14</sup> For the sake of validity, I have also replicated the analysis using the “average party age” (correlated, in any case, with IPS:  $r = .609$ , sig. at 0.01) as a proxy for party institutionalization ( $N = 59$ ). The results, available from the author, do not significantly change.



role for democratic survival was extended also to the institutionalization of political parties themselves.

Trying to bring light to the repeatedly mentioned positive effects of both party and party system institutionalization for the consolidation of democracy, this paper has assessed the above-cited assumption by employing the appropriate methodology on a new dataset, large enough to allow for both cross-national/regional as well as cross-temporal comparisons. These are the main findings.

First of all, and following Randall and Svåsand's (1992) steps, it seems clear that party and party system institutionalization are two different, even if related, concepts which should never be conflated. As a result, the latter should always be operationalized with an eye to excluding indicators that measure aspects at the party, rather than the systemic level. Secondly, it is not the institutionalization of political parties but the institutionalization of party systems as a whole that has a positive effect on the prospects for democratic consolidation. However, and thirdly, such impact takes place in a different way than most scholars predicted as party system institutionalization is not a necessary, but a sufficient condition for the consolidation of democracy. In fact, democracy has survived in many post-communist countries despite, sometimes even in spite of, extremely inchoate party systems (e.g. Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, etc.). What scholars, and politicians, should remember is that continuous lack of systemic institutionalization will "necessarily" put democracy in peril as most pre-WWII cases clearly demonstrate. Fourthly, and with apologies once again to Schattschneider (1942:1), democracy does seem to be unthinkable save in terms of moderately institutionalized party systems. In other words, democracy will never collapse as soon as a certain degree of systemic institutionalization is reached. At least this is what our historical analysis of 60 different European political regimes reveals. Finally, party system over-institutionalization has not proved as dangerous for the process of democratic consolidation as some may have predicted (see Schedler, 1995). This is not to deny that excessive levels of institutionalization may harm the quality of a nation's democracy. But this is a matter for future research.

All in all, as Sontheimer already noted twenty-five years ago, "the stability of the party system [rather than the parties] is the really decisive factor for the stability of the whole system in all democratic systems [...]" (1987:10). And this has important implications in terms of how democracy should be promoted as - needless to say - the whole question of democratic consolidation should be approached with a preferential eye on party systems rather than merely on parties, as it has usually been the case (e.g. Burnell and Gerrits, 2012).

In other words, and paraphrasing Pridham (1990:2), focusing on party systems must remain a basic if not the central theme for examining the consolidation of liberal democracy.

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## Tables

Table 1. Necessary, but not sufficient, conditions

	<b>Cause absent</b>	<b>Cause present</b>
<b>Outcome present</b>	1. No cases here	2. Cases here
<b>Outcome absent</b>	3. Not directly relevant	4. Not directly relevant

*Source:* Ragin (2003:182)

Table 2. Operational indicators of party system institutionalization

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Caveats</b>
Government Alternation	Pedersen's index of ministerial volatility (MV)	. If $MV \geq 50$ , then IGA = MV . If $MV < 50$ , then IGA = 100-MV
Governing Formulae	% ministers of all familiar governments	. If the very same combination = 100% . If entirely new combination or new party forms single party government = 0% . If part of the new government is familiar = % of the familiar part . If a party earlier in government forms a government on its own = 100 - % of previous coalition partners
Access to government	% ministers from "old" governing parties	"Old" governing parties = parties previously in government

*Source:* Adapted from Casal Bértoa and Enyedi (forthcoming)

Table 3. Cross-tabulations of party system institutionalization and democratic collapses/survivals according to democratic waves

	<b>Collapses</b>	<b>Survives</b>
First Wave (1897-1914)	3 (0)	4 (100)
Second Wave (1917-1940)	7 (14.3)	7 (100)
Third Wave (1945-1973)	4 (0)	7 (100)
Fourth Wave (1974-1988)	0	5 (80)
Fifth Wave (1989-2013)	1 (0)	22 (50)
<b>TOTAL</b>	15 (6.7)	45 (73.3)

*Note:* The percentage of institutionalized party systems in parentheses.

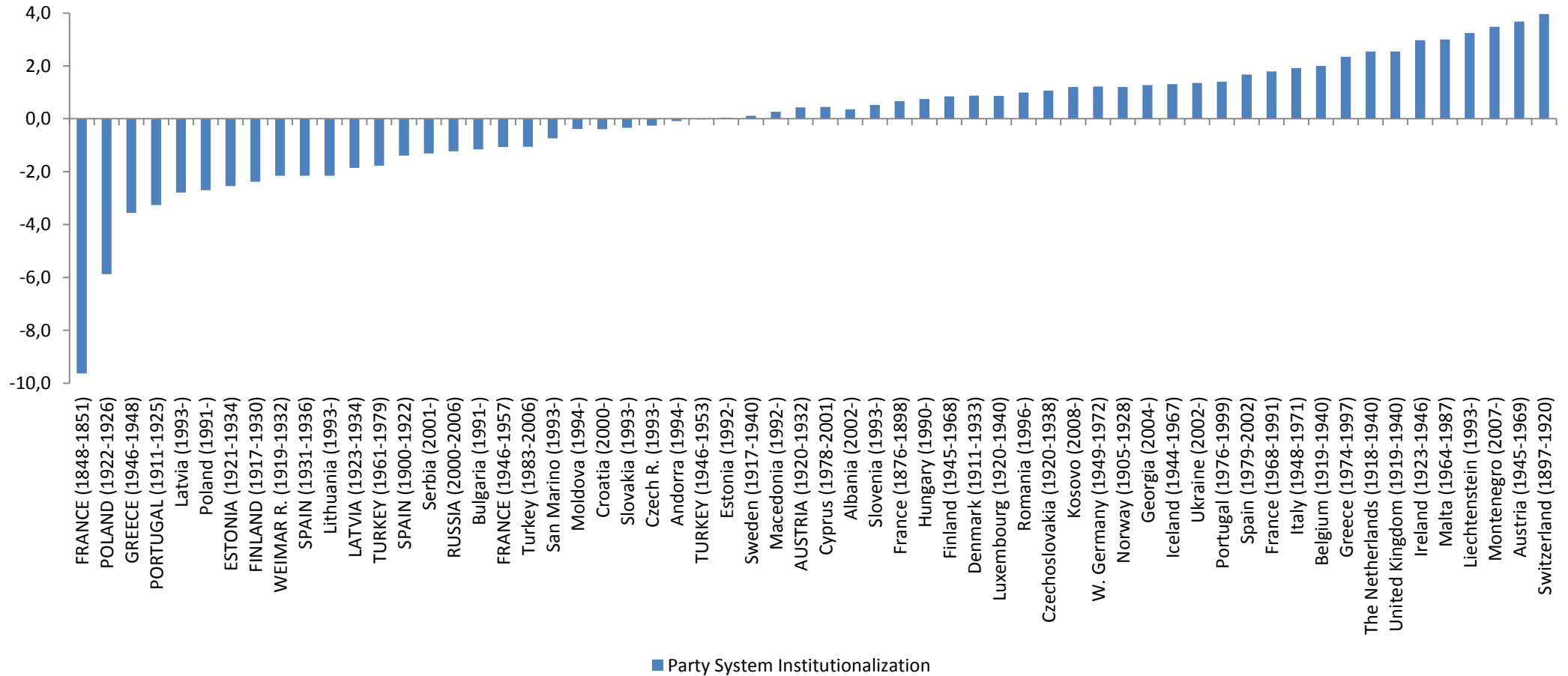
Table 4. Cross-tabulations of party institutionalization and democratic collapses/survivals according to democratic waves

	<b>Collapses</b>	<b>Survives</b>
First Wave (1897-1914)	n/a	4 (75)
Second Wave (1917-1940)	6 (66.7)	7 (71.4)
Third Wave (1945-1973)	3 (66.7)	7 (85.7)
Fourth Wave (1974-1988)	0	5 (80)
Fifth Wave (1989-2013)	1 (0)	22 (31.8)
<b>TOTAL</b>	10 (60)	45 (55.6)

*Note:* The percentage of regimes with institutionalized political parties in parentheses.

## Figures

Figure 1. Party system institutionalization in Europe (N = 60)

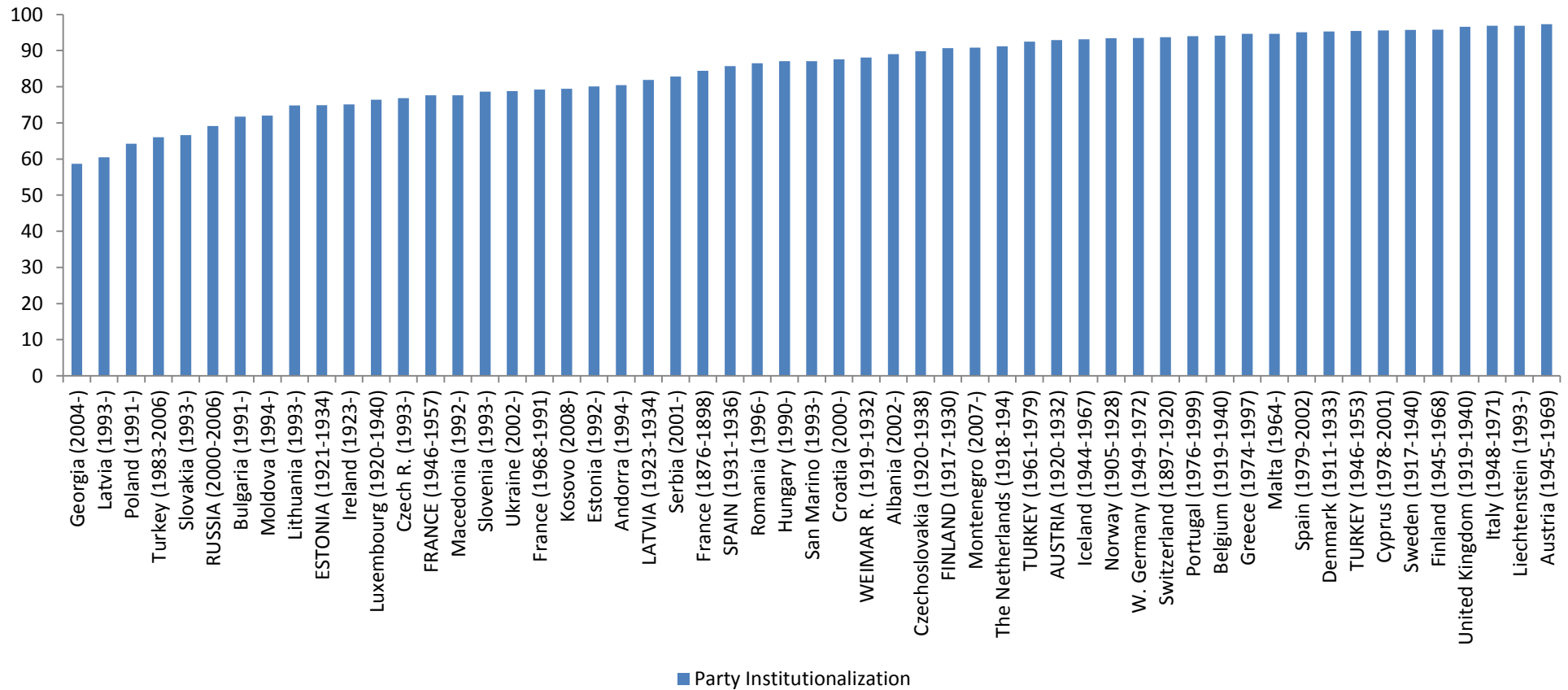


*Note:* Cases of democratic collapse are displayed in capital letters.

*Source:* Own calculations.



Figure 2. Party institutionalization in Europe (N = 55)<sup>15</sup>



Note: Cases of democratic collapse are displayed in capital letters.

Source: Own calculations.

<sup>15</sup> While both Restoration Spain (1900-1922) and inter-war Portugal (1911-1925) have not been included due to unavailability of the data (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010: 1539, 1815), the lack of at least a pair of elections in France II Republic (1848-1851), inter-war Poland (1922-1926), and post-WWII Greece (1946-1948) impeded the calculation of the IPS for these three democratic regimes.