

**Party System Institutionalization in New Democracies:  
Poland – a Trend-Setter with No Followers**

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The aim of this paper is to explain the development of the Polish party system. And not just any development, but its' institutionalization- a topic recently dealt with by many scholars (Lewis 1994; Morlino 1995; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Toka 1997)<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, an attempt is made to link two - believed by many to be causally related - phenomena: party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation. The approach of political science tends to see parties and party system institutionalization as -certainly not a sufficient, but clearly a necessary -- prerequisite of democratic consolidation. And even though the intensity of this claim varies considerably, the general expectation is that the "appropriate" sequence of development is as indicated above. In this paper an attempt is made to convince the reader that the Polish case proves to be to the contrary. In a way this represents "bad news" for institutionally oriented political scientists- the institutionalization of parties comes last, as the *finale* of other consolidating changes, not as their precondition. The sequence of events shows that the macro-economic success occurred first, this being followed by its positive subjective evaluation, then by an increase in satisfaction with democracy and - more importantly – in growth of diffuse political support, and only finally by party system institutionalization. The latter phenomenon should not, however, be confused with the institutionalization of parties themselves- this process is still ahead of us.

The paper consists of several broad sections. The first focuses on different aspects and indicators of party system institutionalization and dwells on its manifestations in Poland. In section two the issue of democratic consolidation is discussed together with its crucial sub-indicator - the diffuse political support phenomenon. By disentangling this notion, tracing its unblurred, clear manifestations in Poland we expect to shed light on the extent to which democratic consolidation has been achieved. Section three looks into the "shape" of the party system - its polarization, issue structuring and the space of competition it delineates. In the fourth section, we take a glance at the meaning and salience of the left-right semantics. Finally, in the concluding part I try to interpret the overall relationship between the phenomena discussed and their particular manifestations. The design of the paper is comparative in nature; testing certain hypotheses needs both diachronic and synchronic approaches. Comparisons are thus both: in time (for Poland 1991-97) and in space (mainly within the ECE region).

## **Polish Party System - Institutionalization or Fragility?**

### **(a) Party System Institutionalization – its Manifestations and Indicators**

As a starting point in conceptualizing the party system institutionalization Mainwaring and Scully's (1995) proposal serves us well. They put forward four indicators, constitutive elements of an institutionalized party system: (i) stability in inter-party competition; (ii) the existence of parties with stable roots in society; (iii) the acceptance of those parties and of elections as the legitimate means by which the public determines who governs; (iv) the existence of party organizations with stable rules and structures. Finally, an important remark is made that "institutionalizing a party system is important to the process of democratic consolidation" (p.4). We shall often return to this point in the remainder of the paper.

There are other approaches to the analysis of party system institutionalization. Morlino prefers to talk of "party system structuring" or of "party system stabilization" (1995: 316 ff.). He enumerates its' several broad indicators – electoral volatility, frequency of critical elections and stabilization of the political class, especially at the outset of democracy's installation. This

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<sup>1</sup> The subtitle of the article is partly borrowed from Paul Lewis' conference paper *Parties and Parliaments in East Central Europe: Poland as a Trend-Setter*. Hardly anybody would disagree with the general assessment of Poland's pioneering role in the region, and equally with the claim that the "Polish status as a trend-setter of democratisation in the communist world did not make its own path any easier" (Lewis 1999: 4). The data presented in this article aim at showing that the Polish route to both a market economy and consolidated democracy, reveals idiosyncrasies considerably different from theoretical expectations and the experience of other countries' of the region as regards the sequence and patterned relationship between phenomena believed to be associated with party system institutionalization.

general proposal is further disentangled into several detailed indicators: the fragmentation of the system, the effective number of parties, as well as measures of disproportionality are proposed. In addition, the level of party identification and elite continuity are believed to be among the crucial ones. Finally Morlino includes – just as Mainwaring and Scully do - particular parties' institutionalization as an indicator of party system institutionalization.

I definitely disagree with the latter proposal. In brief, I find unconvincing the claim of a direct link between parties' institutionalization and party system's stabilization. The relationship between the two is far from being that simple and deterministic. In some instances the institutionalization of parties, their organizational stability and continuity might prove conducive to party system institutionalization but in other instances not necessarily, particularly in the case of young democracies. Here the needed flexibility and adaptability to a rapidly changing social context might prove more conducive to ultimate party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation than stable organizational structure.

To conclude: when analyzing the institutionalization of a party system, one has to avoid relying on the static parameters of the subsystems' (i.e. parties) and should concentrate on the functions their outputs fulfill for the system as a whole. This proposal should not be treated as springing from pure functionalist dogma, it is aimed rather at securing heuristic and empirical utility. There are many other ontological and theoretical problems in connection with the operationalization of the institutionalization phenomenon, lack of space however prevents me from dwelling on them (for details, see Markowski 1998; 1999). However, some are worth mentioning. First, confusion stems from the entanglement of two analytically different phenomena: an institutionalized (static) and institutionalizing (dynamic) party system. The latter is a process of acquiring the quality of stability, and ought not be confused with the notion of *party system change* (Mair 1997), which denotes a departure from a previous state of prolonged institutionalization. Secondly, among the factors believed to be reliable indicators of institutionalization, categorically different ones seem to be intermixed- some are clear determinants, others are conducive correlates, yet others might be considered outcomes of institutionalization. Thirdly, the above mentioned problem of equating the phenomenon of party institutionalization with party system institutionalization calls for in-depth scrutiny. The crucial question here is which comes first, if the starting point is lack of institutionalization of both: parties and party system. Is it reasonable to expect that the institutionalization of one of the two can exist without the other? And if so, which one? Elsewhere (Markowski 1999a; 1999b) I have discussed these issues in some detail so here I will refrain from systematically pursuing the puzzles mentioned above.

### Voters' volatility in Poland

#### *[I] Aggregate volatility 1991-1993-1997*

To begin with, several caveats. Firstly, I find it plausible to distinguish between *general* aggregate volatility (which disregards parties going out of and into political business), and *citizens'* volatility (i.e. volatility which accounts for the changing "party system offer": mergers, dissolutions, etc.)<sup>2</sup>. Secondly, party mergers force us to consider some of them as direct continuities of previous political entities (details to follow).

The aggregate *general* volatility between 1991 and 1993 amounted to 34.9%, the *citizens'* - 22.7%. These figures were obtained under the following assumptions: (a) among "other parties" contesting only one of the two elections are: ChD, BBWR, KdR, Samoobrona and numerous irrelevant, marginal parties; (b) WAK of '91 is treated as the political equivalent of KKW 'Ojczyzna' of '93 as is 'Solidarność Pracy' for UP.

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<sup>2</sup> In both instances Pedersen's (1974) volatility index is applied: half the sum of absolute vote percentage differences received by each party in two consecutive elections. The distinction between "general" and "citizens'" volatility: the second percentages of votes for parties which contested only one election are simply subtracted from the "general" one.

Students of Polish volatility are faced with more acute problems when it comes to comparing the 1993 and 1997 voting, primarily because of the new political entity - AWS (Solidarity Election Action), which turned out to be the definite winner of the latter election with 33.8 percent support. If we treat AWS as a direct heir of several rightist parties<sup>3</sup>, the *general* aggregate volatility of the 1993/97 period goes down to 19.3% and *citizens'* - to 15.2% (for details see Markowski 1999a).<sup>4</sup>

In newly democratizing polities, undergoing a multi-dimensional change, such as those re-emerging from communism, there is good reason to look at the process of voters' volatility through *party family* lenses. In order to avoid too broad artificial aggregations that would obscure rather than clarify the party system development, in the following calculations as many as ten party families<sup>5</sup> are taken into account. The rationale behind analyzing all these - differently aggregated - data is manifold. Firstly, at the beginning of the transformation, for the majority the numerous parties were hardly distinguishable. Secondly, these small sofa parties never (with few exceptions) contested an election alone, usually they formed a coalition.

In table 1 below I present some of the important indicators of volatility:

- (a) the Total Volatility (TV), with the additional distinction between (i) the general and (ii) the citizens' volatility;
- (b) 'between-party-family' Total Volatility (FTV), with the above distinction (i) and (ii);
- (c) block volatility (BV);
- (d) within-block volatility (WBV).

Two caveats are necessary at this point: first, in the first two rows the TV and FTV account for the empirical reality of 1997 - namely the appearance of AWS and their ancestors; second, the computations of BV and WBV - presented in rows 3) and 4) are thus based on 'party family' grouping (the left column of each row), as well as particular parties (right column).

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If - as I am inclined to do - one follows the real-politics and regards AWS as a direct follower of the parties that constituted it, then almost all (save WBV) volatility parameters have improved dramatically since 1991/3. The only increase in WBV, equaling 6.72 for 1993/97, is due to a considerable shuffle within the 'leftist' block.

Now, since we lack any theoretical guidance as to which of the two main components of the total volatility- the (BV) or (WBV) - is more significant for the process of party system institutionalization, we have to speculate a little.

Above all I disagree with those expectations that newly emerging post-communist democracies, immediately after the *installation* phase, can reasonably be expected to reveal signs of stability. The point is that in order to arrive at both consolidated democracy and a viable market, during the initial phase of transformation considerable flexibility is needed, permitting adaptive changes in the party system aimed at assuring a state of *equilibrium seeking stability* for the whole socio-politico-economic system. One can not have a 'frozen' party system while an enormous change in the social-structural subsystem takes place.

If we agree with the above reasoning, the issue may be reworded thus - how long should this adjustment process of "fruitful fluidity" between elites and masses, party system and society be treated as normal and conducive to the ultimate stability of the system? This question, if correct *per se*, can be answered only empirically, since the 'out-of-communism-democratizations' are new phenomena.

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<sup>3</sup> The following parties of 1993 comprised the 1997 AWS: KKW 'Ojczyzna' (in fact, ZChN), NSZZ 'S', PC, PK, SLCh and PL as well as the major parts of KPN and BBWR; plus some minor sofa parties.

<sup>4</sup> Other assumptions are: (a) ROP is the political equivalent of KdR; (b) UW -- of UD and KLD; (c) among the most important "other" parties are: KPEiR, BdB, KPEiR RP and a few marginal groupings.

<sup>5</sup> The ten *families* are: (1) socialist, (2) social-democratic, (3) conservative, (4) Christian-democratic, (5) nationalist, (6) religious, (7) ethnic, (8)

Bearing in mind the idiosyncrasies of the transforming societies, and accounting for the two distinguished phenomena, the static (institutionalized party system) and the dynamic (institutionalizing party system), as well as different manifestations of voters' volatility, I submit that the patterned temporal sequencing indicative of party system institutionalization should look as follows:

- (a) after the initial phase of high volatility, as people become capable of choosing relevant political options, its decreasing tendency is expected;
- (b) among the two major components of total volatility (TV), temporary initial decline in 'block-volatility' (BV) should occur, as what crystallizes first is a broad ideological orientation of individuals, say their personal preference for liberal, left or right packages perceived as relevant for their (new) social position. This process takes a while, until individuals become able to clearly identify long-term interests derived from their labor-market position.
- (c) Only then, after a longer time-span necessary for a deeper, more detailed appreciation of individual interest and the working of cultural factors (socialization, inherited political preferences) can a distinct identification, first with a party family and then with particular party, be reasonably expected.

If so, let's have another glance at table 1. Indeed, as expected, the total voters' volatility (TV) went down. Moreover, so did the volatility calculated via the 'party family' approach and so does the 'block-volatility' (BV). In brief, the Polish party system between early 90s and 1997 did change in the direction of stability and institutionalization. This came about because in 1997 the average Polish voter was able to identify more clearly his or her interests with a particular ideological orientation. However, the institutionalization process hasn't, yet, reached the level of sound party identification, as both 'within-block volatility' figures indicate increase. Since we are inclined to interpret this result as indicative of the weak institutionalization of the last phase, one should bear in mind the details of the vote flow- the leftist block (SLD/PSL) has retained almost the same support in 1997 as in 1993, with a dramatic change of support for each of the two former coalition partners, taken individually. The obvious paradox is that the shift, indicative of volatility and consequently of weak party system institutionalization occurred exactly because voters decided to prevent a-democratic, unreliable and destabilizing populist policies of the PSL. This seeming contradiction proves that the relationship between party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation is much more complex and indirect than some tend to believe<sup>6</sup>.

Finally it seems worth looking at Polish volatility from the global perspective. The mean Western European volatility has been calculated as 8.4% for 1960-89, but if one concentrates on the more comparable figures for the new Southern European democracies in their first ten years or so, these are: 18.4 for Greece 1974-85, 13.6% for Spain 1977-87 (Mair 1997: 182). Lack of qualitative difference between Polish and some fragile Latin American democracies in the 70s and 80s are also visible; apart from stable Uruguay and Colombian figures (around 9 percent), Argentina, Chile, Venezuela and Costa Rica display levels of volatility similar to Poland – between 12.7 and 18.2 percent, not to mention the astronomic figures for Peru, Brazil, Bolivia or Ecuador- 54.4, 40.9, 33.0 and 32.5, respectively (Mainwaring, Scully 1995: 6-8). Voter volatility figures for the neighboring countries of East Central Europe - Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia are: 28.3, 25.8 and 23.5 percent, between the first round of elections and 33.6, 31.4, and 23.8, respectively, between the second and third elections<sup>7</sup>.

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liberal, (9) agrarian, (10) radical-populist.

<sup>6</sup> Along the same lines, see the persuasive argument of Toka (1997).

<sup>7</sup> In the last Czech pair of elections 1996-98, the volatility has gone down to about 19 percent. One should bear in mind, however, that the time between the two elections is shorter by a half than in other cases referred to (save Poland 1991-93).

### (c) Fragmentation and deviation from proportionality

All newly established democratic party systems face an uneasy institutional choice - the decision concerning the electoral rules, and in consequence the option for a more representative or a more accountable system. In reality the choice need not be treated as a mutually exclusive alternative, nevertheless hardly anybody would question the different merits of both electoral designs, PR and plurality. Two categorically different factors: (a) high initial uncertainty (see Lijphart 1992) and (b) huge, well organized mobilized masses forced Polish constitutional engineers to implement almost pure proportionality in the 1991 election. Very soon the democratic political practice demanded altering these rules of the game, as within 1991-93 there were several, all of them unsuccessful, attempts at creating stable governmental coalitions. A demanding task, given that – in reality - at least seven parties were needed to arrive at governmental majority. Rae's (1967) **Index of Fractionalization**, calculated for the Polish elections of 1991, 1993 and 1997, equals (.92), (.90) and (.78), respectively.

The important message these figures suggest is that the new electoral rules of 1993, introducing thresholds, did not work automatically. Numerous small parties, mainly of rightist, religious-national and Christian-democratic orientations - renowned for their approval of rationality and empirical proof - had disregarded public opinion surveys' unanimous messages indicating they had reached reasonably low levels of support to consider crafting coalition pacts, and decided to contest the election alone. The result - almost 35% of the vote was wasted. **The Index of Deviation from Proportionality** (Taagepera & Shugart 1989) jumped from 12.01% in 1991 to the astronomical 37.34% in 1993. Nevertheless, the lesson of 1993 has been digested accurately by both elites and masses. The numerous rightist parties contested the 1997 election under the umbrella logo of "Solidarity"; the result - the Index went down to 18.5%. Still high, but close to what a multiparty system with three important dimensions of competition can realistically arrive at.

Other indicators of party system fragmentation point to the same process: (a) the percentage of votes cast for parties obtaining less than 5 percent support, fluctuated in the three consecutive elections and equaled 23%, 29% and 13%; (b) the number of 'effective parties' has also gone down rapidly to about 4.6, from 10.0 in 1993 and 12.5 in 1991<sup>8</sup>.

The Polish party system thus started off with rather unpromising legacies of transformation, as far as institutionalization is concerned, as well as uncondusive institutional infrastructure, yet the amendments aimed at optimizing party system's chances for crystallization and institutionalization have been implemented and have worked accordingly.

### (d) Party identification and elite continuity

According to Barnes (1998: 129) only 17 percent of Poles answered positively the classical party ID question in January 1991. Barnes recalls Converse's statement that "stable partisanship should increase with experience with democratic electoral politics", yet moves smoothly to express his astonishment with the low Polish figure. A reminder thus: in January 1991 free parliamentary elections were still ahead of Poles, there existed barely 3 real parties and the post-revolutionary public mood was strongly anti-partist. After the 1993 "wasted vote" and disproportionality experience, parties became the major political actors of Polish politics. Consequently, the PID figures for December 1995 and October 1997 jumped to 43.5% and 64.3%, respectively.

Elite continuity, conceived as the reelection ratio of "incumbent" MP's, looks promising at first glance. The paradox is that the more frequently elections are called, the more likely one finds personal continuity for simple life-cycle reasons: what supposedly is expected to be an indicator of a stable institutionalized party system is dependent upon its' structural instability. In Poland, the two first terms of the Parliament, one of which had not been elected under purely democratic law<sup>9</sup>, lasted only two years each, the third, 1993-1997, was a full term. The percentage of MP's who are first-comers to the parliament amounts

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<sup>8</sup> The 1997 Polish 'effective parties' figure is - along with the Hungarian - the lowest in the ECE region.

<sup>9</sup> Even though it proved to be more accountable and consensus-seeking than the next one, democratically elected in 1991.

to 91.7, 72.8 and 63.0 percent, respectively for the 1989-91, 1991-93 and 1993-97 terms.

If one believes these particular indicators to reliably depict the process of party system institutionalization, a clear trend towards it is in place in Poland.

#### (e) Stable social roots of party affiliations

Conceivable ways of addressing the issues of the social roots of party support are numerous, none of them uncontested. The topic deserves an in-depth longitudinal or panel designed study of the social structure transformations linked to the changing political context, something we can not get into; for this reason the following presentation is deliberately a simple one. The issue I address here is whether it is true, as many scholars tend to believe, that there is a very weak association of social class or/and social position with party preferences.

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It is hard to disagree with Mainwaring and Scully that, normally, that is in socially stable systems, it is plausible to expect clear and logical (i.e. based on rational calculations) links between party preference and social structure. Skepticism as to the same relationship in societies undergoing radical social change has already been expressed. In order to make the comparison design more reliable, the huge social aggregates like classes were disaggregated into several single-parametric groups based on social background traits. In some instances parameters denote groups which might in fact be considered a class (e.g. farmers, workers), most of them however do not.

The data permit the following conclusions:

/a/ No indication of stronger links between the social position of an individual and party preferences are found among stable Western polities as compared to ECE countries- clearly the opposite is true.

/b/ Among the Western democracies only Germany and Britain's famous class cleavage comes close to the strength of association comparable to the Polish ones of 1991.

/c/ Other class-related parameters indicate that Poland reveals strong rural/urban and also farmer/non-farmer divides. Yet Poland is clearly exceptional in that all the - ascribed, achieved and class -factors seem to be strongly associated with party preferences.

/d/ The temporal change for Poland shows, however, the strength of association between the socio-demographic background variables and party preferences is declining, with one exception- the religious factor<sup>10</sup>. Why this one? Again just a hypothesis, although grounded in empirical evidence- the salience of the religious dimension derives from the on-going blurring effects of the re-shaping of the social structure. It is the least costly vehicle of transparent communication between elites and masses, in the case of complicated, (still) incomprehensible, social repositioning and the inability of substantial portions of the populace to correctly identify the relevant representatives of their socio-economic interests. Religious labels simplify the world, even though religious issues have become less important for the Polish public.

To conclude: stability of the social roots of party support is unlikely as long as the social structure re-shaping is under way. The future growth of a diffuse, numerous, slowly post-materializing middle class, accompanied by the remnant legacies of the transformative phase, doesn't seem to be conducive to the clarity of the relationship under consideration. Nevertheless, the message for those disseminating misleading news about the blurred socio-political relationship in East Central European polities is clear: such speculations have no empirical ground.

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<sup>10</sup> This result fits very well with and confirms other data presented in this paper, especially in the section on polarization, dimensions of competition, which indeed indicates that in the Polish 1997 parliamentary election the politicizing of the religious divide by elites was extremely polarizing.

### **Changes in Satisfaction with Democracy: Diffuse Political Support for Democracy and Associated Phenomena**

There is hardly any disagreement as to the importance of the institutional factors for democratic consolidation. Yet as long as the majority of the public refrains from supporting whichever democratic design is installed, democracy remains fragile. It is about legitimacy, i.e. a belief that in spite of certain shortcomings the existing political system is better than any other that conceivably might be established. The literature is full of distinctions between different objects of legitimacy: government, parties, Parliament. The main distinction is drawn between '*particular*' and '*diffuse*' political support, the latter being more persistent and of greater moment for overall system stability.

The main question concerns the treatment of the satisfaction with democracy as a plausible indicator of democratic consolidation. It seems reasonable to assume that the higher the support the more likely the democratic consolidation is under way. I submit here, however, that in order to claim democratic consolidation it is not enough. One needs to prove that diffuse political support emerges as an autonomous phenomenon, relatively independent from economic trends and particular political configurations.

The above design has been operationalized in the following way: the indicator of diffuse political support is the Euro-barometer's question about 'satisfaction with democracy'. The operational version of the idea I suggest has to do with sequencing and patterned relationship. In a nutshell, diffuse political support is in place, if the following complex relationship is to occur: satisfaction with democracy becomes more positively correlated with: (a) political efficacy and (b) electoral participation and either unrelated or more negatively related with (c) economic fortunes and (d) support for winning or losing parties.

To test the above hypothetical, complex relationship one needs diachronism- dynamic comparison in time. This is a simple first step of testing a bi-variate relationship in time. In addition, I shall investigate the logic presented above in a multivariate design – a regression analysis aimed at unveiling the net effects of the set of independent variables. In this instance I assume that in a more consolidated democracy the higher the satisfaction with democracy the less the direct impact of (c) economic factors and (d) political ones. In other words, diffuse political support is expected to be a more autonomous, independent - from short-term economic and party configuration factors - phenomenon in a consolidated setting than in a fluid one.

The satisfaction with democracy item distribution - in many public opinion surveys - reveals that in the early '90s, satisfied Poles accounted for no more than 20-22% of the adult population, that their number has doubled between 1993 and 1996 to about 40+ percent, finally reaching 54% in the aftermath of the 1997 parliamentary election. This almost tripling of those satisfied with democracy might lead many to claim that democratic consolidation is in place. The puzzling problem arises from the fact that in Poland this trend has been accompanied by economic recovery and its socio-political consequences, booming consumer optimism, increasing household wealth and relevant attitudinal changes. 1992 was the first year of positive change in GDP, by almost 3%, growing in the next years on average between 5-6% a year, resulting in a cumulative growth by 1997 at the level of about 130% (if 1990 equaled to 100); definitely the highest among all post-communist countries.

The New Democracies Barometer shows the trend was accompanied by an increase both in disapproval rates of the communist regime (between 1991 and 1995, by 9%) and approval of the new political regime by 24%. In both instances, this was the biggest change among the 10 countries under scrutiny (see Rose and Haerpfer 1996).

In table 3, simple approval rates of selected attitudes from the CEU longitudinal series for Poland are shown. The almost tripling of 'satisfaction with democracy' is accompanied by decreasing 'particular' support - satisfaction with incumbent governments; Poles reveal growing acceptance of the democratic procedures whilst remaining critical of their governments.



Indicators of 'political efficacy' (A, B, J and L)<sup>11</sup>, and their temporal change vis a vis satisfaction with democracy - show them to be the result of general diffuse political support rather than its cause. Subjective evaluation of the 'chances of getting ahead' is improving at a temporal interval from satisfaction with democracy, and at a slower pace. This simple aggregate level juxtaposition of political support's correlates, and related phenomena, apparently hints at its autonomous status.

To prove this supposition one has to resort to the individual level relationships and embark on a multivariate analysis, tracing the direct effects of particular factors. The result of these efforts is presented in tables 4a and 4b.

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Entries in part "a" of the table show simple bi-variate correlations between satisfaction with democracy and four other indices. The results confirm that Poland in 1997 in comparison with 1993 turns out to be a polity with a higher efficacy/participatory impact on diffuse political support. And clearly, the second part of the hypothesis is confirmed as well: the link between individual economic success and satisfaction with democracy is becoming weaker and similarly in the case of belonging to the politically winning or losing party camp (the correlation of .04 is statistically insignificant).

Let's turn now to the net, direct effects and the explanatory power of independent variables on satisfaction with democracy. The empirical message is transparent and in line with the aggregated data analysis: as time passes democracy in Poland consolidates, because diffuse political support is becoming less dependent on economic and political factors (model 1) and slightly more determined by participation and political efficacy (model 2).

In short, diffuse political support, believed to be a strong component of democratic consolidation, has been presented from four angles: (i) the overall satisfaction with democracy has tripled; (ii) simple distributions of phenomena associated with it change in the same direction, though the pace is slower; (iii) other factors believed by many to be troublesome correlates, blurring the 'pure' diffuse political support, seem to be unrelated to the dynamics of satisfaction with democracy; (iv) both simple bi-variate correlations and multi-variate regressions display the same picture, that individual level analysis confirms the submitted hypothesis- in 1997 the diffuse political support is less dependent on the factors of economics and political fortune.

### **Party System Shape, Ideological Dimensions, Dimensions of Competition, Polarization and Party System Institutionalization.**

Theoretical justification for focusing on party system shape, its' constitutive dimensions and polarization, may be found in a 30-year-old observation of Huntington (1968: 416 ff), that even though moderate fragmentation and cross-cutting cleavages seem to be conducive to democratic stability, yet in the initial phase of political system formation polarization might be a more desirable phenomenon as it helps establish a programmatically based relationship between parties and masses. This is due to its providing an unsophisticated electorate with a better clarity of policy goals pursued by the parties and consequently contributing to the belief that democratic rules matter for policy outcomes, which ultimately stimulates participation.

Party system 'shapes' are described in many ways, and recently I have gone into this problematic elsewhere (Markowski 1997; Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, Toka 1999). In a comparative East-Central European perspective the Polish party system reveals that its' ideological space is defined by two major policy dimensions – the economic 'left-right' and socio-cultural 'religious-secular' divide.

A few terminological distinctions are due at this point. I distinguish *ideological*<sup>12</sup> *dimensions*, which are important bases for

<sup>11</sup> For full wording of the four items see Table 3. In the further regression analysis, the 'political efficacy index' was based on items A and J only.

<sup>12</sup> I refer to one particular usage of the term '*ideology*', referring to cherished values and beliefs that provide individuals with a vision of reality as it is and as it should be. In technical terms it is a crude simplification of the world, turning its complexity into something comprehensible and relatively simple. In our case it is about the simplification of policy stances on issues as categorically different as privatization policies, abortion provisions, nationalism and preferences concerning redistributive policies. In operational terms it is the result of factor analysis of a set of

identifying party positions, forming an issue-universe of the general public's perception of political reality, in the form of coherent policy clusters, irrespective of whether politicians find them relevant to compete on or not. In depicting the party system's shape, ideological dimensions alone do not suffice. They exist independently of the elite's creative skills and active voter responses, which limit our analytic capacity since politics also ought to allow for the latter interaction. One thus needs a *'dimensions of competition'* concept and polarization semantics, which are created on the same issue universe, yet differently constructed. Firstly, they result from interactive games between elites and masses (in this presentation derived from active voters' perceptions of the issues/policies, not the whole population as in the case of 'ideological dimensions'). Secondly, the particular clustered issue composition of each dimension of competition is obtained by maximizing the differences between electorates.<sup>13</sup>

At this point another methodological caveat is due. The concept of *polarization* has been conceived in various ways, most clearly by Ersson and Lane (1991), who utilize the previous conceptualization by Taylor and Herman (1971) and Sigelman and Yough (1978). It takes into account several factors: the number of parties in the polity, the respective share of votes obtained by particular parties, and their position on the left-right meta-dimension (as a difference between particular party positions compared to the mean left-right position of the whole system). In this paper, I submit another proposal and ways of calculating the polarization index. It deviates from the above one in three crucial respects: firstly, I find it unconvincing to talk of polarization without allowing for the homo/heterogeneity of party positions. In other words, and in accordance with the common sense, the clarity of party positions, technically measured by their standard deviation, is an important factor contributing to the overall polarization. One cannot seriously talk of polarization when party positions are blurred, i.e. voters of particular parties support clearly different policy stances, even though one can point to their mean position, which in this case is a purely abstract mean. In other words, among two situations in which, say, four parties occupy the same mean positions, the overall figure of my polarization index will be lower in the case of higher standard deviations of mean party positions. The second innovation is designed to allow for the magnitude of the party's support. It is obvious that parties are not equal entities and bigger ones, if located at the two polar end of a continuum, contribute to polarization much more than two small parties. The third amendment has to do with the very definition of the dimensions. Allowing for polarization on the left-right meta-dimension, I focus mainly on empirically created dimensions of competition as defined by the public. These are the religious – secular (RS) dimension and the dimension of economic populism – economic liberalism (EC).

This leads us to another aspect of the discussed topic, namely that democratic consolidation is dependent upon the ideological dimension on which polarization takes place. It seems obvious that 'indivisible (non-distributive) goods'- first of all ethnic identities, but religious values as well - if politically polarized might impede democratic consolidation more considerably than comparable polarization concerning economic policies. The Polish system reveals two, sometimes three, clear ideological dimensions, none of them however is based on ethno-cultural divisions.

The following set of hypotheses concerning the relationship between democratic consolidation, party system institutionalization via crystallization and ideological as well as competitive dimensions is being tested.

Firstly, it is plausible to expect that the "left-right" dimension semantics: (1.1) will be better explained by the universe of ideological dimensions; (1.2) will become more strongly linked to the economic dimension (i.e. that the direct, net effect of economic issues increases with time). Secondly, if institutionalization succeeds (2.2) polarization increase - as a means of

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attitudinal/opinion items covering the whole array of modern policy domains. Empirical clustering of the items unveils societal perception of certain syndromatic policy packages. These 'ideological dimensions' are both: rationally linked within-cluster policy domains and, at the same time, differentiated from other clustered packages (factor analysis Varimax rotation applied).

<sup>13</sup> In statistical algorithm terms it is a discriminant analysis that is being applied to arrive at **'dimensions of competition'**, contrary to factor analysis which served as a tool for creating 'ideological dimensions'

clarifying party positions - should contribute to the simultaneous increase in elite—mass positioning adjustment. Thirdly, in a two-dimensional political space (3.1) party system institutionalization increases if the two dimensions become less interdependent. Table 5 is relevant for checking some of the above suppositions.

T A B L E            5            about here

Before commenting on the validity of the above hypotheses, a few descriptive remarks:

- 1) The polarization of the Polish party system increase on both salient dimensions, more spectacularly on the religious-secular (RS). Polarization on the 'left-right' ideological proxy is the highest and fastest (almost tripling).
- 2) The analysis of the stretch of the system - the distance between any two parties located at polar positions - permits two different messages for the two conceptualizations of the political space. The "*ideological stretch*"<sup>14</sup> (column 2) shows the following dynamics: (a) the RS dimension fluctuates though remaining almost constant if one compares the beginning and the end of the period, whereas (b) the EC dimension, which fluctuates as well, goes up from .66 to 1.17. The "*competitive stretch*" (column 3) reveals that the RS dimension decreases dramatically from 2.23 to 1.57, whereas EC increases considerably. What is notable however is that the parliamentary election years (1993 and 1997) boost stretches of both EC dimensions, simultaneously reducing the RS dimensions stretch. Generally, however, if one focuses on the one-dimensional simplification (data not shown), the message is: parties in Poland '97 competed within a much more "compressed" political space than before.
- 3) The overall salience of these political dimensions (columns 4 and 5) indicates that the RS 'ideological' dimension remains almost the same throughout the years covered, whereas its 'competitive' dimension salience increases considerably. In the case of the EC dimension, the former decreases slightly and the latter remains almost constant.

Conclusion: the importance of the RS divide for Poles at large seems constant, it is the effective efforts of political elites that create competitiveness and growing religious-secular polarization. The polarizing potential of economic policies, on the other hand, seem to decline slightly, and even though this dimension's stretch grows considerably between 1995 and 1997 (see columns 2 and 3) its polarization decreases. Briefly, it seems that there are two temporal paces at which the Polish party system institutionalizes. Thus in economic terms there seems to have been much more of a consensual agreement in 1997 than there was in 1993, when both the stretch of this dimension among the public as a whole was highest as well as its' ideological salience. Quite the reverse story unveils on the religious-secular dimension: even though the stretch of this dimension is declining, the major actors of the political game find it desirable to launch antagonist appeals that advance polarization as well as competitive salience considerably.

### **The Left-Right Meta-dimension**

The data in table 6 permits us to test hypothesis 1.1

T A B L E            6            about here

Firstly, the submitted hypothesis (1.1) turned out to be partially correct: with the passing of the transformational period the explained variance of "left-right" identifications by joint economic and socio-cultural ideological dimension grew considerably, tripling between 1992 and 1995. Then in 1997 a dramatic decrease in their explanatory power occurred.

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<sup>14</sup> The term 'universe stretch' is reserved for political space which is determined by perceptions of political reality (issue stances, policy preferences and attitudes) by all adult Poles, independently of their party identification and political participation, i.e. non-voters are included in delineating and shaping this universe. On the other hand, the term 'competitive stretch' is applied when the political space is defined solely by electorates of particular parties and the reality is determined by an imposed expectation of maximizing the differences (distances) between parties. In a way the distinction lies between a para-objectively existing reality, as defined by the polity as a whole, without the effects of party elites influences and, in the second case, a reality which is defined by the location of parties' electorates, those who participate (i.e. non-voters are excluded) and react to the competitive game launched by elites. The statistical method aimed at creating the former is factor analysis, and the latter - discriminant analysis.

Secondly, the overall salience of these two dimensions is stable. Except for 1993, the religious-secular dimension is higher by about a half or more (see table 5). Yet, the magnitude of the direct effects (standardized 'beta' coefficients) and their relative weight differ considerably over time. The religious-secular issue domain explains almost all of the variance in 'left-right' self-identities in '92 and '95, however in the parliamentary election years both issue domains contribute to the left-right more considerably and in 1997 almost equally, though poorly. Thus the economic dimension becomes relatively more important (hypothesis 1.2)

Thirdly, there is almost no overlap between the socio-cultural and economic dimensions (hypothesis 3.1)- at all points in time the standardized coefficients ('betas') are identical (save two minor exceptions) with bi-variate correlations. In other words, these two policy domains are autonomous and independent

The overall interpretation of these results from the party system institutionalization perspective is complicated because of 1997. On the one hand in 1997 the direct effect of the two dimensions is for the first time equal, which encourages us to speak of a relatively decreasing influence of the socio-cultural factors in favor of economic ones, as carriers of party competition. On the other hand, however, the impact of the two on the 'left-right' self-identities becomes negligible, yet still independent. What is for sure is the latter point: the Polish party system space remains two-dimensional and is clearly structured by two independent policy domains.

Particular configurations of the party system shape (its' stretch, 'dimensions' salience, polarization) might lead to many speculations about their impact on party system institutionalization. All of them, however, lack an *a priori* theoretical grounding, in newly democratized polities in particular. Lack of space restricts me from dwelling on this problematic. Instead let me go directly to the hypothesis (2.1) presented above. Were we to treat seriously Huntington's expectation then - from what we've already considered (see table 5) - one should expect that the more polarized dimension should contribute to elite—mass signaling game improvement and consequently to their higher spatial proximity. This hypothesis in fact can be reworded into static and dynamic versions, the former indicating a one-point-in-time comparison, the latter comparing the temporal pace changes in both phenomena. In order to test this hypothesis one has to simultaneously control the factors entered in tables 5 and 7.

TABLE 7 about here

What we know from them is that in absolute terms the lowest polarization is on the economic dimension, followed by the socio-cultural (religious—secular) dimension and finally by the 'left-right' ideological proxy. The same ordering applies to the dynamic aspect of the hypothesis. The overall means of voter-elite proximities in two around-election periods clearly confirm our prediction: voter-elite distances on the religious-secular dimension are both absolutely lower than on the economic dimension. As well as that its' dynamics of change is more pronounced – the average proximity doubles in the four year period (from .34 to .17), whereas on the economic dimension the change is rather marginal (from .54 to .41) and its' absolute level quite different. Finally, although we lack fully comparable data for 1993/94, the absolutely best voter-elite fit on this ideological proxy combined with the absolutely highest polarization potential and its' rate of increase, clearly supports Huntington's prediction.

Since his hypothesis concerned the 'initial phase' of political system formation, the logical question is: How long do we envisage this phase lasting? At what point in time does polarization cease to be conducive to party system institutionalization and start impeding its stability? It is about the time span of a democratic life cycle and the alleged curvilinearity of the relationship between political time and the polarization—centripetality continuum. We have to leave these questions open at this time.

## CONCLUSIONS

- (1) Both the absolute and relative perspective on 'hard' as well as survey opinion data indicates that between 1991 and 1997 a considerable change in party system institutionalization took place in Poland; its' major indicators coincide and cluster together logically.
- (2) Systematic confrontation of the relevant data on party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation shows that there is a remote, far from deterministic relationship between the two. Thus the postulates claiming that party system institutionalization is important to the process of democratic consolidation remains - in my view - open to empirical inquiry.
- (3) Evaluating party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation in Poland is troublesome for yet another reason: both phenomena are accompanied by impressive - by regional standards - economic success and ultimate increase in public mood indicators. An effort at disentangling the phenomenon of satisfaction with democracy and concentrating on pure diffuse political support, allowing for the blurring influences of its' economic and political correlates, proved rewarding. The result: as transformational time passes by the diffuse political support becomes more autonomous and independent from economic and short-term political phenomena, simultaneously becoming more associated with political efficacy and participatory factors. In brief, the general socio-political context for party system institutionalization improves as transitional time passes by, but clearly independently and ahead of the latter phenomenon.
- (4) The detailed analysis of party system polarization, dimensions of competition and the relevance of 'left-right' semantics shows that the Polish party system has indeed become more polarized as time has passed, and this polarization seems clearly conducive to the increased transparency of the elite-mass signaling exchange. The 'left-right' meta-dimension revealing its superior - in comparison with the "content" dimensions - polarizing potential, indicates that up to a certain point it had effectively incorporated both, economic and socio-cultural dimensions, and then in 1997 it became less related to the two. It did not, however, cease to polarize the party system space. And even though the religious-secular divide can "substitute" part of the abstract left-right positioning and discourse (for details see Markowski 1999a), nevertheless a substantial part remains unexplained by it. This aspect of the picture seems to be partly incompatible with the remaining part of the story. The 'left-right' dimension has become more equally defined in terms of, and dependent upon, socio-cultural (religious) and economic dimensions. This contradicts the increased salience of residual, non-distributive religious-secular values in Polish politics. However, it is clear that growing salience of religious factors can be attributed to the elites' instrumental creativity effectiveness.
- (5) Generally, one ought to stress the following- if we allow for temporal changes in particular indicators of party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation then little doubt remains that the causal link in Poland runs from economic recovery and successive growth in consumption to satisfaction with democracy and independent increase in diffuse political support, and only then to party system institutionalization. If this is so, believing the presented data, one important message for scholars interested in 'external influences' has to be emphasized. This is exactly the only polity which - for many reasons - launched a 'shock-therapy' mode of economic reconstruction and by the time populist/nationalist-friendly forces installed themselves as a governing coalition in 1992, the first macro-economic indicators of recovery were in place. And it is exactly at this point when tough IMF/WB stipulations proved decisive for the continuation of liberal economic polities, resulting in an average of about 6 percent GDP growth in the 1993-97 period.
- (6) No doubt, however, remains that the "trend-setter" (in general terms of the drive towards democratization) reveals extreme idiosyncrasies that restrict others from following the same route. The seeds of this phenomenon are in the transitional path. The combination of high initial uncertainty as to the external reaction coupled with well-organized mass mobilization at a substantially higher level than elsewhere in the region, all this contributed to problems in the smooth passage from a too-stormy civil society to a calm political society. This anti-formal mood coupled with a deep suspicion towards entities called

parties has influenced the peculiarities of Poland as described.

(7) A clearly alternative path of development took place in Hungary: parties came first, relatively well organized and believed by many to be "frozen too early". They had certainly preceded the most dramatic economic change that occurred only in spring of 1995. Meanwhile no visible changes in satisfaction with democracy or in the positive attitudes as regards the old regime and economy, accompanied by criticism of the new ones, are visible till 1998 (Rose & Haerpfer 1998). As of 1997/98 the comparison of the two genuine first-comers to the transformation does not show any - previously broadly alleged - superiority for the Hungarian party system in terms of its institutionalization as defined in this article. The same number of effective parties, almost the same below-five percent vote share is accompanied by two differentiating factors: considerably higher voter volatility in Hungary 1994-98 than in Poland 1993-97 (34 : 19) and relatively higher electoral participation in Hungary (though lower between 1994 and 1998, by some 12 percent). What remains indisputable is the much better state of parties' internal organization and institutionalization as well as their parliamentary behavior in Hungary. Briefly put- the two routes to the ultimate goals of the market economy and consolidated democracy lead via a different order of both the occurrence and importance of associated phenomena. In particular, the parties' and party system institutionalization seem to play a substantially different role. These two examples of recent successful transformation show that the theoretical predictions concerning the relationship between party system institutionalization and democratic consolidation are far from empirical reality.

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