

THE “NORMALISATION” OF PARTY SYSTEMS AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN EASTERN EUROPE

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Abstract

Eastern European elections are regarded as outlying cases in international research. According to scholars, the reason for it lies in a low institutionalisation of political parties. In this article, I focus on the developments which occur in the institutionalisation of party systems in the course of the first multiparty elections. Theories about party system formation and strategic voter behaviour let suggest that the party system stabilises and nationalises after several elections. It is only with sufficient experience that political parties and voters have enough information to act strategically and to adjust their behaviour to the new electoral systems. A novel database on electoral results on the district level that I constructed allows me to test those hypotheses by measuring “party nationalisation” and “wasted votes” for the first time for Eastern Europe. Both indicators are calculated with innovating measures for Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Moldova and Romania. Even if the countries (in contrast for instance to Central Europe) have few democratic experience, four of those party systems after one and a half decades reached almost “normal” values. But Russia still lacks a well institutionalised party system.

Keywords: democratic consolidation, electoral laws, party systems, transition, voting behavior

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Introduction¹

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, hundreds of millions of European citizens gained political rights. For the first time after an authoritarian period, they could vote in competitive elections. However, loads of expressed votes were “wasted”. Political parties were created in an inflationary way, but most of them failed to expand throughout the countries and to become one of the relevant political players on the national political scene. Many parties failed to get parliament representation.

It is all but exceptional that very small parties fail to pass the electoral threshold and disappear from the political scene. However, in the new European democracies “vote wasting” for unsuccessful political enterprises reached never seen dimensions: The best known defeat of democratisation from that point of view were the elections to the Russian Duma in 1995. In the proportional representation (PR) race (225 out of 450 seats were appointed proportionally in a nationwide circumscription), parties that carried altogether nearly half the votes (!) failed to pass the 5%-threshold and get representation in the parliament (Moser 2001). Whereas in the plurality vote race in 225 single-member districts, nearly 50 vote percents were cast for independent candidates or for political parties that didn't win more than one parliament seat. Only two parties ran candidates in more than half of the districts, the race was rather dominated by independent candidates. It is hard to position such independent politicians on the national political scene. Scholars say that early elections in nascent democracies lead to outcomes that are basically different from those in stabilised democracies.²

This article deals with the electoral changes that occurred in Eastern Europe in the 15 years of multiparty elections. With an ongoing party system institutionalisation process, I suppose that there are two possible developments. Thus, I measure with novel data on Eastern Europe elections: On the one hand, the parties get more nationally structured and they begin to compete on a national level. On the other hand, small parties failing to pass the electoral threshold that is set by the electoral law disappear from the political scene due to the “psychological effect” of electoral laws that Duverger (1951) described. As soon as voters and party leaders adjust their strategic decisions to electoral system effects,

1 Many thanks to Alex Fischer and Pascal Sciarini for helpful comments and Ljiljana Labus for corrections.

2 Electoral system scholars claim that the election outcomes in those elections may hardly be compared to the functioning of electoral systems in stabilised Western societies. See for instance Reich (2004); Cox (1997); Nohlen (2004), Simon (1997: 371).

the amount of "wasted votes" cast for unsuccessful parties sinks drastically. In order to measure this transformation, I use two variables that measure aspects of the party systems institutionalisation, the "party nationalisation" degree and the amount of "wasted votes".

In the early stage of democratisation, both variables indicate the lack of institutionalisation, but in time they begin approaching "normal" values. The indicator of "wasted votes" measures how many votes are attributed to parties that don't pass the electoral thresholds (Anckar 1997). The "party nationalisation" degree shows to what extent a party gets its electoral support homogeneously throughout the country, instead of succeeding only in few regions (Jones&Mainwaring 2003).

While Bakke and Sitter (2005) showed, how the party system stabilised in four Central European countries with falling amounts of "wasted votes", on Eastern European countries there are only isolated similar investigations or only over a short period (Beichelt 1998: 615). And the "party nationalisation" degree, a result of the most recent research on party systems,³ has never been calculated for post-communist Europe. One reason may be that district level electoral data were only partially available. Due to its ethnic diversity the region appears as particularly interesting for this aspect of research.

My article considers the post-1990 (lower house) elections in four European countries of the former Soviet Union (Russia, Moldova, Estonia and Latvia) and includes furthermore Romania. Three other European and ex-Soviet countries, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus, are not suited for this research because the indicator of "wasted votes" doesn't make sense for the two-round (majority) elections in Ukraine and Lithuania and because elections in Belarus were far from being free and fair (Birch 2001: 357).

The former Soviet countries appear to be a helpful sample for comparative election studies, because they have all similar electoral systems: A national threshold that excludes parties with less than 5% of votes (Moldova: 6%; in three countries the threshold has been raised in the investigation period) and from the seat distribution.⁴ All these countries entered furthermore at a similar time the democratisation process and each of these countries is rich in ethnic groups. Romania is added to the sample because in both electoral threshold and ethnicity it is a similar case in Eastern Europe, while the Visegrad countries (Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary) have more democratic experience (Agh 1999).

³ "Party Nationalisation" has been calculated for Western Europe (Caramani 2004), North- and South America (Jones&Mainwaring 2003), India (Chhibber&Kollman 1998), Thailand and the Philippines (Kasuya 2001; Hicken forthcoming).

In the first part of this article, I shall discuss the party system institutionalisation process in transitional political systems. I will define two aspects (“wasted votes” and party system nationalisation”) that I will measure and discuss in this article. Then, operationalisation and the hypotheses are explained. In the following empirical part of the article, both measures are shown for the post-communist elections in the five investigated countries. I will conclude this article with a comparison of the development of the values in the sample countries and the examination of the hypotheses.

Party system transition from a theoretic perspective

There are different models of party system institutionalisation in transitional countries and how this influences the election outcomes. Firstly, I will have a look at the party system institutionalisation development in transitional countries, afterwards I will explain how this influences the indicators.

In stabilised democracies, the political party system was formed out during decades, sometimes over a century (Lipset&Rokkan 1967a). Such a stable party system in transitional countries has yet to be formed. In some of the Central-Eastern European countries (for instance in the succession states of Czechoslovakia, in Hungary or Poland), the new party systems build on pre-communist parties (Turner 1993: 331f). Though, most of the post-communist countries in the region lack such a democratic tradition – or it was only very short. Those countries in particular lack stable social cleavages and affiliated political parties, which is why there electoral outcomes contrast the patterns of experienced democracies.

Research on party system changes in transitional countries show that characteristics of electoral outcomes change quickly in the early elections. Academics apply contradicting theories about the development. Two opposed patterns are told to be typical for early elections.⁵ Reich (2004: 236ff.) calls them the “shakedown” and the “party dispersion hypothesis”. The “shakedown hypothesis” supposes that early elections are almost chaotic, that votes are dispersed over many parties: “At first, relatively many parties were formed to try their luck” (Taagepera&Shugart 1989: 87f). There are several ways how the party system gets more and more ordered. Firstly, the electoral law provides mechanisms that restrict the number of parties in parliament. This

⁴ With exceptions in Romania for ethnic minority parties (Cesid 2002) and in Estonia for regional parties (Taagepera 1995: 328f).

happens through legal thresholds or through restricted electoral circumscriptions, that don't allow small parties to win seats. Secondly, the actors on the political scene react to those institutions: In order not to waste their vote by voting for a party that doesn't pass the electoral threshold, electors vote for a larger – that is likely to win parliament representation. And political entrepreneurs (potential party leaders) concentrate their force on successful parties (Cox 1997: 159f.). Over time, the entropy of the elections is reduced.

The “party dispersion hypothesis” shows a completely opposite image: Initially, the elections' aim is to break down an authoritarian regime. The oppositional movement has to stand united for (democratic) change. The elections are held in a dominating bipolar configuration – the opposition movement on the one and the authoritarian forces linked to the old regime on the other side. Only in following elections to the initial transition an united alliance will not be needed any more– and it will split off (Simon 1997). At the same time, post-communist transition countries suffer from economic transition, and therefore, parties are frequently loosing elections. Consequently, this leads to additional changes in the party systems. After being initially low, the amount of wasted votes increases – while the party nationalisation degree decreases.

Some authors (Bielasiak 1997; Merkel 1999: 156) merge both cited approaches and describe the party system development with the following evolutionary process: After the collapse of the hegemonic party system, a polarised party system along the poles of communist and democratic support emerges with oppositional forces that are united competing in “umbrella movements”. After the initial transition, the authoritarian-democratic conflict line becomes less relevant and this gives way to a fragmented party system; the democratic movement splits along personal and political lines or through the revival of pre-authoritarian, traditional political forces. Gradually, the extreme, sometimes “chaotic” plurality is reduced through both political mechanisms and socio-economic changes to a “polyarchical” party system. However, the duration time of the different phases may vary from country to country. The achieved development depends on the election timing of the elections. Depending on the character of the transformation, early elections may be held already at the time of the conflict between the old regime and the opposition or only after this conflict has been settled. Elections during the initial conflict result in a well structured pattern of

⁵ The term “early elections” is used as synonymous to expressions like “founding elections” (Bogandor 1990, von Beyme 1994), “first elections” (Turner 1993) or “initial elections” (Moser 1999).

regime and opposition with small amounts of wasted votes and a high nationalisation. In the following elections, these parties disperse and re-institutionalise slowly and, according to the “shakedown hypothesis”, build larger and stable parties (see hypotheses below).

An important factor for the forming of political parties are the electoral systems. They define the conditions in which political parties compete. They may provide more or less drastic measures to limit the plurality of political groups that are represented in parliament. Regarding the new European democracies, scholars say that the classic relationship between electoral systems and political parties (the more permissive an electoral system is, the higher the number of parties) doesn't work well (for instance Golder 2002: 24). Moser (1999) claims that one reason for those outlying results is the lack of institutionalisation in party system.⁶ Nevertheless, the question how such a system gets institutionalised is little studied. One aspect I shall considerate in this article is the strategic coordination among political parties and voters; a second aspect is the nationalisation of the political parties. Both are supported by the electoral systems, but they require democratic experience. Otherwise strategic coordination can't work properly and the nationalisation of political parties hasn't already grown.

The characteristics of party system transition

Electoral laws are the motor of such strategic coordination – and they are the “catalyst” of changes of party systems. Most Central-East European national electoral laws don't allow a large variety of political parties to be represented in parliament. More precisely, almost all the electoral systems provide some kind of electoral thresholds. In many countries, a legal threshold was introduced on the national level. Such thresholds exclude parties that don't reach the required national vote share from the distribution of parliamentary seats. Other countries apply (or applied) forms of plurality or majority vote in single-member districts, where only the candidate with the most votes (respectively the largest party) may win parliament representation. Furthermore, there are proportional systems with particularly small electoral district which also limit the number of parties to be represented in parliament.⁷ Namely, parties failing to get the vote amount that proportionally corresponds to a parliament seat, may not get parliament representation (Taagepera&Shugart 1989).

⁶ Sartori (1986) explains this connection theoretically.

Such electoral system thresholds help to reduce the entropy in the party systems: As small parties fail to pass them, the number of parties in parliament is much lower than of those that competed in the elections. Duverger (1951: 256) called this the “mechanical effect” of electoral systems. The entropy is reduced through the electoral system and “wasted votes” are generated. But over time in a dynamic process the wasted votes (cast for small parties) decrease: Rational voters avoid voting for them (Downs 1968) – and party elites compete only with supposedly successful party lists. Duverger (1951: 256) calls this the “psychological effect”.⁸ Anckar (1997: 502) writes: “When voters are aware of how the electoral systems operate, they tend to avoid voting for smaller parties, as a vote for a small party can be seen as equivalent to a wasted vote.” Over time, electors and parties undergo a “learning effect” and adjust their strategic behaviour to the electoral law. Research shows that voters in stabilised democracies are able to make very sophisticated strategic voting decisions (Blais&Nadeau 1996). Small parties disappear because they don’t get votes – or don’t even present lists. Downs (1968) described this with the logic of an electoral market: “Rational voters” choose the party which they can make the best use from – what implies that it should be able to get elected.⁹ And parties if they candidate try to get elected and consequently too small parties don’t have intentions to candidate.

In that way, the “mechanical effect” of electoral laws gets replaced by strategic coordination (“psychological effect”) and the amount of “wasted votes” reduces (see hypothesis 2 below). However, this is only possible when party organisation and electoral-party linkages get stronger and the electoral outcome gets predictable. Cox (1997: 79) studied the conditions, when such “strategic voting” may not work:

1. “the presence of voters who are not short-term instrumentally rational”;
2. “the lack of public information about voter preferences and vote intentions (hence about which candidates are likely to be ‘out of the running’)”;

7 For an overview over the electoral thresholds in Central and Eastern Europe see Nohlen&Kasapovic (1996), Shvetsova (1999), Nohlen (2004).

8 Duverger (1951) wrote his theory with regard to plurality vote systems. In such elections, if electors vote for a third- or fourth-ranked candidate, they give a “symbolic”, however ineffective vote. That is why rational electors try to identify who are the both front-running candidates and give their vote to the one amongst them they like more (Blais&Turgeon 2004). – The same logic applies for parties below the threshold in proportional representation systems.

9 According to Abramson et al. (1992: 56) „sophisticated voting“ is not only a function of „voter’s perception that his or her vote can help make a candidate [or party in our case] win or lose“. Furthermore a voter makes both, outcome estimates and „utility comparisons“ about if maybe a party or candidate with better chances also may fulfil almost his or her preferences.

3. “public belief that a particular candidate will win with certainty”;
or
4. “the presence of many voters who care intensely about their first choice and are nearly indifferent between their second and lower choices”.

Especially the first and the second point apply to the situation in the new European democracies. Lacking of election routine and experience with electoral system effects, the political actors may have difficulties in making rational decisions appropriate to the electoral system and gain the electors for them. Secondly, on the highly fluid political scene, there are no reliable prognostics on the outcome.¹⁰ Thus, political parties are unable to join electoral alliances and voters can't avoid voting for parties that will fail and to waist their vote, because the results are far from being known, there are no well-established parties and the winner of the election is in doubt (Gerring 2005: 91; Birch 2001: 369).

The mechanical and the strategic-psychological effect of electoral systems have consequences on the nationalisation of political parties and vice-versa. In fragmented, chaotic, few structured party systems, political parties are supposed to be attached to (local) politicians. Von Beyme (1994: 279) calls them even “pseudo parties”. In the embryonic state of the party systems, political parties haven't yet acquired the necessary resources and haven't reached an organisational level to be represented with basis organisations throughout the country. And as civil society is just about to be formed, there are few stable links from political parties to well organised social groups. Furthermore, in the embryonic state of democracy where civil society lacks well-defined social groups, local identity and personal affiliation may constitute an important reason for voting decisions. In little institutionalised party systems, party labels are “diffuse; many parties are little more than personalistic vehicles for their leading figures” (Mainwaring 1998: 78). Thus, while regional parties may locally be strong, they fail to get a considerable national level of support. That is why regionally defined parties – like typical in the beginning of democratic transitions – have difficulties to pass national thresholds of representation – what creates wasted votes. And like Cox (1997: 199f.) argues, a higher nationalisation of parties makes coordination among parties easier and consequently allows strategic coordination on the district level.¹¹ That is why I expect a parallel and interdependent

¹⁰ Moser (1999: 361) writes: “Those postcommunist states showing increased strategic voting over time are those with the most institutionalized party systems in the region, while those that exhibited no signs of adaptation to electoral-system constraints have weaker party systems.”

development of strategic coordination and party nationalisation (see hypothesis 3 below).

Operationalisation: How to measure strategic voting and party system institutionalisation

In the prior paragraph, I discussed how party systems get gradually institutionalised and how at the same time voting gets more and more “strategic” – and the Duverger’s “psychologic effect” intensifies. Both effects seem to be linked reciprocally to each other. In this article, I describe how the two aspects developed in Eastern Europe. For both indicators, I innovate on the way how to measure them. For the degree of strategic coordination, I use an adopted measure of “wasted votes”. Furthermore, I introduce the “standardised party nationalisation score”, a new measure of party nationalisation.¹²

Wasted votes to measure strategic coordination failure

Most commonly, investigations on strategic voting are based on two measures: Firstly, differences between the indicated preferences for political parties and the real vote decision on an individual level (for instance Abramson et al. 1992; Blais&Nadeau 1996; Alvarez&Nagler 2000); secondly, if in the same country different electoral systems are applied, strategic voting may be measured with differing vote distributions for each of the systems (Karp et al. 2002; Lutz 2001). The latter method is limited to cases where different electoral systems are applied in the same country – and in some cases voters with disregard of the electoral system effects intentionally split their votes amongst different parties (Carruba&Timpone 2005). On the other hand, the first method requires very exact survey data even for small parties.

I choose a less common way to measure strategic electoral coordination among voters and parties, by measuring strategically “wrong” votes. I apply the indicator of “wasted votes”. Commonly, votes are considered as “wasted if, and only if, it has been given to a party that

11 Moser and Scheiner (2004: 577) state : “The lack of well-established parties undermines the ability of voters and elites to behave strategically, as well as project to the national level constraining effects that occur at the district level.”

12 Some authors rely also on other indicators to measure party institutionalisation on the basis of electoral data. Many use “volatility”, that measures how many vote change on an aggregate level between two elections. Such vote shifts are very high in transitional democracies. Although, volatility is problematic, due to many party fissions and fusions that may not been appropriately treated. Moreover as it is a measure for the process of party system stabilisation, it is not a particularly good indicator for the reached party system stability (Bakke&Sutter 2005: 250).

receives no seat in the final seat allocation” (Anckar 1997: 503). For proportional representation systems with national legal thresholds, this operationalisation may be appropriate. Though, in cases of elections in single-member districts by plurality rule this definition does not fit. Electors that want to use their vote effectively, will cast it for one of the both front-runner candidates in the constituency. Votes for third- or less-ranked candidates don't influence the electoral outcome. That is why Cox and Schoppa (2002: 1038) speak of “wasted votes” if they are attributed to candidates that don't rank on the first or second place in single-member district races with plurality vote, thus without introducing such an indicator. That is why I propose a different calculation of wasted votes, namely in plurality elections I consider all votes that are cast for others than the first- and second-ranked candidate as “wasted”. This index is more difficult to calculate, as it requires electoral results on the level of single electoral districts. This is only possible thanks to my novel database on regional or electoral district level for the post-communist countries in Central-East Europe. For the first time, the database was used for the empirical investigations of this article.

The nationalisation of political parties

A second indicator is used to measure a further aspect of party system institutionalisation, namely the nationalisation of political parties. It may only be calculated on the basis of regionalised electoral data. In a highly nationalised party system, the parties' respective vote shared do not vary much from one district to the next. In a weakly nationalised party system, vote shared vary widely across districts. In such party systems, often even major political parties don't compete in an important part of the electoral districts (Jones&Mainwaring 2003: 140). While in several regions nationally important parties are only very small or even non-existing, regional dominating parties in many cases do not play an important role on the national level (see Caramani 2004, etc.).

Although the research branch is young, many indices have been developed to measure the degree of nationalisation of political parties. Although no one of them can satisfy, because firstly they may not be reliable, secondly they might not take into account the size of the single territorial units in which the party forces are measured, thirdly they might be sensible to the number of territorial units into which a country is divided for the purpose of calculating this indicator. That is why they are biased if applied in comparative research. With the “standardised Party Nationalisation Score” I propose an indicator of nationalisation that avoids all those mentioned problems. The indicator is calculated on the basis of a

"Gini-coefficient" (like used by Jones&Mainwaring 2003). However, this coefficient differs widely, depending on the number of the electoral districts a country is divided in. Namely, in the same country, the results of the Gini-coefficient are differing vastly depending on whether they are calculated on the basis of electoral results from few regions or on the basis of the results of many districts or even municipalities. This is why I introduce a logarithm-standarisation (according to the number of electoral units the country is divided in) of the "Party Nationalisation Score" by Jones and Mainwaring.¹³

Hypotheses

In the first part of this paper, I explained how party system institutionalisation and strategic electoral coordination develop over time in transitional countries. Successful parties take roots in society and build a stable electorate. Considering research on the party system institutionalisation described in the prior paragraphs, the following hypotheses shall be tested in this article:

- 1a)** According to the party dispersion hypothesis, the party system is well institutionalised in the beginning, because there is a well-structured and nationalised conflict between a well-organised old regime party and the opposition movement. (In new countries with territorial conflicts, such a stable structure may be given through these conflicts instead of the old-regime versus opposition conflict.) Only in the following elections parties split. The entropy raises, the nationalisation decreases. The amount of wasted votes increases as small parties are founded, but many of them fail the electoral thresholds.
- 1b)** According to the modified shakedown hypothesis like proposed by Bielasiak (1997), initially the political party conflict is well-structured between the old regime and the opposition (or among different groups in territorial conflicts). Afterwards the parties disperse, regional parties without national organisations are competing against each other. Many votes are "wasted" for too small parties. Only over time, the party system continuously nationalises and the strategic coordination ameliorates. First elections may either fall into the period with a party dualism or already into the high entropy of political parties.

¹³ For a discussion of the failures of existing indices and the construction of the "standardised Party Nationalisation Score" PNS10, see my working paper "The standardised 'Gini-coefficient' to measure party nationalisation" on <http://www.idheap.ch/idheap.nsf/go/bochsler>. The indicator has a scale from 0 (perfect regionalisation) till 1 (perfect nationalisation).

- 2) The more concentrating the electoral system is – the higher is the initial amount of wasted votes, because more small parties are likely to fail. But over time, high national thresholds lead to a nationalisation of the party system as voters and party elites adopt the concentrating element in their strategic coordination. At the end of this development, the amount of wasted votes settles down and shouldn't differ among different electoral thresholds. Raising of the electoral thresholds leads to a temporary rise of wasted votes, but will normalise on the long-term; although the party nationalisation gets an additional drive.
- 3) Wasted votes and party nationalisation develop in opposite directions, but at the same time. If the party system is nationalised, it is better structured and the electors may choose among large national parties. The higher the nationalisation degree, the less votes are “wasted” for regional parties.

I shall test these hypotheses in the following paragraphs.

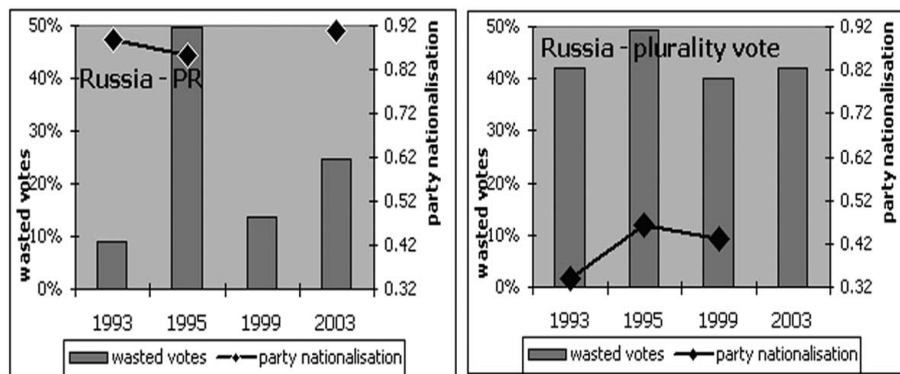
The normalisation of voting in the 1990s in Eastern Europe

For the empirical investigation, I focus on four European countries of the former Soviet Union (Russia, Moldova, Estonia and Latvia) and Romania (see above). Each of those countries held four, Romania even five multiparty elections. The 1990 republic elections in the former Soviet Union can not be taken into account because district results are not available and because they were rather multi-candidate than multi-party elections (Bogandov 1990: 289; Slider 1990: 296f.).

In 1993, **Russia** held the first post-soviet elections to the Duma. The amount of wasted votes in the proportional elections was surprisingly low. Nevertheless, it doesn't correspond with the party dispersion hypothesis, because in a dual party system with government and united opposition forces this would be valid as well for the plurality race. In the 1995 PR race, the amount of wasted votes rose to 50%. Every second vote was cast for a small party that failed to pass the 5% national threshold. Furthermore, the Russian parties lost to some extent their nationalised character and regional strongholds got more important. The un-strategic behaviour is explained by the mixed electoral system: Local candidates in the plurality vote tier run their party lists in the PR vote to get more publicity in the electoral campaign. In 1995, government

campaign financing and free media airtime was connected to a candidature in the proportional race (Moser 2001: 38).

Diagram 1/2: **The development of wasted votes and party nationalisation in Russia's Duma elections; in the proportional elections (left) and the plurality vote (right). (Data for party nationalisation in the 1999 PR race and for wasted votes in the 2003 plurality race is not available.)**



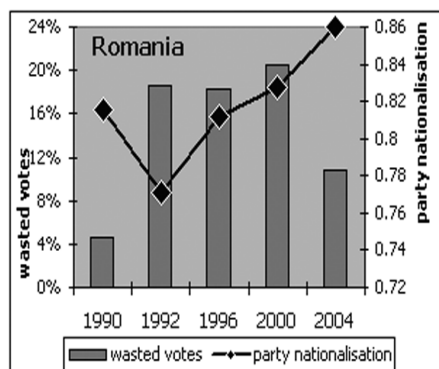
Russian parties and voters learned from the 1995 electoral tragedy. In the 1999 proportional elections the wasted votes dropped down to 14% (Diagram 1). Moser (2001: 153f.) concludes that strategic behaviour of both voters and elites rose in the 1999 elections. While the number of candidatures dropped, voters avoided giving their vote to minor parties. Data on party nationalisation for the 1999 PR elections are lacking, but until 2003 this value made a major bounce reaching a high value of nearly 0,91 (in correspondence to the “shakedown hypothesis”). At the same time, the amount of wasted votes rose again. With almost a quarter of the votes spent on success-less parties even after the fourth elections, the Russian party system seems all but stabilised. The electoral law was still not adopted by the political actors – even if the 1999 election result may suggest a contemporary strategic behaviour. New parties close to the new president Putin (“Party One Russia” and the “Patriotic Party Fatherland”) succeeded to attract large numbers of voters – while two reformist parliamentary parties (Rose 2000), the old “Yabloko” and the recent “Union of the Right Forces” narrowly failed. It is possible that the Russian party system will develop along the shakedown hypothesis and the amount of wasted votes will reduce. Until now, this is clearly not the case.

While the proportional results were largely discussed, the outcome of

the plurality vote (Diagram 2) didn't get the same attention. The amount of wasted votes in the 1995 elections was exactly the same as in the proportional race: on the average, of all 225 circumscriptions, both front-runners got just half the votes. Independent candidates got both 35% of the votes and of the seats; only Zhirinovski's far-right Liberal Democratic Party and the Communist Party had candidates in more than half of the electoral districts. Up to 2003, the plurality elections in single-member districts prevented an institutionalisation and nationalisation of the party system. In the 1999 and 2003 elections, the amount of wasted votes was reduced to around 40%. Nevertheless, Russia (in the plurality vote part) remain the front-runner in terms of electoral inefficiency among the examined cases.¹⁴

It took only five elections in **Romania** for the amount of wasted votes to begin to decrease. In 2004, the nationalisation of the party system reached a high level. Romania shows a typical pattern for the development of the electoral outcomes in transition countries as described in the hypothesis 1b: In the first (allegedly not sufficiently free¹⁵) multiparty elections in 1990, votes were widely concentrated on the "National Salvation Front". The lack of a legal threshold kept the amount of wasted votes at a very low level.

Diagram 3: **Wasted votes and party nationalisation in the election to the Romanian chamber of deputies.**



After those first transitional elections in Romania, the party system split off and led to a low level of structure in the second national elections, held in 1992. Romania is the exact exemplification of hypothesis²: In 1990, there was no national legal threshold, but a natural, imposed through the district size. With a moderate threshold of 3%, the elections of 1992/1996

resulted in over 18% wasted votes – almost comparable to the other studied countries. The amount of wasted votes doesn't depend largely on

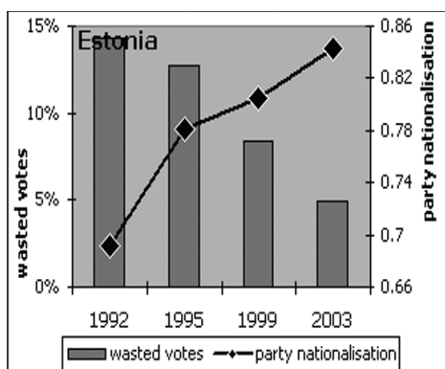
¹⁴ For the 2003 elections, my data don't allow the calculation of party nationalisation measures, as party affiliations are unknown.

¹⁵ See for instance "News from Helsinki Watch: News from Romania: Election Report, May 1990", cited in: Bogandov (1990: 292).¹⁵ See for instance "News from Helsinki Watch: News from Romania: Election Report, May 1990", cited in: Bogandov (1990: 292).

the level of the threshold. It rather depends on the point in time after such a threshold has been introduced – or, in other words, on the question if the voters and parties did have the time to adjust to it. The shift of the threshold up to 5% in the year 2000 led as predicted to a stronger mechanic effect on the party system – with more than 20% of wasted votes, in spite that it was already the fourth multiparty election. Only in 2004 the index dropped to 11%. In accordance with the 3rd hypothesis – party nationalisation and wasted votes develop almost in opposite ways.

Estonia resembles the shakedown case (hypothesis 1b): The amount of wasted votes remained moderate and was continually decreasing (Table 3). Like the other discussed countries, Estonia as well has a 5%-threshold. However, it's only applied to the attribution of the remaining seats on the national level – while regional parties have the possibility to win seats in the circumscriptions without reaching nationally the quota of 5%. While wasted votes continually decreased and reached in 2003 with 5% the lowest level of all the discussed countries, the (initially very low) party nationalisation degree raised and reached in 2003 a common level of around 0,85. The rise of the party nationalisation is due to the continuous integration of Russian minority politicians into Estonian political parties. For the first time in 2003, the Russian minority parties failed to pass the electoral threshold of 5% and are not represented any more in parliament (Pettai 2004: 832); thus, one of the last regionally concentrated parties in Estonia fell short of electoral support and disappeared from the legislative.

Diagram 4: **Wasted votes and party nationalisation in the Estonian elections.**



The development of the wasted votes **in Moldova** corresponds with the shakedown hypothesis: Until 1998, the entropy grew and the wasted votes increased slightly. In 2001, the increase is due to the new national electoral threshold (that was shifted from 4% to 6%) and resulted in a gigantic amount of wasted votes of 28%. An unstructured and changing party system and the threshold lead continuously to a vast overrepresentation

of the parliamentary parties (Beichelt 2001: 246f.). The Organisation for Security and Collaboration in Europe (OSCE: 2001: 3f.) strongly criticised the raised threshold and the resulting wasted votes. Although, without any institutional changes, the record-level was almost cut in half in the 2005 elections. However it is quite high and voters and parties only gradually adjusted their behaviour to the electoral institutions, which contradicts hypothesis 2 – while in other countries after the 4th multiparty election the amount of wasted votes dropped to around 10% or even below. Amongst others, ethnic minority parties (like the “Patria-Rodina” Bloc that gets its votes from the Gagauz minority) failed to reach the electoral threshold. The party nationalisation level (data for the elections in the 1990s are not at disposal) is slightly falling on a high level.¹⁶

Diagram 5: Wasted votes and party nationalisation in the Moldavian elections.



Although **Latvia** increased its electoral threshold from 4% to 5% in the 1998 elections, the measures of wasted votes and party nationalisation remained almost stable (Diagram 6). Party nationalisation remains rather on a low level. This, because some major parties (in 2002 especially the Human Rights Party) are closely linked to the Russian minority

in the country (Davies&Ozolins 2004). The amount of wasted votes raised in 2002, as a consequence of changes in the Latvian party system. This rise is firstly caused by the split of the Social Democratic Alliance. Both following parties failed the 5%-threshold, but contributed 5,5% of the wasted votes. Additionally, the party “Latvia’s Way” failed narrowly with 4,9% of the votes. Even if the wasted votes seem to increase over time, according to the party dispersion hypothesis, the leap in the year 2002 comes late, and thus seems too late to fit in with the party dispersion hypothesis.

¹⁶ However, the rather limited change could partially be caused by a change of the aggregation level of the electoral data. Furthermore, due to the single electoral district, this measure is not very relevant

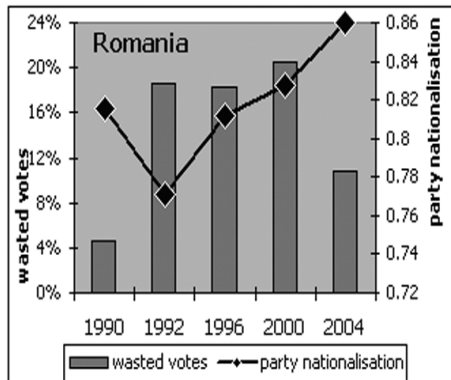


Diagram 6: **Wasted votes and party nationalisation in the elections to the Latvian Saeima.**

Conclusion

Three of the five considered cases – Romania, Estonia and Moldova – support the modified shakedown hypothesis (1b). Over time, the voters and political parties adjust their behaviour to the electoral system. A strategic coordination (that let the amount of wasted votes decrease intensively) and the party nationalisation degree raise simultaneously. In the Romanian case and less clear in the Moldavian case, the first multi-party elections show a specific pattern that corresponds with Bielasiak's (1997) modification of the classic shakedown theory: After the very first multiparty election, (and with the introduction of a 3% electoral threshold in Romania,) the amount of wasted votes raised and the party nationalisation decreased – before stepping into the typical shakedown pattern. In Romania, this is easily explained by the initial state of transition. In Moldova, at that time the territorial conflicts about the separatist Trans-Dniestrian region and about the autonomy for the Gagauz region still dominated the political agenda and may be seen as the initial conflict of transitional Moldova – consequently leading to a belated pluralisation and shakedown process. In all three countries the party nationalisation reached quite high values of 0,85 or above. Nevertheless, the amount of wasted votes reached only in Romania and Estonia a level of around 10% - similar to the countries of Central Europe (Bakke&Sitter 2005: 252).

The party dispersion hypothesis finds no confirmation in those countries. At least at the second look, the characteristics even of the Latvian case show that there is no dispersion process. However, the high amount of wasted votes in 2002 is of a rather accidental nature and may indicate that the party system still hasn't become stable. So does Russia, where the party system still lacks institutionalisation.

Electoral thresholds structure the party systems, as my results show

(hypothesis 2). All the changes of the electoral threshold (Romania 1992 and especially 2000; Latvia 1995; Moldova 2001) show that shifts of the electoral threshold increase the number of wasted votes. In most of the cases electors and parties adjust their strategy to the higher threshold and are able to reduce the amount of wasted votes in subsequent elections. The evidence of the effect of electoral system changes on the degree of party nationalisation is even less clear, due to missing data (Moldova until 1998) and to the special case of the Romanian 1990 early elections.

Regarding the 3rd hypothesis, one part of the cases (Romania, Estonia and proportional elections in Russia) are in accordance with the expected patterns of an opposed development of the party nationalisation and wasted votes. In Latvia and by the plurality elections in Russia, neither the one nor the other indicator show a considerable development, while in Moldova, party nationalisation measures are too incomplete to help identifying a development.

The results of this comparison of a small number of countries suggest: Even if the Eastern European elections were treated as special cases in the electoral studies (Golder 2002: 24; Moser&Scheiner 2004), over time the political parties and electors adjust their behaviour to the electoral rules and the party system stabilises. And even if the studied countries did not all reach a “normal” level of party nationalisation and especially of strategic coordination, particularly in Russia, the party system is far from being well-structured.

The glance on party nationalisation and on (newly operationalised) wasted votes has been possible for a first time for the region. Thanks to regional or district level electoral data that have been collected by the author. However, due to the low number of cases included, the analysis remains widely descriptive. The theoretically discussed hypotheses at the first look seem to work partially for the studied party systems. A more severe test, which would include alternative theories, requires a significantly higher number of cases and for some countries maybe a larger time period. This may be subject for further studies.

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