

Democratization in the Balkans, 1990-2002*

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The end of the Cold War and the formation of electoral democracies in the Central, Eastern and Southeast European countries have caused the emergence of an extensive literature focusing on the qualitative and quantitative changes with respect to the various aspects of the transition phase and the consolidation of democracy in these countries, and theories attempting to account for the transformation have abounded since 1989. Part of the reason for the interest is attributable to the three previous “waves” of democratization and the fact that there was a certain degree of intellectual bias in favor of liberalism to observe the simultaneous transformation in the postcommunist countries towards economic liberalism and the formation of liberal democracies. The process of democratization has been discussed from a variety of theoretical and empirical positions.¹

A major point of discord in the efforts to assess democratization has been about the very definition of the terms “democracy”, “democratization”, “transition”, and “consolidation”. The formation of an intellectual framework to carry out cross country comparisons has been hampered by the fact that the proponents of liberal democratic order have long disagreed among themselves about which institutional arrangements constitute the essence of a democratic system (Davisha and Parrott, p.4). It has been pointed out that the studies with their conceptualization of democracy about the countries that have liberalized and democratized in the twentieth century are inapplicable to the postcommunist countries simply because of the fact that these countries had not gone through the “traumatic” phase of communism (Davisha and Parrott, p.4). But even though there are discussions on these points,

competitive elections have been recognized as the *sine qua non* of a democratic order. And because the implementation of the elections has been an unmistakable qualitative change in the direction of democratization as well as providing an aspect within which quantitative cross-country comparisons have been facilitated, this paper focuses on the electoral process in the Balkan countries. Except for the latest elections in Albania, the presence of international observers has helped make these elections fair ones.²

Another point on which scholars have exchanged opinions is related to the hitherto interconnected nature of liberalization and democratization. This could also be considered as part of the bigger problem presented by the question of delineating the boundaries between transition and consolidation. It is observed that the old sequence of transition from liberalization to democratization and consolidation did not occur, but because democratization occurred in all, consolidation had to be defined in a different way (Beyme, 1996). In the previous transitions from authoritarian rule, the survival of democracy was a variable which could be used as an explanatory factor in locating the starting point of consolidation in the process, but because democracy has survived after the first decade of democratization in the postcommunist Balkan countries, it has lost power as an explanatory variable and this is one of the reasons why consolidation must be redefined. Apart from such arguments there is another strain of exchanges centered on the nature of the degree of change which makes democracy “the only game in town.” As implied in the discussions of Linz and Przeworski, some scholars have focused on delineating the boundaries between transition and consolidation. The essentially liberalist position adopted by scholars like Linz argues that the liberalization phase can still be lived out in the postcommunist states, and that the criteria for assessing the consolidation of democracy are valid for the postcommunist countries as well (Linz and Stepan, 1996).

This point is important in the arguments about the “uncertainty” inherent in the nature of postcommunist transition (Schedler, 2001). Schedler argues that the true “illusions of consolidation” may well be related to the problem of treating transition and consolidation as dichotomous variables with neat starting and ending points. Another interpretation is that because of their established nature, the communist institutions have lingered on during the transition phase and it is essential to check for their interference in the process (Brabant, 1998). This fact renders more difficult the task of clearly conveying the meaning of consolidation as applied to the postcommunist Balkan countries. Rather Schedler argues that transition and consolidation should be considered as continuous variables in a milieu which is characterized by institutional uncertainty or fluidity.

As will be argued below, this is the position adopted in this paper and forms part of the theoretical framework within which an attempt to present a quantitative model for assessing the institutionalization of the electoral process in the Balkan countries will be made. The countries included in the study are Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania and Slovenia.

Theoretical Framework

It is important to clearly define the concepts to be evaluated in any study and likewise it is crucial to discuss the operationalization and conceptualization of these same phenomena. This is needed in any study that aims to communicate its findings in an efficient manner. With respect to the postcommunist democratization studies, the fact that sometimes the concepts are not clearly defined has in part caused the emergence of some of the problems mentioned above, not the least important of which is the fact that the formation of frameworks to be utilized in making cross-country comparisons has not been facilitated.

More often than not, the criteria for the consolidation of the democracies have been taken from Dahl’s definition of “polyarchies” (or political democracy). Although some other

criteria have been advanced, the most that is achieved with respect to the study of the democratization of the Balkan countries is the inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania to some studies and projects, whereas almost all other countries in the region are left out of studies (for instance, see Linz and Stepan, 1996).³

Now I want to turn to the general question of the place of frameworks in scientific inquiry. I firmly believe that scientific inquiries start from a question and are driven by frameworks. If the original questions are treated as if they exist in a vacuum, then the results will be vague and many variables which may have been related will probably be lost somewhere in the process. That is why in my view the Kuhnian paradigm is more relevant than Feyerabend's anarchistic theory of science with its emphasis on individual freedom.⁴ I believe that our original questions frame the manner within which we approach the subject matter at hand and within our specified borders we describe our question and the phenomena leading to *an* (not *the*) answer to *the* question.

An analytical approach helps us understand politics by applying "models" to the components of politics to see how they work.⁵ Within the wider frameworks that are offered and used in the literature, the "minimalist" definition of democratic consolidation that takes the "institutionalization" of elections as the main indicator is used in this study. Therefore a wider model of liberal democratic performance and the variables that are offered lie outside the scope of this discussion.⁶ Although other authors offer more detailed definitions and therefore avenues of research,⁷ I argue that the fact of the presence of political parties and elections are important qualitative changes and I will approach the question of democratization in the Balkans from this perspective to apply a quantitative model that will enable us to make cross-country comparisons. This model will also make comparisons with today's consolidated democracies not against the standards they have achieved today (i.e. the standards the cheering crowds of the founding elections in the postcommunist countries

thought they would attain within a reasonable period of time once they adopted democracy), but against the electoral indicators of those countries immediately after their founding elections in the twentieth century. In this respect, I think that even if there is some vagueness about the conceptual framework, Jack Bielasiak's recent article was a well-directed attempt.

A model is an internally consistent body of theory and the model that I have applied is about the patterns that may be observed in the parliamentary elections in the region. Decidedly, this is a crude one, but it does provide enough explanatory power over the phenomena leading to an answer to the question of democratization in the Balkan countries. Therefore, the scope of the present study is demarcated by elections and although there is criticism about the importance given to the study of elections at the expense of other variables, "the development of electoral systems and political parties is essential for democracies to function well" (Bielasiak, 2002). And even though this subset of the phenomenon can not be put definitely to the test because the history of the process is now occurring, it is still crucial to understand the patterns that can be seen after the first decade of postcommunist democratization in the Balkan countries to have an analytical background towards the future developments in the region.

Another reason for my emphasis on elections in this paper is the fact that horizontal accountability may only come after the institutionalization of vertical accountability, the understanding that incumbents are answerable to the voters. From this perspective, it can be argued that the institutionalization of the electoral process provides the essential ground upon which the horizontal accountability's presence may be checked.⁸ Before proceeding further I think it will be useful to make two caveats. The first one is about the fact that the status of democracy in a country does not preclude the possibility that it might break down sometime in the future. The other is related to the general argument laid down above and it is beneficial to keep in mind that there is not only one type of consolidated democracy.⁹ The patterns of

competition and the space available for voters to register their preferences are the indicators that will show the emerging patterns and consequently these patterns can be incorporated into other studies. Perhaps one last point to mention is the difference between economic performance and consolidation. Although the relationship between increased levels of democracy and economic growth is mentioned in the literature,¹⁰ the current democratization “wave” in the Balkans seems to proceed in a milieu of, at best, mixed economic results. So, the concept of consolidation must not be confused with economic success.¹¹ Naturally for the democratic experiment to take root, the development of a political culture is necessary. With the passage of time, it will be all the more a requirement for the incumbents to provide economic results. This is an issue that needs to be addressed in the studies in the second decade of the democratization process in the Balkans.

The standard measures of electoral volatility and effective number of electoral parties are used to assess the extent of the institutionalization of the electoral process in the Balkan countries.

Empirical Findings and Discussion

Volatility refers to the change in the party support over successive elections (for more information on the index, see the technical appendix). The change is important because, once elections begin in a formerly authoritarian country, the development of stable, coherent parties becomes crucial for the subsequent democratization of the country. The rise and fall of partisan support can also be thought of as the flexibility inherent in the party system. In fact, this may be a good thing in the context of the troubles brought about by postcommunist economic restructuring. But a consistently high level of party system instability has some detrimental consequences.¹²

In line with my argument above, as there is necessarily a degree of uncertainty with regard to the processes of transition and consolidation, some degree of uncertainty is also

necessary for democratic consolidation. This is necessary to keep losers in the electoral game and to prevent the electoral process from becoming an “electoral lottery”.¹³

[Table 1 here]

When the volatility scores of the Balkan states are examined (Table 1), it is seen that all have scores in the neighborhood of 20% and that there is no wide regional variation between the party systems with respect to this index. Apart from Bulgaria and, to a slight degree Slovenia, the volatility has decreased since the founding elections of these countries. These high levels of instability can be explained by the peculiar characteristics of the Balkan countries' transition process from communism. One of the most important was the fact that there were virtually no existing party systems and these had to be built anew by the political entrepreneurs of the period. Another reason for the even greater initial volatility scores is the fact that many former communist leaders used the opportunity presented by the first elections to personalize the contest and retain power. The backlash against this cadre in the subsequent elections, that is to say the alternation of incumbents and opposition, explain the high initial volatility scores.

The effective number of electoral parties is another dimension in the formation of stable party systems. It is generally understood that the number of parties shape the spatial milieu within which voters are to register their choices. In this respect, the higher the number of parties, the higher the probability of the voters switching their support from one election to the other.¹⁴ The reason is that the high number of parties will lower the spatial distance between parties along policy issue dimensions and this will facilitate a change in WED (weighted Euclidean distances) calculations.¹⁵

Still the effective number of parties can be interpreted in a different manner. For instance, using vague adjectives, one scholar has reached the conclusion that ENEP for Eastern Europe is not “any more excessive than in many consociational systems in the West.”¹⁶ Here I do not make any claim about a strict criterion against which to evaluate ENEP in Balkan countries. Constructing a framework within which we may make judgments about “excessiveness” is nigh on impossible.

What I will do is present the ENEP scores of the Balkan countries and evaluate them and then present the volatility and ENEP scores in a joint table and then compare them to the data from the relevant periods of the countries and regions that underwent a process and democratization to try to see if any pattern has emerged after a decade of democratization in the Balkans.

When we look at the ENEP scores of the Balkan party systems (Table 2), it is seen that apart from these scores’ relative magnitude, a pattern is evident. There are no wide variations in the countries’ scores and they seem to have reached stability.

In order to gain better insight into the prospect of the institutionalization of the party systems, I want to compare the scores with the other democratization “waves” in the twentieth century (Table 4).

It is clear from the data on electoral volatility that the Balkan countries are closer to the Latin American experience than the European democratization of this century. This is interesting in that it suggests that this closeness to Latin America with respect to vote switch-over may bring with itself an authoritarian backlash against the fluidity of the party system.¹⁷ It is tempting to argue the kind of backlash that Russian President Vladimir Putin has brought to bear upon the perceived instability of Russia in this light.¹⁸

It is also seen that the region is very close to the East Central European countries on volatility. I argue that from now on, the institutionalization of the party system will to a

certain extent depend upon the governments' ability to produce significant economic benefits to the populace. Up to now, the democratization process has seemed to be autonomous from the economic performance of the individual countries and there has been a trend towards protest voting. This trend may degenerate into a pattern of significant authoritarian backlash and the democratization process may even be strengthened in the presence of economic performance. This situation, coupled with the fact that these countries are ethnically mixed states, may further the democratization process.¹⁹

With respect to the ENEP scores, the Balkan region lies between the other postcommunist countries and Western Europe, Latin America and Southern Europe. The average ENEP for the latter three regions are 3.7, 4.18, and 3.5, respectively. The Balkan region, with an average ENEP score of 4.6, lies closer to Latin America than any other region, post communist states included.

The Balkan region can thus be said to have produced a more fractured political scene than the Western countries, but when this comes hand in hand with a high volatility, the result is a very vague political environment and weak institutionalization. The important point to look for is whether the high number of parties will continue beyond this initial phase of democratization.

Conclusion

As a result of this study, I would like to restate the fact that studies employing conceptual frameworks that call for a clear separation between transition and consolidation get it wrong. Because of the peculiar characteristics of the Balkan countries, it has been demonstrated that the process was, is, and will be, a unique one. Therefore, I think "gradualism" is a better way to approach the issue of democratization in the Balkans. The results after a decade of democratization are decidedly mixed, but this region surpasses almost all other postcommunist regions with respect to the measures of institutionalization explored

here. The future prospect for further Balkan democratization will inevitably be linked to their economic performance and in this context I believe a mutual interaction between the EU and the Balkan countries and especially the “pull” factor of the EU will be two of the most important deciding factors.

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

A Description of the Measures

Electoral Volatility

The measure of electoral volatility has been used extensively in the political science literature and has become one of the standard measures.²⁰ Pedersen (1979) has constructed the index as follows:

$P_{i,t}$ and $P_{i,t-1}$ are defined as the party i 's share of vote in elections t and $t-1$, respectively. Then the change of the party i 's share of vote is defined as:

$$\Delta_{p_{i,t}} = P_{i,t} - P_{i,t-1}$$

If this change is calculated for all of the parties that take part in the election (n parties), then the total net change in the election t is calculated as follows:

$$TNC_t = \sum_{i=1}^n |\Delta_{p_{i,t}}|$$

$$0 \leq TNC_t \leq 200$$

Because of the fact that one party's share is another's loss (an election is a zero-sum game) the sum of the absolute values of the differences of all individual parties between two elections (here t and $t-1$) has a maximum value of 200. To standardize, volatility is defined as:

$$V_t = \frac{1}{2}TNC_t \quad (1)$$

and we have the volatility index that has a maximum value of 100;

$$0 \leq V_t \leq 100 \quad (2)$$

In the calculations that have been made in this study only the parties that have contested in two subsequent elections have been taken into account and a slightly revised index that have been offered by Birch (2001) has been utilized. In this index, the sum of the absolute values of the changes in individual parties' shares of vote resulting from individual vote transfers has been divided by not 2 but the sum of the relevant parties' shares of vote in the two elections. Hence the index is:

$$\frac{\sum_{i=1}^n |p_{i,t} - p_{i,t-1}|}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_{i,t} + \sum_{i=1}^n p_{i,t-1}} \quad (3)$$

Effective Number of Electoral Parties²¹

p_i is defined as the fractional share of the i^{th} party. Then in the original form, the ENEP is calculated as follows:

$$N = 1/\sum p_i^2$$

As an improvement, instead of the fractional shares of the parties' vote, the numerical value of the individual parties share is taken. In this way, the numerator of the equation is

equal to the square of the sum of the party's share of vote. The revised version of the index as proposed by Taagepera (1997) is as follows:

$$N = P^2 / \sum p_i^2 \quad (4)$$

However, this measure still has difficulty to handle the “others” category found in many electoral data. The effective number of parties calculation may be distorted based on the composition of the votes in the “others” category. So, to take this factor into account, Taagepera has integrated this category in the measure as a function as follows:

$$N = P^2 / \left[f(R) + \sum p_i^2 \right] \quad (5)$$

Here $f(R)$ is the function that determines the contribution of the “others” category to the overall calculation. Taagepera shows that the logical upper and lower limits for $f(R)$ is R and R^2 . Then, the guideline for calculation, in order to minimize any distortion because of the incompleteness of the data, is that first, we calculate the $f(R)$ as R , then we calculate the R^2 and $P_L R$ (Here P_L refers to the party that has the least share of vote among the parties that are listed individually in the data list). The smaller of the values of R^2 and $P_L R$ is included in the equation. Finally, the arithmetic average of the calculations with $f(R)$ as R and the last described are taken. And the score is reached. In this study, the ENEP has been calculated using the last revised formula which was offered by Rein Taagepera.

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Data Sources:

The data that were used in this study have been compiled from a variety of sources:

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"Notes on Recent Elections" section of *Electoral Studies*, various issues.

Inter-Parliamentary Union Database. Available [online] at <http://www.ipu.org>.

Keesing's Record of World Events (1991-1996 annuals) and available [online] at <http://www.keesings.com>.

University of Essex's Database of East and Central European Elections. Available [online] at <http://www.essex.ac.uk/elections>.

Notes:

¹See for instance, Krastev (2000), Beyme (1996), Grzysmala-Busse (2001), Nunberg (1999), Elster, Offe and Preuss (1998), Nowotny (1997), Innes (2002), Basch (1998), Kummel (1998), Filippov, Ordeshook and Shvetsova (1999), Shvetsova (1999), Chandler (2002), Bernhard (1993), Foweraker and Landman (2002), Ishiyama (1995), Cellarius and Staddon (2002), Miller, Reisinger and Hesli (1998), Marginean (1997), Bertschi (1994), Vuckovic (1999), Basom (1995), Birch (2002), Schedler (2001), Randall and Svasand (2002), Pridham (2001), Bielasiak (2002), Davisha, and Parrott (1997), Przeworski (1991), O'Donnell (1996), and Linz and Stepan (1996).

² I am grateful to Aydin Babuna for pointing this out during a discussion.

³ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan take *completed democratic transition and consolidated democracy* as their dependent variable and set out to explain them by independent variables such as *stateness, leadership of the preceding regime, international influence*. Their book is a typical example of my argument that although more variables are added to the study, still only Bulgaria and Romania are explained.

⁴ See Chalmers (1999).

⁵ See Hinich and Munger (1997).

⁶ See Foweraker and Krznaric (2001).

⁷ See O'Donnell (1996).

⁸ Guillermo O'Donnell defines "horizontal" accountability as the the controls the state agencies are supposed to exercise over other state agencies (1996, p.44).

⁹ See Linz and Stepan (1996).

¹⁰ For instance, see Minier (1998) for a forceful discussion of the empirical relationship between economic growth and democratization.

¹¹ Elster, Offe and Preuss (1998), p.307.

¹² Birch (2001) lists four main consequences of a high level of party system instability: the reduction in accountability, the low level of party institutionalization, an increase in uncertainty, an increase in the stakes of the electoral game.

¹³ See Innes (2002).

¹⁴ See Pedersen (1979), Hinich and Munger (1997).

¹⁵ As always, from a rational choice perspective, the issue is not whether the individual voters actually carry out these kinds of calculations in their minds, the main issue is whether we can model, for instance the voting behavior, based on the frameworks that make these assumptions. The same also holds for utility theory.

¹⁶ Beyme (1996), p.140.

¹⁷ See Nowotny (1997),

¹⁸ See Birch (2001).

¹⁹ Basch (1998) powerfully demonstrates the effects of ethnic separation on democratization and I personally do not think this may be inapplicable to Balkan countries.

²⁰ For an early description and application of the model, see Pedersen (1979). Most calculations in the literature have been made using the Pedersen Index to facilitate replication.

²¹ For an extensive discussion of the measure, see Taagepera (1997, 1999).

APPENDIX

Table 1. Electoral Volatility in Balkan Party Systems

Country	Period												National Average	No. of election periods
	1990	1991	1992	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002		
Albania		n.a	29.7			11.6	36.7				8.26		21.6	4
Bosnia						n.a		27		30		14.5	23.8	3
Bulgaria	n.a	17.6		13.8			25.5				28.2		21.3	4
Croatia	n.a.		27.7		8.2				23.5				19.8	3
Macedonia	n.a.			30				36.4				21.7	29.4	3
Romania	n.a.		40.5			13				22.5			25.3	3
Slovenia	n.a.		22.3			28.3				22.3			24.3	3
Regional Mean													23.6	

Table 2. Effective Number of Electoral Parties in Balkan Party Systems

Country	Period												National Average	No. of election periods
	1990	1991	1992	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002		
Albania		2,15	2,19			2,79	2,86				3,18		2,6	5
Bosnia						3,4		6,24		7,48		7,60	6,2	4
Bulgaria	2,75	4,18		3,90			2,99				3,98		3,6	5
Croatia	2,38		4,03		3,78				3,89				3,5	4
Macedonia	4,70			3,26				5,06				4,12	4,3	4
Romania	1,50		6,90			6,08				5,27			4,9	4
Slovenia	9,05		8,42			6,33				5,13			7,2	4
Regional Mean													4,6	

Table3. Volatility and ENEP in Balkan Party Systems

Country Date	VOL.	ENEP	Country Date	VOL.	ENEP	Country Date	VOL.	ENEP
Albania 1991		2,15	Bosnia 1996		3,4	Bulgaria 1990		2,75
1992	29,7	2,19	1998	27	6,24	1991	17,6	4,18
1996	11,6	2,79	2000	30	7,48	1994	13,8	3,9
1997	36,7	2,86	2002	14,5	7,6	1997	25,5	2,99
2001	8,2	3,18				2001	28,2	3,98
Country Date	VOL.	ENEP	Country Date	VOL.	ENEP	Country Date	VOL.	ENEP
Croatia 1990		2,38	Macedonia 1990		4,7	Romania 1990		1,5
1992	27,7	4,03	1994	30	3,26	1992	40,5	6,9
1995	8,2	3,78	1998	36,4	5,06	1996	13	6,08
1999	23,5	3,89	2002	21,7	4,12	2000	22,5	5,27
Country Date	VOL.	ENEP						
Slovenia 1990		9,05						
1992	22,3	8,42						
1996	28,3	6,33						
2000	22,3	5,13						

Table 4. Average Volatility and ENEP in Emerging Party Systems

Country	Average Volatility	N of Election Periods	Average ENEP	N of Elections
Postwar West Europe				
Austria	7,1	3 (1945-1956)	2,6	4 (1945-1956)
France	10,4	3 (1945-1951)	4,8	4 (1945-1951)
Germany	13,9	3 (1949-1961)	3,5	4 (1949-1961)
Italy	14,1	3 (1945-1958)	3,9	4(1946-1958)
Regional Mean	11,38		3,7	
Country	Average Volatility	N of Election Periods	Average ENEP	N of Elections
Southern Europe				
Greece	18,4	3 (1974-1985)	3,1	3 (1974-1981)
Portugal	8,7	3 (1975-1980)	3,6	3 (1975-1979)
Spain	21,9	3 (1977-1986)	3,8	3 (1977-1982)
Regional Mean	16,33		3,5	
Country	Average Volatility	N of Election Periods	Average ENEP	N of Elections
Latin America				
Argentina	12,7	5 (1983-1993)	3,2	6 (1983-1993)
Bolivia	33	4 (1979-1993)	4,7	4 (1979-1993)
Brazil	40,9	2 (1982-1990)	6,7	2 (1986-1990)
Paraguay	25,8	2 (1983-1993)	2,1	2 (1989-1993)
Regional Mean	28,1		4,18	
Country	Average Volatility	N of Election Periods	Average ENEP	N of Elections
East Central Europe				
Czech Rep.	12,8	3 (1990-1998)	5,2	4 (1990-1998)
Hungary	27,4	2 (1990-1998)	5,5	3 (1990-1998)
Poland	24,6	2 (1991-1997)	9,6	3 (1991-1997)
Slovakia	17,1	3 (1990-1998)	5,2	4 (1990-1998)
Regional Mean	20,48		6,38	
Country	Average Volatility	N of Election Periods	Average ENEP	N of Elections
Baltic States				
Estonia	25,9	2 (1992-1999)	7,2	3 (1992-1999)
Latvia	29	2 (1993-1998)	7,5	3 (1993-1998)
Lithuania	39,2	2 (1992-2000)	5,5	3 (1992-2000)
Regional Mean	31,37		6,73	

Country	Average Volatility	N of Election Periods	Average ENEP	N of Elections
Former SU Europe				
Moldova	36,6	1 (1994-1998)	4,8	2 (1994-1998)
Russia	47,3	2 (1993-1999)	8,3	3 (1993-1999)
Ukraine	n.a.		6,6	2 (1994-1998)
Regional Mean	41,95		6,57	

Source: Jack Bielasiak, "The Institutionalization of Electoral and Party Systems in Postcommunist States", *Comparative Politics*, 34:2 (January 2002), p.199.

Fig. 1 The relationship between national mean volatility and dispersion around the mean

