PATTERNS OF PARTY DEVELOPMENT IN NEW DEMOCRACIES

Ingrid van Biezen
Department of Political Science and International Studies
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham B15 2TT
Tel.: +44 (0)121 414 3305
Fax: +44 (0)121 414 3496
E-mail: I.C.VANBIEZEN@bham.ac.uk

DRAFT- NOT FOR CITATION

Political parties that emerge in an institutional context in which democratization primarily entails the establishment of the principles of public contestation in a previously hegemonic regime, will follow a different organizational trajectory than parties emerging in a context whereby a competitive oligarchy develops into a full democracy. Whereas many of the now established West European liberal democracies followed the second path, this was generally not available to countries that constituted part of what Huntington (1991) has depicted as the “third wave”. This institutional context, taken from Dahl’s (1971) typology of political regimes, is of fundamental importance for an understanding of party formation, for it conditions the opportunities and constraints for organization building (van Biezen, 1998).

More particularly, it can be argued that the environment in which most parties in the newly established democracies emerged is likely to favour a certain sequence of organizational development in which the party in public offices emerges and acquires relevance before the development of an extra-parliamentary organization, and that this, in turn, will be reflected in the current organizational format in the predominance of the public face of the party in the organization as a whole. Furthermore, given that many parties in these new democracies had to build their organization from scratch and also given that the context in which they emerged will probably lead to a prioritizing of electoralist as opposed to organizationally penetrative strategies, it can be expected that partisan linkages with society will be weak, that the membership organization will have acquired little importance in the party organization as a whole, and that extra-parliamentary activity depends on professionals rather than on members working as volunteers. Given their institutional origins and the relevance of institution building, moreover, it can be anticipated that their orientation to and their linkages with the state will be strongly developed, and that parties will be characterized by relatively high centralization around the party leadership. In addition to the institutional context, conjunctural factors related to the period in which these parties emerged, and particularly the access to public funding and the mass media, are expected to have served to enhance these particular organizational styles.

The purpose of this paper is to explore and discuss the extent to which these propositions hold true for parties in recently democratized European polities, that is, in those polities that constitute part of the “third wave” of democratization. The analysis focuses on party organizations in four new democracies in particular: Portugal and Spain in Southern Europe, and Hungary and the Czech Republic in East-Central
Europe, which, despite the fact that much valuable work has been done on parties in each of the two regions, have been rarely compared systematically. Although the experiences in Southern and Eastern Europe form the core of the comparisons, the comparative reference point is much wider than that, in that it includes other parties in consolidated democracies in Europe that constitute part of the “third wave” of democratization, as well as the long-established West European democracies. In fact, and underlying the whole basis of the analysis, the key point of comparison is with the development of party organizations in the long-established democracies of Western Europe (see especially Duverger, 1954; Kirchheimer, 1966; Panebianco, 1988; Katz & Mair, 1995). The comparison between both Southern and Eastern Europe, on the one hand, and Western Europe, on the other, is not only imperative for arriving at any comprehensive understanding of party organizations in new democracies, but should enable us to appreciate precisely what is different about party organization and development in new democracies, and should, at the same time, reveal what has also been distinctive about the trajectories in Western Europe itself. Let us now look at the main findings.

On the Relevance of Members, Professionals and Party Leaderships

Our expectations regarding the role of members, professionals and party leaderships have been challenged in one respect at least by the fact that, even in new democracies, the model of the party as a membership organization seems to continue to matter. This can be seen from the particular structure that has generally been adopted for the extra-parliamentary organization, in that, even in new democracies, parties tend to be based on formal membership registration and have adopted an organizational structure in which the local branch is the basic organizational unit and the thresholds for entry are normally quite low. In this sense, these parties have modelled their organization according to the ‘Socialist invention’ of relatively open branches which contrasts with the model based on the closed and limited caucus, in which entrance tended to occur only through co-option or formal nomination (Duverger, 1954: 23). The introduction of these basic principles of organization by the early mass party on the eve of

---

1 This paper summarizes the main findings of my PhD research, which involves a comparative analysis of the organizational development of 19 parties in the new democracies of Southern and Eastern Europe (van Biezen, 2001). The research was sponsored by the Foundation for Law and Public Administration (Reob), which is part of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).
democratization in the late 19th century thus had a ‘contagion effect’ clearly extending
beyond an immediate impact on the traditional cadre parties of that era, in that they also
prove to provide the leading examples for parties building their organizations in these
recently established democracies today.

Parties in the new democracies further seem to have taken their cue from their
older West European counterparts in terms of a party structure in which local branches
(and cells) are clearly only part of the whole. While, as Duverger (1954: 23) puts it, the
traditional caucus ‘evokes an autonomous reality, capable of living on its own’, the
separate existence of branches is inconceivable. Most parties in the newly established
democracies furthermore display a high level of vertical articulation, with a strong
connection of the different organizational levels through the representation of lower
strata on the higher echelons. Party organizations are generally built bottom up, having
established congresses or assemblies at all levels of the organization which are usually
composed primarily of delegates elected at the lower echelons and conceived as
representative organs of the membership organization. Executive organs are normally
elected by, and accountable to these assemblies. Ultimately, it is the national party
congress which is formally the highest decision-making authority within the party,
which further underlines the importance formally accorded to the membership
organization and demonstrates the impact of previously existing models of party
organization in the West on the recently established democracies.

In this regard, it should also be noted that for most parties the membership
organization is the exclusive basis on which the entire extra-parliamentary organization
is structured. That is, its size is decisive for the share of representation of the lower
structures to the party congress, or to other national organs, as well as the number of
representatives to organs on the higher strata more generally. Only a few parties – such
as the Hungarian FIDESZ, Izquierda Unida and the Partido Popular in Spain or the
Portuguese CDS-PP – are organized partially on the basis of their levels of electoral
support. Only these four parties thus clearly accord a lower relevance to the
membership organization and, in this sense, reflect an organizational structure which
shows a stronger orientation towards the party’s electors rather than its members.

It should also be underlined that for many parties the existence of a membership
organization continues to be valued positively, and that members therefore continue to
be seen to matter, as might be illustrated by the membership recruitment campaigns
carried out by the Spanish and Portuguese Socialist Parties – the PSOE and the PS – for
example. Even in new democracies, therefore, electoral legitimacy derived from the mandate of the voters cannot supplant the perceived legitimacy derived from a large membership. These parties thus still cling to the predominant Western model of the party as a membership organization and thus, despite their relatively recent arrival on the stage, and despite expectations, they do not differ so markedly from their older counterparts in the established democracies.

Having said that, however, various examples at the same time attest to the increasing relevance of direct member participation in the election of party organs and officials, and thus to a changing role of the party members in respect to the traditional membership organization. The changing role of the organized membership may also be seen from the marked and quite consistent pattern by which the frequency of party congresses tends to be reduced over time. Parties in new democracies thus tend to limit the opportunities for involvement and participation of the organized membership, and they do so even more convincingly than their counterparts in the established western democracies (cf. Krouwel, 1999: 110). These parties may therefore echo contemporary reforms in many of the long-established West European parties, by which the organized membership tends to become less relevant (see Mair, 1994).

In addition, it might be argued that many of the organizational changes point towards the marginalization of the membership per se, and a loss of intra-party democracy more generally. From this perspective, the consistent cutback in the frequency of party congresses can be seen as just one example of the mechanisms by which the membership increasingly loses its relevance and party organizations in new democracies tend to be progressively dominated by their national leaderships. The overall weakness of the structural linkage between parties and society in a sense has paved the way for a more influential role of the party elites. Certainly as far as the provisions in the party rules are concerned, but also in political practice, it is often the national executives which emerge as the organ ultimately controlling the functioning of the party apparatus, financial decision making, as well as the selection of candidates for public office. Although the lower strata of the organization may have been conceded some say in the selection process of public office holders, for example, the national executives usually retains the right to final approval or veto. Even in parties where the membership participates directly in the selection of the party leader, as in the case of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), for example, the strong role of the party leadership in the selection of candidates remains evident and the actual extent to which the primaries
have increased the influence of the membership remains questionable (Boix, 1998; Hopkin, 2001).

The high degree of centralization around the party leadership is even more strongly suggested by the prominent position of the party leader within the organization, who, not only in political practice but also by statute, enjoys a privileged position. Notwithstanding the preservation of a formally collegial form of leadership by some of the older parties, many parties show a marked inclination towards personalized leadership. In many parties, the composition of the daily executive, the control over the party apparatus, the employment of party personnel, the financial management of the party or the selection of candidates for public office may largely hinge upon the statutory authorities of the party leader. All this is perhaps best illustrated by the radical transformations of the former youth movement FIDESZ in Hungary, from a collegial to a personal leadership with extensive prerogatives and from a grass-roots movement to an ‘extremely oligarchic’ party structure (Machos, 1999), in a shift towards what seems to represent the predominant leadership style and type of party organization in new democracies.

Finally, it should be emphasized that party members are clearly less relevant than paid professionals for internal party activity. Here too, parties in new democracies seem to mirror the tendencies observed for West European parties, where the diminished importance of voluntary labour is clearly demonstrated by the substantial increase during the post-war period in the number of paid professionals at the party central office (see Krouwel, 1999). In fact, in new democracies, the importance of professionals seems to have assumed an even greater importance than in contemporary Western Europe, although, it appears to be the post-communist democracies that are primarily responsible for these marked levels of professionalization, rather than the new democracies per se.² In this sense, therefore, the post-communist countries provide the sharpest contrast with both their Southern European counterparts and the long-established liberal democracies in Western Europe.

The East-Central European parties also tend to evolve to a larger extent around party officials as opposed to party members, as is attested by the much higher

² Taken together, the level of professionalization in the new democracies – with an average of 12.9 employees for every 10,000 party members – is more than twice as high as in the contemporary western democracies, where a level of 6.3 was recorded for the second half of the 1980s (Krouwel, 1999: 91). The East European parties have employed on average 16.7 paid professionals at the central office for every 10,000 members, against 4.3 paid professionals for Southern Europe.
proportion of *ex officio* representation on their party organs than in the Southern European parties. While the average share of *ex officio* representatives to the national party congress in the Southern European countries amounts to some 15 per cent, for instance, on average they make up almost one quarter in East-Central Europe. More generally, the observation that the existence of a membership organization continues to be valued positively seems much less relevant in the post-communist context. For many of the parties in Hungary and the Czech Republic a favourable attitude towards members is largely absent, despite their formal organizational model as a membership organization. That party members in the post-communist countries generally do not seem to carry any additional advantage to the party, is not only reflected in the somewhat acquiescent attitude towards the low membership levels and the absence of membership recruitment campaigns, but also, and more strikingly, in the relatively widespread practice of fielding independent candidates for public office under the party label. By expanding their reach outside the channels of the party organization in performing their recruitment function, these parties thus reveal a generally poor sense of party, as well as a primary concern for electoral performance, by which a model of party as a membership organization is relegated as an old-fashioned phenomenon. These parties thus provide a marked contrast with the continuing interest in many of the West European parties in maintaining a membership organization (see Scarrow, 1996; Seyd & Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley, Seyd & Richardson, 1994). Hence, particularly in the post-communist democracies, the distinction between members and non-members has become almost decisively blurred and the notion of party membership clearly has lost practically all of its relevance. From that perspective, the preservation of the party as a membership organization becomes in fact a paper structure devoid of any substance.

**Parties and Society: a Tenuous Relationship**

Given this general attitude towards membership, it is therefore perhaps not surprising that membership levels are generally low, and that they tend to be even lower in East-Central Europe than in Southern Europe. In terms of the levels of party membership, the present analysis has revealed that parties in new democracies are indeed characterized by relatively weak partisan linkages with society. Taken as a percentage of the electorate, party membership today in the four countries analyzed here averages just 3.2 per cent, with Portugal recording the highest percentage (3.99) and Hungary the lowest
Parties in newly established democracies, therefore, clearly do not engage citizens the way their counterparts in the longer established democracies once did (cf. Katz, Mair, et al. 1992). A diachronic analysis of the membership levels furthermore reveals that the membership organizations are unlikely to expand substantially beyond their presently limited size. Of the four countries analysed here, Spain is in fact the only country where party membership in relation to the electorate has increased significantly over the past twenty years, which can largely be explained by the fact that it departed from an exceptionally low level in the 1980s. Portugal and Hungary have witnessed rather minor growth levels and the Czech Republic has actually recorded a substantial decline. The membership levels for the newly established democracies today are furthermore substantially lower than those recorded for the contemporary West European parties, where the mean M/E ratio – excluding Austria – is 4.7 per cent (Mair & van Biezen, 2001). This suggests that, whichever factors are responsible for the more or less general decline in party membership and the erosion of the party organization on the ground in the context of the longer established democracies, they appear to work with an even greater effect on parties in newly democratising polities.

To be sure, old parties generally have a larger membership organization than their newer established counterparts. This is most notably true for the Czech Communist Party (KSČM) and the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), but also for the Czech Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL), for example. However, despite their currently relatively high membership levels, these older parties have seen their organization on the ground sometimes rapidly whither away in what appears to be quite a consistent trend. For the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), this steady and continuous decline in membership levels started already shortly after the transition, with the party reaching its membership peak in early 1978. The relatively large membership organizations of some of these older parties may therefore reflect a certain degree organizational inertia, but the erosion of their membership organization suggests that many of them are gradually losing their hold on society. In the long run, therefore, this type of partisan linkage with society will tend to lose much of its relevance.

The decline recorded for the Czech Republic can be attributed to the massive and quite predictable decline in the membership of the former ruling Communist Party (KSČ, now KSČM) and, although to a lesser extent, to that of the Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL), a former satellite party. Excluding these old parties, membership levels in the Czech Republic would reveal a minor increase between 1993 and 1998, although this growth should in fact be attributed solely to the Social Democratic Party (ČSSD).
However, our initial expectations seem to be challenged by the fact that it is not necessarily the newly created parties that have the smallest membership organizations. In fact, a number of newly created parties which have established relatively large, or at least medium sized membership organizations. A noticeable example in this regard is the Spanish Partido Popular. While its membership organization did not receive any significant impulse until mid 1982, by the late 1990s the party ranked second after the Czech Communist Party. On the other hand, a newly established party such as the Partido Popular also shows that the membership organization, while perhaps comparably large on paper, may be of little relevance in the party organization as a whole. The obligations of the members of the Partido Popular are only minimal and the party does not demand any substantial participatory duties from its membership. More generally, it is worth recalling that it is only in newly established parties as the Spanish Partido Popular or the Czech ODS and ODA that the obligations of party members are minimal and do not exceed the payment of the membership fees or vague requirements such as the acceptance of the party rules programme and statutes. Older parties such as the communist parties in Portugal and the Czech Republic (PCP and KSCM), by contrast, clearly reveal their organizational legacy by standing out for the high number of obligations and by demanding the strongest commitment from their members. And although the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) and Socialist Party (PSOE) or the Czech Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) started out as parties imposing considerable duties on their members and demanding a quite active level of participation, all three are they now gradually abandoning this organizational inheritance. This could be interpreted as an adaptation of the party organization in which any substantial engagement of the membership in internal party activities is no longer desirable and in which an active party membership is seen to matter less.

Even here, however, the picture is not unequivocal, since many of the newly established parties appear to have imposed sometimes considerable obligations on their members. These requirements include the duty of active membership participation and the recruitment of new members to the party, or the prescription of a particularly active role to the local branch, for example. The fact that many parties have introduced at least some of these requirements suggests that parties in a newly established democracy have introduced more “inclusive” organizations than anticipated, and also that they might be slightly more approving of an active membership than expected.
These unexpected findings notwithstanding however, the formal organizational linkages between parties and society are generally weakly developed. This can also be seen from the low extensiveness of party organizations, i.e. their limited geographical coverage, which, seems to be especially relevant for the East-Central European context rather than for the new democracies tout court. Parties in post-communist Hungary and the Czech Republic, and particularly the newly created ones, have established such a limited number of local branches that, on average, the reach of party organizations does not exceed 25 per cent of the country’s territory.\(^4\) One of the important consequences of the weak presence of party organizations on the ground is the low profile of parties in local politics, which tends to be dominated by candidates without party affiliation. In addition, the low territorial implantation of party organization in post-communist countries leaves parties in these polities remote from large sectors of society, and, consequently, renders partisan linkages more generally of little relevance as a channel to structure the relationship between parties and society.

Hence, with the levels of party affiliation relatively low, and, especially in post-communist polities, the territorial presence of party organization relatively limited, party membership appears to be an exceptional rather than a common political practice. It thus appears that tendencies towards a declining importance of the partisan linkage found in the established Western European democracies, where ‘parties are weakening as elite-mass linkages’ (Andeweg, 1996: 158), are also visible, and even more forcefully so, in the context of the newly established democracies. This is also true when we broaden the conceptualization of linkage beyond the merely formal organizational relationship with society.\(^5\) As is demonstrated by evidence suggesting low or negative party-identification, low trust in political parties and politicians, high levels of abstention and electoral volatility, or the heterogeneity of the parties’ electoral constituencies,\(^6\) the linkages between parties and citizens also tend to be weak in psychological, ideological or sociological terms (see e.g. Linz & Montero, 1999; Rose

---

\(^4\) This figure excludes the Czech KSČM and KDU-ČSL, which have preserved a notable organizational heritage in the form of a relatively sizeable organization on the ground.

\(^5\) V.O. Key, for example, famously defined linkages as ‘the interconnection between mass opinion and public decision’ (Key, quoted in Lawson, 1988: 14).

\(^6\) Although Chhibber and Torcal (1997) have argued that composition of the electorate of the Spanish PSOE has become less socially heterogeneous with time, because of an increased strategic appeal to the party’s traditional clientele.
& Mishler, 1998; Schmitt & Holmberg, 1995; Tóka, 1998; Wyman et al. 1995). It thus appears to be the electoral rather than partisan linkages that almost exclusively shape the relationship between parties and society, while the role of parties in providing the linkage between society and the state might be increasingly irrelevant (cf. Katz, 1990).

In addition to the weakness of the partisan linkage per se, it is noteworthy to emphasize that the nature of the relationship between parties and society tends to be shaped through direct rather than indirect linkages. Although our initial expectations have been challenged by the relatively large number of parties that have created separate youth – and sometimes also women’s – associations, and thus have adopted a partially indirect structure of organization, this mode of organization is not extended to the inclusion of other organized interest associations within the ranks of the party organization. The large majority of parties report no formal linkages with trade unions, for example, or with organized interest associations more generally. In fact, the only party to ever possess an institutionalized relationship with a fraternal trade union was the Spanish PSOE, which maintained such a linkage until 1990 in the form of an obligation on the part of party members to affiliate to the Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT).

Despite the absence of formal linkages, however, close relationships do actually exist in political practice. The strongest linkage can be found between the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses (CGTP), where it consists of a virtual complete entanglement of the party and union cells on the shopfloor, interlocking directorates at the level of party and union elites, as well as a strong emphasis on behalf of the party to strengthen the union and to promote the organic cohesion of the labour movement. The orientation of both party and union is furthermore exclusive, in that they reject any division in the labour movement and generally refuse cooperation with other, non-communist, organizations. The Hungarian Christian Democrats (KDNP) resemble the PCP with their primarily exclusive focus on linkages with like-minded, in this case Catholic, organizations and therefore also provides an example of a party organization with a deep subcultural implantation (see Enyedi, 1996).

The PCP and KDNP are exceptions to a general organizational pattern, however, where despite the sometimes close relationships with organized interest associations, such an exclusive approach to organized interests is normally absent, or clearly diminishing. The Spanish Communists and Socialists (PCE and PSOE), for example, both
started out in the post-authoritarian era with an organizational model derived from their historical origins as early twentieth century labour parties, which was characterized by a strong connection with an allied trade union. However, both parties have begun to recognize the need to open up the party organization to interest organizations other than the traditionally allied UGT and Comisiones Obreras. With time, therefore, the relationship between parties and trade unions have become much looser and both the PCE and PSOE have gradually disentangled themselves from the historical linkages. In Eastern Europe, the former ruling Communist Parties and their allied trade unions have abandoned their organizational and programmatic commitment to one another more decisively, as is illustrated by the pragmatic relationship between the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and the trade union MSZOSZ, or the distant position that the Czech unions have always taken vis-à-vis political parties, and the Communist Party in particular. That an indirect model of integration is in fact been considered as largely obsolete and inappropriate for parties in contemporary democracies can also be seen quite clearly from the stance of the Portuguese Socialist Party in defence of a direct linkage between party and society.

All of these parties thus show that the actual autonomous relation between parties and organized movements is not necessarily the result of a weak development of organizations in civil society, as Kopecký and Barnfield (1999) have argued in the context of post-communism, but is at least partially induced by the reluctance of parties to adopt the particular indirect model of organization. The context of contemporary democratizing regimes, therefore, in which parties are generally not born out of conflicting societal interests, seems to leave few incentives for them to develop close and formalized linkages with organized interest movements (cf. Waller, Coppieters & Deschouwer, 1994). In fact, many of the old parties which were historically linked to organized interests, now seem to be unravelling along a similar path to that taken by their counterparts in the contemporary West European democracies.

Encouraging Étatisation through Public Funding

Lewis (1996: 13) has argued for parties in the post-communist context that ‘the state remains a major focus of attention and a central point of orientation’, an observation which seems to hold true more generally for parties in newly established democracies. Certainly as far as the availability of public subsidies is concerned, the state can be seen to have a critical impact on party organization in new democracies, in that state funding
of parties it has decisively strengthened party-state relations and, at the same time, has reinforced the organizational styles already encouraged by the particular context of a newly democratizing polity in which parties first developed. First, the early introduction of state subventions secured a strong financial between parties and state from the outset (see Gillespie, 1998; Lewis, 1998). In fact, financial dependence on public subventions is such that the state is – at least formally – the single most important financier of party activity, on average contributing some 65 per cent of the parties’ total income. Financially, parties in new democracies seem even more firmly entrenched in the state than parties the long-established democracies, where the average share of public funds to the total income of Western European parties in the late 1980s was only some 35 per cent (Krouwel, 1999: 82). In terms of their strong linkage with the state, therefore, most parties in the newly established democracies of Southern and East-Central Europe clearly reflect the tendency observed by Katz and Mair (1995), by which state subventions become a principal resource for modern parties in a contemporary democracy and by which parties increasingly become part of the state apparatus rather than the tools of civil society (see also Katz, 1996).

While the introduction of public funding in Western Europe contributed significantly to the parties’ shifting orientation from society towards the state, in the new democracies the tie to the state came immediately in the wake of democratization. In addition, the parties’ early financial dependence on the state also appears to have removed one key incentive to establish a more structural financial linkage with society. Notwithstanding the continuing importance of the membership organization for some of the older parties such as the Czech and Portuguese Communists, the membership organization has generally lost virtually all relevance in financial terms. In the new democracies, the share of membership fees to the parties’ total income on average amounts to just some 7 per cent on average. Here too, these parties present unequivocal evidence of the pace by which tendencies observed for the long-established democracies tend to be reinforced in the context of a new democracy.7

Public funding furthermore tends to further encourage the parties’ electoral orientation, by tilting the balance increasingly in favour of subventions for electoral as opposed to routine organizational activities. This will of course also have removed a

7 Despite a distinctive decline from the beginning of the 1950s onwards, by the late 1980s still almost 30 per cent of the income of West European parties originated from the membership fees (Krouwel, 1999: 76).
further incentive for the development of the extra-parliamentary organization. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, it underlines the higher priority that the parties deciding on such measures accord to electoral rather than organization activities. In this sense, therefore, it reflects a notion of party by which a direct and temporary linkage with the electorate prevails in importance over a more structural and permanent relationship with the party rank-and-file.

Finally, the extensive availability of public funds has not only created strong party–state linkages, but also may have further centralized the locus of power within the party (cf. Nassmacher, 1989: 250-51). More specifically, the increasing dependence on the state as a single financier coupled with the centralized method of subsidy allocation may have resulted in a corresponding increasing of the concentration of power within the party (cf. Panebianco, 1988: 35). In terms of the internal organizational dynamics, therefore, it seems that the extreme financial dependence on the state may have further encouraged the oligarchization of parties and, to rephrase Michels, has ‘enshackled the organization as with iron chains’ (Michels, 1992/1911: 116-7). Parties in new democracies, therefore, are primarily elitist organizations, although ones in which the locus of power, quite unexpectedly, is to be found within the extra-parliamentary executive.

The Predominance of the Extra-Parliamentary Executive

It is this last observation which is perhaps the most intriguing. For although many of the arguments cited above may lend support to our initial expectations, parties in new democracies seem to differ from what was anticipated, and from their West European counterparts, in one important respect: in terms of the balance of power between the extra-parliamentary party and the party in public office, there is no unequivocal support for the anticipated predominance of the party in public office within the party organization. In fact, it is only in the high level of personnel overlap between the party executives and the party in public office that we see a strong confirmation of a trend towards the predominance of the party in public office in newly emerging democracies. The overall picture is of party executives being strongly invaded by, or in some cases entirely composed of, public office holders. What is surprising, and thus also more interesting, however, is the evidence of the remarkably powerful status of the extra-parliamentary party and the particularly strong position of the party executive. Rather than acquiring the status of an independent body, let alone that of the predominant face,
the official rules of these parties indicate that the party in parliament is essentially subordinate to the party executive, and that also in terms of financial and human resources it is the extra-parliamentary party that clearly occupies the most privileged position. In this sense, the new democracies deviate markedly from the organizational characteristics recently observed for many Western European countries, where the party in public office has generally been the main beneficiary of the changing relationship between the different faces of the party organization (see Katz & Mair, 1993). Apparently, for parties in these new democracies, Duverger’s classic dictum of either internal or external creation seems of little relevance in terms of the overall power balance between the extra-parliamentary party and the party in public office. Nor has their birth in an environment of generous public funding and widely available mass media tipped the scales in favour of the party in public office.

Given the apparently limited utility of established models of party formation and organizational change for parties in newly established democratic polities, it seems therefore that alternative explanatory factors have to be taken into consideration to account for the particular balance of power between these two faces of party organization. Perhaps it is the potential tensions between the party executive and the parliamentary party that should lie at the core of any explanation of the tendency to strengthen the position of the party executive at the expense of the party in public office (see van Biezen, 2000). Especially parties in new democracies are vulnerable to these intra-party conflicts, as the relative lack of party institutionalization and the weakness of existing loyalties towards generate high levels of intra-party instability. This is in fact typical for newly emerging parties in a newly democratized polity, whereas the number of splits and mergers in parties in the established liberal democracies has generally proved quite limited (see Mair, 1990). Parties in newly democratizing polities may therefore consider it particularly urgent to build mechanisms that can maintain the unity of the party and thus discipline the party in public office. From this perspective, the incorporation of large numbers of MPs into the party executive and the simultaneously strong position of the party executive in the new democracies, can perhaps be interpreted as a disciplinary device intended to increase the cohesion of the party in public office. In other words, by ensuring the supremacy of the rules and directives of the party over the autonomy of the fraction and the MPs’ constitutionally enshrined free

---

8 For a similar argument in the context of the more established Belgian parties, see Deschouwer, 1994: 94.
mandate, parties may intend to counteract the potential lack of parliamentary unity and to establish a degree of cohesion that otherwise could not be easily achieved in a context of weakly developed party loyalties.

This cohesion-seeking strategy could provide a plausible alternative hypothesis that accounts for the particularly strong position of the extra-parliamentary party in these new democracies. Moreover, from this perspective, it is easy to understand why in virtually all parties the process of selection of candidates for public office is highly centralized and concentrated – either formally or informally – around the party leadership. As Gallagher points out, parliamentary indiscipline is likely to occur when neither the local party organizations nor the MPs selected for the party have developed a strong sense of built-in partisanship (Gallagher, 1988: 270). In this sense, ‘[i]t is a very important component in recruiting members to the legislature that there be some preexisting loyalty to the party itself’, as Bowler, Farrell and Katz (1999: 7) underline. In the context of a newly established democracy, therefore, it may have been the general lack of such a strong sense of party attachment that has induced parties to seek for alternative mechanisms that might reduce possible dissenting behaviour among their public office holders. Controlling the recruitment process of future public office holders from above may therefore be one of the means by which parties in newly developing democracies compensate for the absence of reservoirs of party loyalty and try to ensure party cohesion through ‘enforced discipline’ (cf. Sartori, 1994: 191).

Although public office holders thus clearly occupy a central position in parties in newly established democracies, our expectation that the party in public office will increasingly emerge as the predominant face of the party organization cannot be sustained. If anything, it is the extra-parliamentary party executive that emerges as the institutional actor. This also suggests that the relation between the party in public office and the extra-parliamentary party is actually more complex than is generally assumed. Certainly as far as the new democracies considered here are concerned, party organizations appear to have become increasingly controlled from a small centre of power located at the interstices of the extra-parliamentary party and the party in public office.⁹

---

⁹ Heidar and Koole (2000), in this context, speak of ‘integrated leadership’.
Conclusion
It thus seems that, except for the balance of power between the extra-parliamentary organization and the party in public office, parties in the new democracies have adopted an organizational style which largely resembles that of their contemporary counterparts in the older democracies. In fact, in many respects, these parties seem to provide a model by which the organizational styles to which the parties in the West have been developing can be seen to prevail in an accentuated form. In other words, many of the organizational characteristics which seem to predominate in parties in the long-established West European democracies today, are even more forcefully present in the newly established democracies. This is true for the weak partisan and strong electoral linkages, as well as the reduced relevance of party members, the predominance of professionals and party leaderships or the parties’ assimilation with the state (cf. von Beyme, 1996; Katz & Mair, 1995).

This seems to suggest that parties in the new democracies have missed out the stage of the classic mass party (cf. Kopecký, 1995) and have been quick to catch up with their counterparts in the West, and thus that their party organizations should be understood as having made an ‘evolutionary leap’ (cf. Smith, 1993). We do not seem to witness entirely new types of party, at least not to the extent that they are phenomena that should be perceived as being something completely different from previously existing types (cf. Sartori, 1984: 28-34), and there is little evidence of organizational innovation. Any existing differences between types of party organization in old and new democracies, therefore, can be best understood as differences in degree rather than in kind.

However, at the same time, it should be emphasized that the path of party formation in new democracies is best understood as a process *sui generis*. That is, despite the many resemblances between parties in old and new democracies today, it should be underlined that they have arrived at this stage by setting off from two completely different points of departure. At the risk of oversimplification, the process for the old democracies might be summarized as ‘a movement from society towards the state’. Parties in new democracies, by contrast, started out as ‘parties in the state’ which subsequently have expanded their organizations beyond the confines of state institutions and reached out, although often only minimally, towards society (cf. Malová, 1994).

Underlining the distinction between these two patterns may contribute to a better understanding of processes of party formation and organizational development.
more generally. It certainly would help to avoid the teleological connotation which is inevitably inherent when interpreting party organizational development in new democracies in terms of leaps towards the models established by the older democracies in the West. Although parties in old and new democracies may be seen to converge and together can be seen to represent a mode of party organization which is clearly different from early post-democratizing Western Europe, it might be the parties in the West European polities that are developing towards the standard currently set by the new democracies, rather than the other way around (cf. Padgett, 1996). In this sense, therefore, this perspective not only reveals what is different about party organizational development in new democracies, but also highlights what has been distinctive about the trajectories in Western Europe itself. That is, it underlines the uniqueness of the emergence of parties as strong movements of society, as opposed to agents of the state, a path which is unlikely to be repeated in a different institutional context of party formation and a different period. In fact, and beyond the context of the four new democracies elucidated in this study, in many of the other European polities that constitute part of the ‘third wave’, parties can be also seen to originate in state institutions, and can be interpreted as attempts to form parties of the state rather than society (see Oversloot & Verheul, 2000). The absence of a successful challenge of alternative types of party is only likely to enhance the continued prolongation of parties as statist institutions.

If, as Di Palma (1977: 222) asserts, ‘parties are what shapes and sets the tone of political society’ and ‘are by and large what political society is all about’, it seems evident that in newly established democracies, and to a progressively large extent also in the older ones, political society is more about the state than it is about society. If society in these new democracies continues to lack a capacity to shape the contours of political society, and if citizens continue to be effectively disengaged from political parties, these new democratic polities should in fact be understood in procedural and competitive elitist terms, by which political society is rendered short of the very substance on which it is to prosper.
References


