

VI. SYSTEM THEORY, PARTY SYSTEMS, AND THE VARIOUS CRISES OF DEMOCRACY

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SUMMARY: I. *Introduction*. II. *Defining a Party System*. III. *Party-system Change and Party-system Institutionalization*. IV. *Crisis Theories and Party-system Change*. V. *Conclusion*. VI. *Bibliography*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Most of the theoretical and empirical literature on party systems and party system institutionalization is linked to questions of democratic stability or democratization. The institutionalization and stability of the party system are seen as core elements of a country's way from authoritarian rule towards a stable democracy.¹ The main questions raised by scholars in this field are therefore: How do we create stable party systems? What are the formal and informal preconditions for institutionalizing a party system? What kinds of electoral systems and party structures are most useful for this?² It is no wonder that the focus is on this perspective and these kinds of questions, given the large amount of countries that have moved from authoritarian regime towards a democratic one during the last 70 years, the last transition period being famously labeled the "third wave of democracy".³

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¹ Gunther, Richard and Diamond, Larry, "Types and Functions of Parties", in Gunther, Richard and Diamond, Larry (eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003; Morlino, Leonardo, *Democracy between Consolidation and Crisis*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.

² Mainwaring, Scott and Scully, Timothy R., *Building democratic institutions: Party systems in Latin America*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995.

³ Huntington, Samuel P., *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oklahoma-London, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.

However, we can observe some trends during the last decades within the group of “established democracies” that have been interpreted as signs of disaffection with the democratic system. Quite interestingly, these symptoms can be observed basically within the realm of parties and party systems, but the corresponding theories are not or not systematically linked to party-system theories. The ungovernability thesis, neo-marxist theories about late capitalism and, most recently, the post-democracy thesis and its relatives are dealing either with the capitalist-democratic complex or with the democratic system in general. In the respective high-times of these crisis theories, relevant changes happened to the party systems: New parties emerged, new coalitions formed that formerly would not have been possible, and parties massively changed their programmatic positions. Additionally, the vote share of established parties decreased, while volatility and the share of non-voters increased in many countries.

In this chapter, it will be argued that either some of these changes are not captured by the criteria used by the standard party-system concepts or classical party-system theories might deliver wrong interpretations of these changes, especially concerning normative judgments about stability and change. The reason for this is that the classical party-system concepts have themselves been developed in the context of the respective challenges of these times. As a consequence, no generally accepted party-system concept does exist.

The following article will firstly develop a party-system concept that is not linked to a specific environment or time. Based on system theory, we will lay out the main functions and subsystems of a party system in the next section. The third section will then address the issues of party system change and party system de-institutionalization theoretically. The fourth section will confront the concept with some theories on the crisis of democracy, locating the major diagnoses within the party system and testing/illustrating them with empirical data. The fifth and final section will summarize the outcomes of our considerations.

II. DEFINING A PARTY SYSTEM

In contrast to (or because of) the huge amount of literature about party systems, there exists no clear definition of the subject itself. After more than 40 years of research on parties and party systems, Lane and Ersson stated that “at the present stage of knowledge concerning political parties the search for a definition stating the necessary and sufficient properties is premature.

The best strategy may be to derive a tentative list of semantically relevant properties”.⁴ Of course, the non-existence of an uncontested definition of party systems does not mean the non-existence of any definition of party systems.

Maurice Duverger was one of the first scholars who dealt with the term “party system”. Dividing political systems solely by the number of parties, Duverger’s definition of a party system is rather unspecific and touches upon two dimensions: *a)* internal structures of the individual parties and *b)* relational properties of the parties vis-à-vis each other, leading to an investigation of “...numbers, respective sizes, alliances, geographical localization, political distribution, and so on”.⁵ Although criteria like the respective sizes, for example, are indeed relational properties, they describe basically properties of the parties and not properties of the relations between parties.⁶

In contrast to this “infinite enumeration of properties”,⁷ other definitions have shifted the focus from the properties of the constituting parts of a party system (i.e. parties) to relationships or interactions between parties. Examples for this are the definitions of Eckstein⁸ and Sartori.⁹ In a similar vein, Peter Mair¹⁰ argued in favor of these more ‘systemic’ definitions by stating that a party system is more than just the sum of its parts. Referring to Sartori,¹¹ Mair stressed the *interactions* between parties as the main features of party systems. Pennings and Lane¹² also defined a party system “as structures of party competition and cooperation”. Scott Mainwaring men-

⁴ Lane, Jan-Erik and Ersson, Svante O., *Politics and Society in Western Europe*, London, Sage, 1994, p. 176.

⁵ Duverger, Maurice, *Political parties. Their organization and activity in the modern state*, London, Methuen, 1954, p. 203.

⁶ Jean Blondel gave another example of an implicit definition that takes into account only the properties of parties: “...the analysis of party systems would require a consideration of the number of parties, of their strength, of their place on the ideological spectrum, of the nature of their support, and of their organization and type of leadership”. Blondel, Jean, “Party Systems and Patterns of Government in Western Democracies”, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 1(2), 1968, p. 183.

⁷ Lane, Jan-Erik and Ersson, Svante O., *Politics and Society...*, *cit.*, p. 176

⁸ Eckstein, H., “Party Systems”, in Sills, D. L. (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, New York, Macmillan and Free Press, 1968, vol. 11.

⁹ Sartori, Giovanni, *Parties and Party Systems. A framework for analysis*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976.

¹⁰ Mair, Peter, *Party System Change. Approaches and Interpretations*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 6.

¹¹ Sartori, Giovanni, *Parties and Party...*, *cit.*, pp. 43 and 44.

¹² Penning, Paul and Lane, Erik (eds.), *Comparing Party System Change*, New York, Routledge, 1998, p. 5.

tioned both aspects, but with a stronger emphasis on the components than on the systemic interactions. According to him, “a system is a combination of interrelated parts that interact in a patterned way to form a complex whole. A party system, then, is the set of parties that interact in patterned ways to form a whole. The notion of patterned interactions suggests that important rules in how parties compete are widely observed even if some rules are contested and undergo change. The idea of a system also implies continuity in the components that form the system and a minimum of stability in patterns of party competition. If there is a sharp discontinuity in the component parts, a different system has supplanted the previous one”.¹³

Agreeing with the (almost tautological) statement that a system is more than simply the sum of its parts, it should be also clear that focusing on interparty relations is not sufficient. Nevertheless, the “semantically driven” concepts and definitions are no proper ground for investigations—although one would agree with most of them intuitively. Quite interestingly, besides Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan in their seminal introductory chapter of “Party Systems and Voter Alignment: Cross-National Perspectives”,¹⁴ none of the above-mentioned scholars referred to scholars of system theory like Talcott Parsons or Niklas Luhmann.¹⁵ The two main foci of system theory are the relationship between a system and its environment as well as the communication within the system. According to Parsons’ AGIL-paradigm,¹⁶ systems must fulfill four functions: adaption and goal-attainment referring to system-environment relations as well as integration and latency (or pattern maintenance) referring to aspects of internal communication within the system. Remarkably enough, Parsons¹⁷ locates

¹³ Mainwaring, Scott, *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization. The Case of Brazil*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 24.

¹⁴ Lipset, Seymour Martin and Rokkan, Stein, “Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction”, in Lipset, Seymour Martin and Rokkan, Stein (eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignment: Cross-National Perspectives*, New York, Free Press, 1967.

¹⁵ Niklas Luhmann defined the function of the political system as “to provide capacities of collectively binding decisions”. Luhmann, Niklas, *Die Politik der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000, p. 84 (own translation). The following discussion of Parsons’ four main functions can be seen as an elaboration of this overarching function.

¹⁶ Parsons, Talcott, “On the Concept of Value-Commitments”, *Sociological Inquiry* 38(2), 1968; *id.*, *The Social System*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1970; *id.*, *The System of Modern Societies*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1971.

¹⁷ Parsons, Talcott, “An Outline of the Social System”, in Parsons, Talcott *et al.* (eds.), *Theories of Society. Foundations of Modern Sociological Theory*, New York, The Free Press, 1965, p. 38.

the problem of institutionalization only within the two internal functions of latency and integration.¹⁸

FIGURE I
 SYSTEM-THEORETICAL VIEW ON PARTY SYSTEMS

	<i>Subsystem</i>	<i>Functional imperative</i>	<i>Locus of challenge</i>	<i>Means</i>	<i>Determining factors</i>	<i>Institutional framework</i>
A	Adaption	Input and processing of information from the environment.	External	Ideological adaption, consideration of new issues, responsiveness.	Social change, new cleavages.	Barriers to entry for new parties, intra-party procedures.
G	Goal attainment	Capability to define goals and act accordingly.	External	Formation of (coalition) governments, production of majorities for new legislation.	Number of parliamentary parties, ideological distance between parties.	Proportional vs. majoritarian electoral system
I	Integration	Solving of internal problems.	Internal	Legal norms defining parties' roles (i.e. control and/or support of the government), parties behaving according to their roles.	Party discipline/ coalition discipline.	Parliamentarism vs. presidentialism

¹⁸ We will discuss this issue in section three.

	<i>Subsystem</i>	<i>Functional imperative</i>	<i>Locus of challenge</i>	<i>Means</i>	<i>Determining factors</i>	<i>Institutional framework</i>
L	Latency (pattern maintenance)	Continuity of certain values and norms.	Internal	Institutionalization of democratic values, parties deploying enduring programmatic positions, meaningful differences between parties' positions.	Cohesion of parties, organizational and procedural structure of parties.	Dominant type of party (elite party, movement, mass-party, cartel party, catch-all party).

Latency (or pattern maintenance) denotes with regard to party systems basically the existence and continuance of certain values and norms. In general, this describes shared democratic values within the realm of the party system. If major actors do not (or no longer) accept these values, the party system becomes unstable. Bribery and corruption of politicians are typical examples for damaged democratic norms. Other examples are anti-system parties not willing to engage in any compromise or even dialogue with other parties. But also stability in the main dimension(s) of party competition is part of the task to maintain the patterns. The same is true for the recruitment and selection of politicians who are committed to the party's values. Written and unwritten rules about election campaigns, parliamentary practices, or party funding, for example, are further parts of this functional imperative as well as parties' internal structures. In the context of latency, these internal structures refer mostly to questions of intra-party democracy.

Integration, the second function related to internal problems, hints more at the roles of (collective) actors. Control and/or support of the government are typical functions that parliamentary parties have to fulfill.¹⁹ The absence of party discipline can be a major obstacle to fulfilling the respective tasks and, in the end, producing the integrative functions within the party system. Parsons stressed the importance of (in this case: democratic) values in those cases where different subunits (i.e. parties) have different roles, as

¹⁹ Lijphart, Arend, *Patterns of Democracy. Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-six Countries*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1999.

is the case in democratic party systems. The division between government and opposition cannot be overvalued and the imbalance of power between the two roles is enormous. The acceptance of the overarching concept of democracy is therefore indispensable. The main “code” of the party system is government and opposition, the “subcode” is the programmatic or ideological differentiation between left and right. It comes as no surprise that, as already mentioned, Parsons²⁰ located questions of institutionalization in this functional sphere as well as in the latency sphere. We will come back to this issue in more detail below.

The remaining two functions are related to external challenges and covered by most classical concepts of party systems. This is especially true for the goal-attainment function which describes a system’s capability to define goals and act accordingly. The major external goals of party systems are clearly related to their executive and legislative functions. The formation of (coalition) governments and the production of majorities for new legislation are typical functions included in all party-system theories mentioned above. The number of parties in parliament and (especially in case of coalitions) their ideological distance are the most influential factors for governmental stability.²¹

Adaption, finally, refers to the capacity to cope with the environment, “...especially through the input and processing of information”.²² The central input of party systems are clearly voters’ interests. The party system has to deal with new issues, cleavages, or changing positions within the electorate. Several ways can be chosen to deal with these challenges: Existing parties can integrate new issues into their programs, old parties can “renew” their programs by changing positions on certain topics, and, of course, new parties can emerge that reflect so far neglected issues or cleavages. One of the most important adaptive transmission mechanisms is intra-party democracy. If party members are able to influence parties’ programs and positions, the chance of a close linkage between changing demands of the voters and changing programs of the parties is relatively high.

The party system basically holds an intermediary position between two environments: the people and the government. Therefore, party systems have an input dimension, i.e. they should be responsive to and representa-

²⁰ Parsons, Talcott, “An Outline...”, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²¹ Recent research questions the long-held assumption that ideological cohesion supports cabinet duration. Hellström, Johan and Bergman, Torbjörn, *Birds of a feather flock together? Government duration and cabinet ideological diversity in Western Europe*, Reykjavik, ECPR General Conference, 2011.

²² Parsons, Talcott, *The System...*, *cit.*, p. 5.

tive of the people (articulation, mobilization). In Parsons' words, this is the function of external adaption. Secondly, they have an output dimension, i.e. they should deliver competent personnel for parliament and government, produce majorities, and form stable governments.²³ The output dimension refers to the goal-attainment function of the party system.

When we look at the most prominent and influential concept for comparing and classifying party systems, namely, Giovanni Sartori's *Parties and Party Systems: A framework for analysis*,²⁴ it becomes obvious that the input dimension of party systems is systematically lacking. Sartori stressed two aspects of party systems as being particularly important: the number of relevant parties and the degree of ideological polarization between them. With the term "relevant" Sartori included only those parties that might either form part of a governing coalition or at least affect party competition. His measure of ideological polarization focuses on the ideological distance among parties. While Sartori's first dimension is by his own definition linked to the output dimension (relevant with regard to forming a government), the second also relates to this function. He was interested in the ideological position between parties, not in the relationship between voters' and parties' positions. The input dimension is therefore missing in this as well as in most other classical concepts.

Not surprisingly, these four functions of party systems are almost identical with the main functions of political parties: articulation and aggregation of interests, the formulation of aims, the political mobilization (via elections), the recruitment of politicians and the formation of governments.²⁵ As 'democracy' refers by definition to a party system with at least two parties, one party must not articulate all societal interests, mobilize all voters, recruit all politicians, and form all governments. However, the party system as a whole should fulfill these functions. In addition to these classical party functions (where the party system would simply describe the "sum of the

²³ For the concept of input and output legitimacy, see Scharpf, Fritz, *Demokratietheorie zwischen Utopie und Anpassung*, Kronberg im Taunus, Scriptor, 1970; *id.*, "Economic integration, democracy and the welfare state", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 4, num. 1, 1997; *id.*, *Governing in Europe: effective and democratic?*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999. In a similar vein, Croissant and Völkel referred to these two dimensions, labeling them electoral dimension and governmental dimension. Croissant, Aurel and Völkel, Philip, "Party systems types and party system institutionalization: Comparing new democracies in East and Southeast Asia", *Party Politics*, 18(2), 2012, p. 237.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*

²⁵ Beyme, Klaus von, *Political parties in western democracies*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1985.

parts”), the ‘systemic’ functions of latency and integration cover the interactions and interrelations between the parties.

This conceptualization of party systems, inspired by Parsons’ AGIL-paradigm, has some advantages in contrast to the existing definitions and concepts that are semantically driven. Besides the conceptually desirable property of being more ‘systematic’, this concept allows us to deal with the question of party-system change or instability much more straightforward. To make this latter point clear, it is important to note a commonality of most party-system scholars—regardless of their differences in definitions and operationalization: Almost all party system theories aspire stability.

III. PARTY-SYSTEM CHANGE AND PARTY-SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Lipset and Rokkan discovered the frozen nature of party systems in most Western democracies of the 1960’s: “[T]he party systems of the 1960’s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920’s”.²⁶ The literature building upon this insight linked the stability of a democratic regime with the existence of frozen cleavages, “which means low volatility, and that was looked upon as a positive”.²⁷ The same is true for Duverger’s model of bipartism versus multi-partism.²⁸ The more parties there are in a parliament, i.e. the more fractionalized the party system is, the lower the authority of governments and the higher political instability—which is a negative. The notion of fractionalization leads directly to Rein Taagepera who argued as well that a lower effective number of parties led to better functioning party systems.²⁹ Sartori³⁰ qualified this argument as only valid for polarized multi-partism, referring basically to communist and fascist parties. From this perspective, not multi-partism *per se* but only polarized multi-partism produces instability which is defined as negative. This list could be easily extended.³¹ The reason for this common perspective on stability may have its origins in Euro-

²⁶ Lipset, Seymour Martin and Rokkan, Stein, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

²⁷ Lane, Jan-Erik and Ersson, Svante, “Party System Instability in Europe: Persistent Differences in Volatility between West and East?”, *Democratization* 14(1), 2007, p. 94.

²⁸ Duverger, Maurice, *op. cit.*, p. 403.

²⁹ Taagepera, Rein and Shugart, Matthew Soberg, *Seats and votes. The effects and determinants of electoral systems*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989.

³⁰ Sartori, Giovanni, *Parties and Party Systems...*, *cit.*

³¹ Lane, Jan-Erik and Ersson, Svante, “Party System Instability...”, *op. cit.*

pean history with the collapse of the extreme multi-party systems of Weimar Germany and the Second Republic of Spain in the interwar years that both collapsed and were followed by dictatorship and war.³² And, of course, the experiences with the so-called third wave of democratization showed the importance of an institutionalized party system for sustainable democratization. Does that mean we can equate institutionalization with stability?

At least some scholars seem to agree to this line of reading. Huntington³³ wrote: “Institutionalization is the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability”. In contrast to this, Mair³⁴ used the term institutionalization for the creation of a party system, replacing a chaotic system or authoritarian rule. Here, the institutionalization of a party system is closely linked to the institutionalization of democracy. Accordingly, de-institutionalization would occur “when a prevailing structure of competition breaks up or collapses, and is succeeded by an unformed, inchoate set of interactions. In this case, an existing party system loses shape and becomes destructured without any alternative system emerging in its place”.³⁵ Mair used the term ‘party system change’ for the description of variations of party systems when at least a new (and over time relatively stable) party system has developed after the changes took place.

How would we define the concepts of stability/change and de-/institutionalization on the basis of our systemic concept of party systems? In general, there are four functions where party-system change could be observed. When we find different ways of producing latency, integration, adaption (input), or goal-attainment (output), we can speak of party system change—specified by the respective area where the transition occurred (see figure 2). The upcoming of the green parties in many Western European democracies in the 1980s, for example, was an example of party system change with regard to the adaptive function (adaptive change). More recent examples are right-wing populist parties or pirate parties entering parliaments in many countries. The actual coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in the UK is an example for attainment change: For the first time after WWII a coalition government has been formed. The list of

³² Wolinetz, Steven B., “Party Systems and Party System Types”, in Katz, Richard and Crotty, William (eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics*, London, Sage, 2006, p. 52.

³³ Huntington, Samuel P., *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968, p. 12.

³⁴ Mair, Peter, “Party System Change”, in Katz, Richard and Crotty, William (eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics*, London, Sage, 2006, p. 66.

³⁵ *Idem*.

examples could easily be continued for the other two functional areas of adaption and goal attainment (see examples in figure 2).

If we speak of a changing party system, we implicitly make the statement that a party system existed and will still exist after the change will have taken place—although in a different form. The notion of institutionalization and de-institutionalization, however, refers to a situation where an institution has been created (institutionalization) or is in the process of dissolution (de-institutionalization). As mentioned above, Parsons identified the two subsystems of integration and pattern maintenance as subjects of processes of institutionalization. The linkage of pattern-maintenance functions to questions of institutionalization is manifest. Institutionalization is by definition the process of establishing values and norms within an organization, system, or society.³⁶ Because the function of latency is to set the democratic values and the parties' programmatic positions on a continuing basis, this subsystem is dealing by definition with issues of institutionalization.

FIGURE 2
 PARTY SYSTEM CHANGE

	<i>Subsystem</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Change of party system</i>	<i>Type of party system change</i>
A	Adaption	Input and processing of information from the environment.	New manifestos, new parties, new intra-party procedures.	Adaptive change
G	Goal attainment	Capability to define goals and act accordingly.	New types of governments (new coalitions, minority governments).	Attainment change
I	Integration	Solving of internal problems.	Change of legal framework for parties' roles.	Integrative change

³⁶ Berger, Peter L. and Luckmann, Thomas, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York, Anchor Books, 1966.

	<i>Subsystem</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>Change of party system</i>	<i>Type of party system change</i>
L	Latency (pattern maintenance)	Continuity of certain values and norms.	New balance of democratic values (i.e. increasing importance of transparency), fewer/more cleavages.	Pattern change

The same holds true for the party system's function of integration. Written norms and, even more important, the according roles, are basically representations of the institutionalized values of the latency subsystem. Roles played by different actors over time are means to produce the continuity of institutions, in the words of Berger and Luckmann:³⁷ "To say, then, that roles represent institutions is to say that roles make it possible for institutions to exist, ever again, as a real presence in the experience of living individuals". If, for whatever reason, parties and their representatives would no longer play their roles, this would be a direct sign of the de-institutionalization of the system.

The function of goal attainment is pursued in an institutionalized environment: the type of government system, country-specific rules about coalition formation, and so on. Without an institutionalization of this sphere, politics would be impossible. The rules that define the legislative procedures are at the core of political power. An absence of these rules would mean autocracy, tyranny, chaos, or, at least, anarchy. In light of the experiences in many Latin American countries, ruling by decree might be a form of de-institutionalization. The "normal" legislative procedures are there no longer the standard way of goal attainment of the political system. Instead, the extra-constitutional power of presidents in times of crisis is used for everyday politics. Nevertheless, the process of goal attainment is still following certain rules and, therefore, we would not speak of a complete de-institutionalization.

The process of adaption has also institutionalized forms. If an integration of new cleavages and interests is successful, the end product of this will occur in an institutional form, of course. This could be a new party manifesto or a new party, for example. The way to adapt to new issues, however, is at least in part occurring in an institutionalized form: parties' statutes, electoral law, and electoral thresholds are institutions that might hinder or

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 92.

foster adaption. In contrast to the electoral law, which is not part of the party system but of its environment, party statutes clearly belong to the party system. Accordingly, the absence of intra-party democracy would be a de-institutionalization of the adaptive subsystem.

FIGURE 3
 FORMS OF PARTY-SYSTEM DE-INSTITUTIONALIZATION

	<i>Subsystem</i>	<i>Function</i>	<i>De-Institutionalization</i>	<i>Type of party system de-institutionalization</i>
A	Adaption	Input and processing of information from the environment.	Absence of intra-party democracy.	Adaptive de-institutionalization
G	Goal attainment	Capability to define goals and act accordingly.	Ruling by decree.	Attainment de-institutionalization
I	Integration	Solving of internal problems.	Contempt of parliamentary roles, disrespect of party discipline, post-election conflict.	Integrative de-institutionalization
L	Latency (pattern maintenance)	Continuity of certain values and norms.	Erosion of democratic values, corruption, programmatic/ideological disrespect or arbitrariness, manipulated elections.	Pattern de-institutionalization

IV. CRISIS THEORIES AND PARTY-SYSTEM CHANGE

Although this article pursues mainly a theoretical and conceptual task, it is worthwhile to confront the theoretical reasoning with some empiricism. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to do this in an encompassing manner. The following discussion can only illustrate how our concept might provide insights into actual phenomena of party-system change and party-

system de-institutionalization. From the discussion of the defining functions of party systems it has become clear that some of the standard indicators of party systems such as the effective number of parties or electoral volatility do not allow us to judge whether the party system is in trouble or not. A rise in the effective number of parties might be due to the incorporation of a new and important issue (as was the case with the green parties in many European party systems) or to an anti-democratic populist movement that entered parliament as a result of voters' rising dissatisfaction with the existing parties. Similar arguments apply to volatility: Rising volatility can be a sign of loosening voter-party ties due to an ever higher share of disappointed voters. It might also be a sign of more "enlightened" voters that do not cast their votes during their whole lives for only one party because of tradition but instead evaluate the parties' records and programs in every election anew. In other words, looking at the standard indicators of party systems will not help us to identify crucial changes or challenges of today's party systems. In order to identify some of these possibly crucial challenges, we will instead briefly present some of the most prominent crisis-of-democracy theories as well as some observations on so-called "defective democracies", relate them to our concept of party systems, and confront them with some empirical data.

The year 1968 and the decade afterwards was not only an epoch of protests and manifestations in many parts of the world (the German student movement, the general strike in France, the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico, and the Prague spring just to mention a few of them). It was also a period of a rising amount of theories about the crisis of democracy. Interestingly, the diagnosis was not confined to one side of the ideological spectrum. There were (neo-)conservative authors as well as neo-Marxist intellectuals forecasting the near breakdown of democracy.

From the conservative's viewpoint, an already overly large state apparatus in combination with people's excessive ideas about their rights led to parties and politicians promising more and more without ever meeting the demands. Additionally, the values and policy preferences of politicians and bureaucrats were way too liberal in comparison with the normal voter and special interest groups had gained an ever bigger influence, accompanied by a disregard of classical interest aggregation by the parties. This misfit of values and expectations would finally lead to the decay of democracy.³⁸

³⁸ Brittan, Samuel, "The Economic Contradictions of Democracy", *British Journal of Political Science*, 5, 1975; Crozier, Michel J. et al., *The Crisis of Democracy: Report of the Governability of Democracies of the Trilateral Commission*, New York, New York University Press, 1975; Olson, Mancur, *Rise and decline of Nations*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982; Bell, Daniel, *Die kulturellen Widersprüche des Kapitalismus*, Frankfurt am Main, 1991. For an overview, see Birch, Anthony H., "Overload, Ungovernability and Delegation: The Theories and the

Neo-Marxist arguments —although using a different vocabulary— were quite similar. Claus Offe and Jürgen Habermas argued that the Keynesian reconciliation of capital and labor had come to an end. However, because of competition between catch-all-parties, a bureaucratization and de-ideologization of parties and politics had taken place; party-members had become demotivated and abandoned their activities. Consumerism and privatism in combination with depolitization was the new lifestyle. In the moment when the state would no longer be able to deliver a proper crisis management, the democratic political system as a whole would have no longer enough loyalty and support to survive.³⁹

40 years later, the arguments have changed only slightly. Colin Crouch defined the current state of democracy as a system where “elections do still take place, and they still have the power to chase governments out of office, but the communication patterns about politics have changed. Competing teams of PR-experts dominate and control the topics of public debate during election campaigns and thereby turn democratic elections into spectacles. The majority of citizens remain in a passive, muted and apathetic stance, reacting only to signals they are exposed to”.⁴⁰ Experts and opinion researchers have a much bigger influence on strategies and policy content of the parties than ordinary members; charismatic leaders have become much more important than party programs. “Political parties are losing their links with movements of opinion emerging from the mass of the people, leading them to seek extensive funds to generate synthetic links between themselves and that public... A major role is played by parties that are emerging, not from deeply rooted movements of opinion, but from very wealthy individuals”.⁴¹ In a similar vein, Bernard Manin observed an “audience democracy”,⁴² Noam Chomsky a “spectator democracy”,⁴³ and Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair were talking about “cartelized party systems”.⁴⁴

British Case”, *British Journal of Political Science*, 14 (2), 1984; Schäfer, Armin, *Krisentheorien der Demokratie. Unregierbarkeit, Spätkapitalismus und Postdemokratie*, Cologne, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, 2008.

³⁹ Habermas, Jürgen, *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1973 (*Legitimation Crisis*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1975); Offe, Claus, 1972. For an overview, see Birch, Anthony H., *op. cit.*; Schäfer, Armin, 2010.

⁴⁰ Crouch, Colin, *Post-Democracy*, London, Polity Press, 2004, p. 10.

⁴¹ Crouch, Colin, 2011, p. 164.

⁴² Manin, Bernard, *The principles of representative government*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

⁴³ Chomsky, Noam, *Media control: the spectacular achievements of propaganda*, Open Media Pamphlet Series, 1991.

⁴⁴ Katz, Richard S. and Mair, Peter, “Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party”, *Party Politics*, 1, 1995.

In all versions of crisis theory, the loosening links between voters and the party system play a crucial role.⁴⁵ This obviously concerns the relationship between party systems and its environments. More specifically, most of the authors identify the heart of the democratic crisis in the the sub-function of adaption: The processing and aggregation of information is no longer said to be working in a sufficient manner.

If we confront these arguments with empirical data, we do not find support for the hypothesis of a widespread malfunctioning of the adaptive process (see table 1). In most countries roughly about 60 percent of the respondents feel represented by one party. Although there are obviously cases where this function is not working properly —Brazil, Japan, and Switzerland— it would be a clear exaggeration to argue that this is a general phenomenon. Additionally, there is no clear regional pattern. In all four regions, countries with a relatively high degree of representativeness coexist with countries showing a lower degree. The process of adaption seems to be working —though not perfectly—, but another part of adaptive function is definitely under stress. In almost all European countries, party membership figures are rapidly declining⁴⁶ and the remaining members are calling for more intra-party democracy. The rise of the pirate parties in many countries can be interpreted as reaction on this demand.

TABLE 1
SHARE OF PEOPLE WHO FEEL REPRESENTED
BY A POLITICAL PARTY

<i>South America & Mexico</i>	<i>CSES3 (2006-2011)</i>
Brazil	39.2
Mexico	58.2
Uruguay	69.0
<i>Average</i>	55.5

<i>Asia Pacific</i>	<i>CSES3 (2006-2011)</i>
Australia	75.1
New Zealand	79.7
Japan	37.0
<i>Average</i>	64.0

⁴⁵ Of course, the crisis theories can be applied to other parts of the political system as well. However, we will focus solely on those issues that can be related to the party system.

⁴⁶ Van Biezen, Ingrid *et al.*, “Going, going... gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe”, *European Journal of Political Research* 51(1), 2012.

<i>Europe</i>	<i>CSES3 (2006-2011)</i>
Austria	51.2
Denmark	79.8
Finland	71.6
France	68.6
Germany	55.6
Norway	81.6
Poland	51.0
Portugal	53.7
Spain	59.7
Sweden	54.3
Switzerland	46.7
<i>Average</i>	61.2

<i>North America</i>	<i>CSES3 (2006-2011)</i>
Canada	61.9
USA	76.1
<i>Average</i>	69.0

SOURCE: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), Module III (this question was not part of Module I).

A second subsystem that is affected according to the above-mentioned crisis theories is the pattern-maintenance system. If this diagnosis is true, the ideological difference between parties is blurred in many countries. The question is, however, whether parties and representatives have no longer an ideological stance or whether the ideological differences between parties have become smaller but are still existent (and important). If we look at the data from the Party Manifesto Project,⁴⁷ we see that parties still produce programs with observable ideological positions. Furthermore, if we look at the programmatic development of the respective two biggest parties in 31 countries over 475 elections, we can discern only a very minor trend towards ideological convergence (see figure 4; thick line, right axis). Instead, we can observe manifestations of a different *Zeitgeist* in different decades. The 1960s and 1970s were programmatically leftist decades, whereas the 1990s were an era with rather conservative positions of both the biggest left and right parties (upper and lower line, left axis). Despite of these program-

⁴⁷ Volkens, Andrea *et al.*, *The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MAR-POR)*, Berlin, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), 2011.

matic movements, the relative distance between the respective two major competitors has been comparatively stable.

Besides by the data from the Party Manifesto Group, the findings are underpinned by survey data. A clear majority of the respondents thinks that it makes a difference who is in power (see table 2). However, we can identify a downward trend especially in some European countries, but starting at high levels. The numbers are still clearly above 50% with the exception of Sweden.

FIGURE 4
LEFT-RIGHT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN
THE TWO BIGGEST PARTIES, 1940S-2000S



SOURCE: Volkens, Andrea *et al.*, *The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR)*, Berlin, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB), 2011. Countries are: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Great Britain, Northern Ireland, Ireland, United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Israel, Turkey, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Serbia, and Slovakia. The Number of elections per country ranges between 6 and 25.

Whereas the above-mentioned crisis theories are mainly addressing democracies of the Western world, similar diagnoses for democracies in other parts of the world exist. One of the most prominent examples is Guillermo

O'Donnell's concept of *delegative democracy*.⁴⁸ According to O'Donnell, this problematic subtype of democracy can be found in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Asia. The main characteristics of this type of presidential system are movements (*movimientos*) instead of parties that form the political basis of the presidents and the self-presentation of presidents as being above all parties (both political parties and organized interests). The president's ignorance of parties, congress, the judiciary, and interest organizations is one result of this type of (defective) democracy. Ruling by decree (*decretismo*) and corruption are said to be prominent ways to produce legislation in the absence of democratically build coalitions. Along with this style of policy making comes the tendency of "interrupted presidencies", as Arturo Valenzuela calls a phenomenon especially apparent in Latin America.⁴⁹ After an initial honeymoon phase the disappointment of the high hopes regarding the solution of deep-seated problems forces many presidents out of office, in O'Donnell's words: "from omnipotence to impotence".

TABLE 2
 SHARE OF PEOPLE WHO THINK THAT
 IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE WHO IS IN POWER

<i>South America & Mexico</i>	<i>CSES1 (1996-2001)</i>	<i>CSES3 (2006-2011)</i>	<i>Difference (CSES3-CSES1)</i>	<i>Asia Pacific</i>	<i>CSES1 (1996-2001)</i>	<i>CSES3 (2006-2011)</i>	<i>Difference (CSES3-CSES1)</i>
Brazil	.	81	.	Australia	68	67.6	-0.4
Chile	51.1	.	.	New Zealand	73.4	67.6	-5.7
Mexico	70.4	72.4	2	Japan	43.5	49	5.5
Peru	67.9	.	.	<i>Average</i>	61.6	61.4	.
Uruguay	.	66.5	.				
<i>Average</i>	63.1	73.3	.				

⁴⁸ O'Donnell, Guillermo, "Delegative Democracy", *Journal of Democracy* 7 (4), 1994.

⁴⁹ Valenzuela, Arturo, "Latin American Presidencies Interrupted", *Journal of Democracy* 15(4), 2004.

<i>Europe</i>	<i>CSES1 (1996- 2001)</i>	<i>CSES3 (2006- 2011)</i>	<i>Difference (CSES3- CSES1)</i>	<i>North America</i>	<i>CSES1 (1996- 2001)</i>	<i>CSES3 (2006- 2011)</i>	<i>Difference (CSES3- CSES1)</i>
Britain	67.1	.	.	Canada	57.1	.	.
Denmark	69.4	68.7	-0.7	USA	64.5	.	.
Germany	64.9	56.1	-8.8	<i>Average</i>	60.8	.	.
The Netherlands	83.6	62.5	-21.1				
Norway	77.6	62.5	-15.2				
Spain	76.4	69.8	-6.6				
Sweden	76.2	48.5	-27.8				
Switzerland	72.5	.	.				
<i>Average</i>	73.5	61.3	.				

SOURCE: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), Modules I and III.

These diagnoses can also be related to our main functions of party systems. The existence of *movimientos* instead of programmatic parties describes a strong defect of the pattern-maintenance function. If the ideological position of parties in Western Europe is said to be blurred, *movimientos* are by definition less institutionalized organizations with highly informal internal structures. Very often, charismatic leaders are the only *raison d'être* of these organizations. If persons replace programs, the party system's function of producing enduring programmatic offers is made impossible. Although we have no data on this topic, a couple of examples immediately come into mind: Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Bolivia's Evo Morales, and Argentina's Cristina Kirchner all fit into this category of charismatic leaders. However, two qualifications are necessary: First, the tendency to focus more on persons than on parties is an institutional consequence of presidential systems and, therefore, "normal" to some extent. Second, there are examples of charismatic politicians in other regions as well. Russia's Putin

is an example, but even in non-presidential systems in Europe we find this type of politicians: Jörg Haider in Austria, Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, and, of course, Italy's Silvio Berlusconi are well-known examples. The crucial question with this type of leader is whether he or she is respecting the legal and democratic norms. Some of the aforementioned politicians have a rather bad record on this. This disrespect can be manifest in different forms, non-existence of intra-party democracy and corruption may be the most prominent. Ruling by decree is another manifestation of the de-institutionalization of the goal-attainment system. If the function of producing majorities for legislation is no longer working, the party system starts to become redundant. Unfortunately, we have no systematic and comparative information about the levels of ruling by decree and intra-party democracy. Comparative data is also lacking for other forms of de-institutionalized party systems like manipulated elections and post-election conflict.

For this reason, we can only briefly investigate the level of corruption. As we have no direct data on corruption, we have to be content with survey data. Asked how they perceive the level of corruptness of political parties, a majority of people in North and South America as well as in the Asia-Pacific region think that they are corrupt or extremely corrupt (see table 3). Although the average share in Europe is below 50%, we also find countries with higher shares like Germany, Britain, and Spain.

TABLE 3
SHARE OF PEOPLE WHO PERCEIVE POLITICAL
PARTIES AS CORRUPT OR EXTREMELY CORRUPT

<i>Asia Pacific</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2011-2001</i>	<i>North America</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2011-2001</i>
Australia	57.5	63	5.5	Canada	65.8	69	3.2
New Zealand	50.7	52	1.3	USA	77.8	82	4.2
Japan	62.9	82	19.1	<i>Average</i>	71.8	75.5	3.7
<i>Average</i>	57.0	65.7	8.6				

<i>South America & Mexico</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2011-2001</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2011-2001</i>
Argentina	71.1	73	1.9	Britain	54.4	72	17.6
Bolivia	77.4	76	-1.4	Denmark	18.4	24	5.6
Brazil	70.3	74	3.7	Germany	57.3	58	0.7
Chile	66.3	68	1.7	The Netherlands	23.4	29	5.6
Colombia	75.4	76	0.6	Norway	26.3	31	4.7
Ecuador	.	.	.	Spain	80.8	84	3.2
Mexico	81.5	82	0.5	Sweden	.	.	.
Paraguay	.	.	.	Switzerland	29	33	4
Peru	76.5	77	0.5	<i>Average</i>	36.2	47.3	11.1
Uruguay	.	.	.				
Venezuela	62.8	65	2.2				
<i>Average</i>	72.7	73.9	1.2				

<i>Central America</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2011-2001</i>
Costa Rica	.	.	.
El Salvador	88.6	89	0.4
Guatemala	.	.	.
Honduras	.	.	.
Nicaragua	.	.	.
Panama	.	.	.

SOURCE: Transparency International 2001, 2011.

Compared to the other indicators, these numbers are definitely unpleasing. Alarming is not only the high level of distrust but also the almost uniformly/overall increasing trend (with the exception of Bolivia) within the 21 countries in the decade between 2001 and 2011.

V. CONCLUSION

If those observations about the state of democracy and, more precisely, about the actual problems of party systems are true, we are facing an alarming situation. Are Western democracies in decay? Are many democracies of the so-called third-wave of democratization in a state of semi-democratic gridlock? The brief empirical snapshot revealed some reassuring information but also some worrying tendencies. We have found no empirical support for the allegations concerning programmatic convergence, neither in the party programs nor in the voters' perceptions. Additionally, roughly about two thirds of the people think that it makes a difference who is in power—which would not be unlikely if there would be no room to manoeuvre for politicians and parties in power. In many indicators, the difference between European democracies and third-wave democracies in Latin America are shrinking or have disappeared which is rather a sign of convergence than of gridlock.

Nevertheless, there are also some alarming figures. The overwhelming perception of parties as corrupt may be the most problematic one. Latin America has made no progress here and in Europe and other regions of the world the perceived corruptness of parties is increasing. Although in many countries between half and two thirds of the population feels represented by a political party, there remains a big percentage that sees no party representing its positions. During the last 40 years, there have been some waves of new parties entering parliaments: green parties, right-wing parties, and, most recently, the so-called pirate parties. The ideological shifts of the biggest parties during the last four decades can as well be interpreted as a means of holding contact with changing positions within the societies. But despite of these processes of renewal and change, an important share of the electorate does not feel represented. Accordingly, membership figures have been declining for decades, at least in Europe. The call for transparency and new forms of participation that are at the heart of the pirate parties might be indicators that both corruption and the representative gap are addressed by new actors within many party systems. This kind of party system change is necessary in order to react to new or changing challenges. It is therefore a misunderstanding to interpret rising volatility or the occurrence of new parties as alarming signs of party-system instability. Vitality is more important than stability—and this is not only true for the older European democracies.⁵⁰

In order to make this judgment more solid, further comparative data on the four subfunctions of party systems is needed. Nevertheless, this brief

⁵⁰ Lane, Jan-Erik and Ersson, Svante, "Party System Instability...", *op. cit.*, p. 106.

discussion of various theories on the crisis of democracy has already revealed some benefits of a “systemic” party-system concept. The linkage with the core functions of the party systems allows us to determine the main indicators if we want to identify change and (de-)institutionalization of party systems. Besides facilitating comparative studies across time and space, this concept also raises interesting questions with regard to interdependencies between the party system’s subfunctions. Although the literature on party systems is legion, there is still a lot to be explored and learned

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