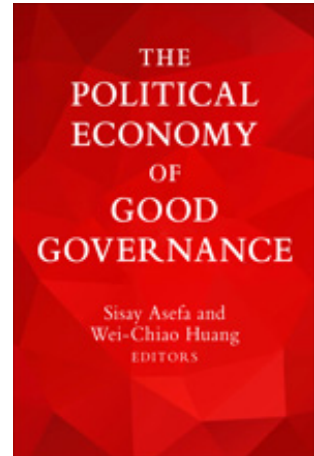


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3

Political Parties, Democracy, and “Good Governance”

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What is the relationship between political parties and “good governance”? The role that political parties have played is rather controversial in the literature. On the one hand, there are those who express very negative sentiments with regard to political parties. Indeed, popular sentiment is often negative about parties and the role they play in democracies. George Washington cautioned against parties as “factions” motivated by the “spirit of revenge” and by self promotion at the expense of the public good. Currently, political parties are almost universally viewed as the most corrupt of the political institutions in modern democracies. Parties can participate in corrupt practices in various ways—by “buying” votes, receiving illegal donations, and “selling” public decisions. The image of political parties as nests of corruption is often connected to the low trust in parties as political institutions and even to the low trust in democracy itself (Kopecký and Spirova 2011)

On the other hand, many scholars have argued that parties are indispensable to the operation of modern democracy. For instance, E. E. Schattschneider, in his work *Party Government*, advanced the thesis “that the political parties created democracy and that modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties” (Schattschneider 1942, p. 1).¹ Although Schattschneider perhaps overstates the case, there is indeed a general consensus in the scholarly literature that parties are essential entities in the building and consolidation of competitive democracy. The notion of the indispensability of parties is rooted in the idea that they perform essential democratic functions, and that while these functions may not be the exclusive domain of political parties, they are thought to perform these functions better than any other type of organization (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Diamond and Gunther 2001; Diamond and Linz 1989; Webb, Farrell, and Holliday 2002; Webb and White 2007).

These functions essentially involve six primary political-party functions. (That number is more or less consistent with other categorization schemes; see, for instance, Diamond and Gunther [2001] and Webb [2007].) These functions are listed in Table 3.1, below.

However, much of the concern with political parties in systems in transition is that they do not perform their ascribed functions very well. Parties in new democracies often lack coherent ideological programs and are unable to offer voters clear sets of choices. The programs that *are* offered are largely detached from citizens' concerns (Ishiyama and Shafqat 2000; Kitschelt and Smyth 2002), and corruption is seen as widespread in such parties (Basedau, Erdmann, and Mehler 2007; Holmes 2006; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Salih 2003). Parties in transitional systems are also seen as not being sufficiently rooted in society, resulting in high levels of electoral volatility as voters and politicians continually switch parties (Kuenzi and Lambright 2005; Mainwaring 1998; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Shabad and Slomczynski 2004; Thames

Table 3.1 Six Primary Party Functions

Interest articulation	Interest aggregation
Receiving and accepting public demands and determining the process of placing issues on the political agenda	Aggregating demands into coherent programmatic packages in democratic contexts
Political communication	Stimulating political participation
Communicating political information, including structuring choices among competing groups along different issue dimensions	Promoting political participation, including party membership, but also partisanship among voters, and the political mobilization and electoral activities of parties
Recruiting/nomination	Governance
Establishing the electoral rules of the game, especially the procedures for determining who gets nominated	Forming and sustaining accountable and effective governments

SOURCE: Adapted from Gunther and Diamond (2003).

2007a,b; Zielinski, Slomczynski, and Shabad 2005). Such parties have also been unable to monopolize the channels of leadership recruitment; hence they fail to perform the primary function of recruiting leaders (Hale 2006; Mainwaring, Bejarano, and Leongómez 2006). In short, as Thomas Carothers (2006, p. 66) laments, political parties in countries in transition tend to be “top-down, leader-centric, organizationally thin, corrupt, patrimonial, and ideologically vague.”

Furthermore, party systems in many new democratic systems are one of two things: 1) They are either fractionalized, unstable systems, where government is paralyzed by a highly fragmented composition, resulting in weak coalition governments (“feckless pluralism,” as Carothers [2006], characterizes such systems), or 2) they emerge as corrupt, patronage-based systems with a single or dominant party (Kopecký and Sprirova 2011; Tanzi 1998).

Parties are also seen as not being sufficiently rooted in society, resulting in high levels of electoral volatility as voters and politicians continually switch parties. This leads to poor government effectiveness (Kuenzi and Lambright 2005; Mainwaring 1998; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Shabad and Slomczynski 2004; Thames 2007a,b; Zielinski, Slomczynski, and Shabad 2005).

Thus it has been suggested in the literature that fractionalized and volatile systems are “bad” for democracy. This is because such systems are not really institutionalized. Institutionalized party systems are better able to promote stable democracy than less institutionalized systems, for a couple of reasons:

- First, more-institutionalized party systems enjoy considerable stability—generally, systems where the major parties appear and disappear, or move from major parties to minor parties and vice versa, are weakly institutionalized.
- Second, institutionalized systems have strong roots in society and bind parties and citizens together. In a less institutionalized system there is less regularity for voters in the articulation and aggregation of their interests, and hence parties are less able to perform the aggregation function which is vital for the functioning of democracy.

Three aspects of party systems’ institutionalization are particularly important for the purposes of this chapter. The first is *party fragmenta-*

tion. Indeed, party fragmentation makes effective governance quite difficult (Duverger 1954). Many small parties in a system often create the conditions for weak coalition governments, which are particularly problematic during times of political or economic duress or crisis (which is often the case in the developing world). An often-cited example of the negative effects of party system fragmentation is the Weimar Republic in Germany in the 1920s, which had a highly fragmented (and ideologically polarized) party system.

Another aspect of party systems that is posited as having a negative effect on governance is *party system volatility*. Party system volatility refers to the extent to which voters are lacking a stable set of party competitors over time. Party systems that are characterized by many changes in terms of vote share or composition are volatile systems. It has been argued that volatile systems do not promote effective governance, for a variety of reasons. First, party system volatility reduces accountability. When partisan actors come and go, it does not provide the opportunity for voters to “throw the rascals out” in case they have made poor policy choices, because the rascals no longer occupy office (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). Furthermore, volatility significantly increases uncertainty, hampering the ability of politicians and voters to engage in strategically driven coordination and formulate coherent policies. Finally, it raises the stakes of the electoral game. This may have the consequence of weakening the democratic commitment of politicians, who may seek other ways to insure themselves against possible political loss at the next election—such as through corrupt actions or, even worse, vote-rigging and electoral violence.

A third pathology of party system development is the emergence of a *dominant party system*. One-party dominance has not necessarily been associated with ineffective governance in the literature, but it *has* been associated with the promotion of corruption. A major cause of corruption is political parties seeking to gain political resources by selling off access to office to the highest bidder (Katz and Mair 1995). One-party dominance leads to more corruption, as the dominant party keeps power by distribution of patronage and other manipulations (Tanzi 1998). Thus, one-party or dominant-party rule is seen as generally inimical to good governance, and it is especially associated with higher levels of corruption than more competitive systems.

Although the ills associated with party systems have often been suggested in the scholarly work, there has been remarkably little empirical literature that directly assesses the relationship between characteristics of the party system and levels of good governance. What *are* the effects of fragmentation, volatility, and one-party dominance on aspects of good governance?

The above literature suggests the following three hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: Party systems’ fragmentation is negatively related to government effectiveness.
- Hypothesis 2: Party volatility is negatively related to government effectiveness.
- Hypothesis 3: One-party-dominant regimes are negatively related to control of corruption (i.e., positively related to corruption).

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The following analysis is a first attempt at trying to assess the relationship between characteristics of party systems and good governance. The sample of countries used in this study includes 92 developing states that have had at least three “competitive” legislative elections during the period 1975–2006 and that are also classified as middle- to low-income countries by the World Bank. These countries were also not completely controlled by the governing party (and so would qualify as having a “party system,” which suggests the existence of more than one party). In other words, countries entered the data set if the opposition controlled at least some seats in the legislature. (Thus, countries like North Korea are not included in the data set.) The time period covered begins with 1975, which coincides with what Samuel Huntington (1991) labeled the beginning of the “third wave” of democratization, and goes until 2006, the last year in which all data are available.

The dependent variables in this study include three of the World Bank’s six Worldwide Governance Indicators, all measured from 2003 to 2010. The argument here is that characteristics of the party system

from 1975 to 2006 should affect government performance in the more recent period from 2003 to 2010.

- The first dependent variable, *government effectiveness*, is conceptualized as comprising the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. The values range from -2.5 to $+2.5$, with negative scores indicating less effective government and positive values indicating more effective government.
- The second dependent variable, *control of corruption*, is also scored from -2.5 to $+2.5$ and reflects perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as "capture" of the state by elites and private interests. In this case, negative scores indicate less effective control of corruption, whereas positive scores indicate relatively higher levels of control of government corruption.
- The third dependent variable for this study, *political stability*, is likewise scored from -2.5 to $+2.5$, and is conceptualized as perceptions of the likelihood that the government will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including politically motivated violence and terrorism. Positive scores on this measure indicate higher levels of political stability, and negative values mean lower levels of political stability.

Two of the primary independent variables, party systems fragmentation and party systems volatility, are measured by two commonly employed measures in the literature. The first, measuring the extent to which a party system is fragmented, is the "effective number of political parties" (ENP) measure. This index proposes the use of the Hirschman-Herfindahl concentration index to measure the fragmentation of a party system based on vote shares in the election or seat shares in the legislature. Using vote or seat shares in the computation of the Hirschman-Herfindahl index and taking the inverse gives us the ENP.² I include the average number of effective political parties for a given number of elections, ranging from a minimum of the first three to a maximum of the first five legislative elections after 1975. This, again, is

to examine how earlier levels of party fragmentation affect later levels of good governance.

Second, to measure party systems’ volatility, I use Pedersen’s index of electoral volatility to calculate legislative volatility. Pedersen’s index measures the net change in each party’s seat share in the lower house of the legislature from election to election. It is calculated by summing the net changes in the percentage of seats won or lost by each of the parties from election to election and dividing by two (see Kuenzi and Lambright 2001; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; and Mozaffar, Scarritt, and Galaich 2003). This is written as

$$V = \sum |c_{i,t+1} - c_{i,t}| / \sum c_{i,t+1} + \sum c_{i,t},$$

where V is volatility, $c_{i,t}$ is the vote share of continuous party i at the first election (t), and $c_{i,t+1}$ is the vote share of continuous party i at the second election ($t + 1$).

The resulting score for each country is an average score across each of the legislative periods. Again, I use the first three to five elections after 1975 to examine how earlier levels of party systems’ volatility affect later levels of effective governance, control of corruption, and political stability.

Finally, I examine the effects of a dominant party on measures of governance. For my purposes, I use the definition of a dominant party system taken from Van de Walle and Butler (1999), who define a dominant party as a party that wins at least 60 percent of the seats in the lower house of the legislature for the first three consecutive elections following the introduction of competitive elections.

In addition to the primary independent variables, I also include a number of control variables in the analysis that can affect levels of government effectiveness, control of corruption, and political stability. These include

- economic growth rates measured in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita;
- average growth rate over the posttransition period;
- a measure of wealth (GDP per capita average over the post-transition period); and

- the level of ethnolinguistic fragmentation (ELF), a commonly used measure of the extent of ethnic heterogeneity in a country.

In addition, I examine whether or not the country had experienced a civil war (given that such countries often face challenges in terms of good governance) and a measure of democracy as indicated by the average Polity2 score (a commonly used measure of the level of democracy) over the entirety of the posttransition period.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Tables 3.2 through 3.4 provide the results of the analysis. Given the continuous nature of the dependent variable, I employ a simple ordinary least squares (OLS) procedure. Coefficient estimates are reported as well as collinearity diagnostic statistics and the variance inflation factor scores. Table 3.2 reports the results of regressing the dependent variable of the government effectiveness score against the list of independent variables.

As indicated in the table, party fragmentation does not affect government effectiveness, which is contrary to what was expected. However, both the emergence of a dominant party and party system volatility in earlier years led to less government effectiveness later. In part this may be due to the transformation of initially very volatile party systems into dominant party systems later (such as the case of the Russian Federation since the 1990s). Furthermore, this result would call into question the commonly held sentiment that political systems that exhibit a “firm hand” are more effective and efficient. The evidence clearly does not support this contention.

One interesting thing to note is that post–civil war states are significantly less effective (in terms of their effective governance scores) than other states in the sample. This is not a surprising result, given that civil wars often undermine state capacity, but it is noteworthy nonetheless.

Table 3.3 regresses the second dependent variable, average control of corruption, against the list of independent variables. The results demonstrate that none of the primary independent variables are related to the control of corruption. These results call into question the notion that dominant party systems tend to promote corruption more than other

Table 3.2 Coefficient Estimates and Collinearity Statistics. Dependent Variable: Average Governmental Effectiveness, 2003–2010

Variable	Coefficient	VIF
Average effective number of parties over first three elections after 1975	−0.025 (0.023)	1.159
Existence of dominant party over first three elections	−0.358** (0.154)	1.540
Party systems’ volatility over first three elections	−0.009** (0.004)	1.077
Average GDP per capita growth rate over posttransition period	−0.461 (1.899)	1.401
Average GDP per capita over posttransition period	0.0005** (0.000)	1.392
Ethnolinguistic fragmentation index	−0.341 (0.301)	1.193
Post–civil war state	−0.280** (0.140)	1.139
Average polity score over posttransition period	0.016 (0.018)	1.358

N = 92
Adjusted *R*-squared = 0.300

NOTE: * significant at the 0.10 level; ** significant at the 0.05 level; *** significant at the 0.01 level. “VIF” = “variance inflation factor”; “GDP” = “gross domestic product.”
SOURCE: Author’s calculations.

types of party systems. This is clearly not indicated by the results reported in Table 3.3.

Furthermore, as in Table 3.2, which shows that post–civil war states have less government effectiveness, so too in Table 3.3, post–civil war states are significantly less able to control corruption. Again, this is probably due to the weakened capacity of such states as a result of civil war.

Finally, Table 3.4 reports the results of regressing the dependent variable of political stability against the independent variables. Interestingly, none of the primary independent variables (average effective number of parties over first three elections after transition, existence of dominant party over first three elections, and party system volatility over first three elections) has any bearing at all on the level of political stability later.

Table 3.3 Coefficient Estimates and Collinearity Statistics. Dependent Variable: Average Control of Corruption, 2003–2010

Variable	Coefficient	VIF
Average effective number of parties over first three elections after 1975	−0.013 (0.023)	1.159
Existence of dominant party over first three elections	−0.060 (0.172)	1.540
Party system's volatility over first three elections	−0.004 (0.004)	1.077
Average GDP per capita growth rate over transition period	0.045 (1.887)	1.401
Average GDP per capita over transition period	0.0003** (0.000)	1.392
Ethnolinguistic fragmentation index	−0.115 (0.299)	1.193
Post-civil war state	−0.328** (0.130)	1.139
Average polity score over posttransition period	0.011 (0.017)	1.358

N = 92
Adjusted *R*-squared = 0.188

NOTE: * significant at the 0.10 level; ** significant at the 0.05 level; *** significant at the 0.01 level. "VIF" = "variance inflation factor"; "GDP" = "gross domestic product."
SOURCE: Author's calculations.

Again, as was the case with government effectiveness and corruption, post-civil war states are inherently less stable than other states. It should be noted that in all of the models, the variance inflation scores did not exceed 2, so there are no problems indicated with multicollinearity in the analysis.

Thus, in sum, the above findings do not suggest support for the initial supposition that party fragmentation would be negatively related to government effectiveness. Indeed, the number of parties (in cases where there are more than one) is unrelated to the extent to which governments are effective. However, party system volatility and the emergence of dominant party systems *are* negatively related to government effectiveness. Dominant parties are not particularly effective at government administration, and neither are highly volatile systems

Table 3.4 Coefficient Estimates and Collinearity Statistics. Dependent Variable: Average Political Stability Score, 2003–2010

Variable	Coefficient	VIF
Average effective number of parties over first three elections after transition	−0.012 (0.023)	1.159
Existence of dominant party over first three elections	−0.106 (0.160)	1.540
Party system’s volatility over first three elections	−0.000 (0.004)	1.077
Average GDP per capita growth rate over transition period	1.539 (1.901)	1.401
Average GDP per capita over transition period	0.0005** (0.000)	1.392
Ethnolinguistic fragmentation index	−0.158 (0.301)	1.193
Post–civil war state	−0.938*** (0.137)	1.139
Average polity score over posttransition period	0.017 (0.017)	1.358

N = 92
Adjusted *R*-squared = 0.486

NOTE: * significant at the 0.10 level; ** significant at the 0.05 level; *** significant at the 0.01 level. “VIF” = “variance inflation factor”; “GDP” = “gross domestic product.”
SOURCE: Author’s calculations.

where there is substantial turnover in the political actors involved in the game. However, these variables are not related to corruption and political stability, which might suggest, among other things, that the relationship between corruption and dominant parties is overstated.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has been essentially a suggestive piece, with the use of data to illustrate the relationship between party system characteristics and three aspects of good governance—namely, 1) effective governance,

2) control of corruption, and 3) political stability. Generally, the results indicate that either dominant party systems or volatile party systems are associated with lower levels of effective governance. However, neither of these party system characteristics are related to the control of corruption and political stability. This would suggest that if one conceives of “good governance” in terms of effective governance, then promoting a stable set of competitive political parties is probably a good way to go. This would add support for programs such as those sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which seeks to promote the development of stable party systems in many new democracies throughout the world.

On the other hand, party system characteristics have little to do with either the control of corruption or the promotion of political stability. This would counter some of the existing literature that suggests that dominant party systems are more corrupt, and that stable party systems would lead to political stability. As to the former, one can imagine a situation (as in the case of many competitive party systems in Western democracies in their earlier periods of development) where competitive politics bred corruption such as vote rigging, multiple voting, patronage, and the like. Certainly this has been part of the history of political parties in the United States, as well as in other Western countries, so it is no wonder that competitive party systems are just as likely to fail to control corruption as dominant party systems.

It is also not particularly surprising that volatility is unrelated to political stability (at least as conceived of in terms of the likelihood of violent overthrow). Indeed, in several cases in the West, most notably in post-World War II Italy, party system fragmentation and volatility led to governmental instability but did not threaten the political stability of the country. In part, this political stability was supported by a continuous group of political leaders. In other words, governments and parties may have come and gone in Italy, but the leadership elite remained intact, thus contributing to the continuance of political stability (in terms of absence of violence), albeit not government stability (in terms of the stability of coalition governments). Thus, at least in Italy, it is not particularly surprising that party system characteristics are unrelated to political stability as well.

These main findings of this chapter are, of course, somewhat tentative. There are a number of areas for improvement in the analysis.

For instance, perhaps the key variable affecting good governance is not the party system, but party organization characteristics. In other words, parties that are more internally democratic may be more effective than parties that are less internally democratic, for instance. Second, it would be preferable to use panel data rather than a simple set of cross-sectional data (albeit with a lagged set of independent variables). Third, there may be individual country effects that would need to be controlled for by a fixed-effects model. Finally, in terms of the political stability analysis, a future paper might examine the relationship between political party systems and state failure—perhaps by using some form of hazard analysis instead of the World Bank’s measure equating stability with no violence. Whatever the case, understanding the relationship between party system characteristics and good governance will remain a fruitful topic for future research.

Notes

1. Although, historically, there has been debate over the definition of a political party in the scholarly literature, we use the classic definition of the political party as offered by Anthony Downs (1957, p. 25): a political party is “a team seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election.” See also Epstein (1967), Janda (1980), and Sartori (1976). For an alternative and stricter definition of party, see LaPalombara and Weiner (1966). For the debate over the definition of parties, see Ishiyama and Breuning (1998).
2. $ENP = 1/\sum p_i^2$, where p_i denotes the i th party’s fraction of the seats (or vote shares). See Laakso and Taagepera (1979) and Taagepera and Shugart (1989); see also variations of the fragmentation index: Dunleavy and Boucek (2003), Molinar (1991), and Rae (1967).

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