



**UNDER- AND OVERINSTITUTIONALIZATION:  
SOME IDEAL TYPICAL PROPOSITIONS  
CONCERNING NEW AND OLD PARTY SYSTEMS**

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## ABSTRACT

The weakness of democratic institutions represents the core problem faced by processes of democratic consolidation. The present paper, which confines its attention exclusively to party systems, starts by diagnosing a double deficit. First, the concept of institutional 'underdevelopment' appears to be somewhat underdeveloped itself. It requires further clarification and elaboration. Second, the debate on democratic consolidation takes the 'old' consolidated democracies as its normative model and assumes that the strength of institutions and the quality of democracy are positively related. This normative horizon might be distorted. We argue instead that institutions may be too weak—but also too strong (section 1). The paper therefore contrasts two ideal types of party systems: 'underinstitutionalized' versus 'overinstitutionalized'. After sketching some defining elements of institutions (section 2), the essay portrays differences and commonalities between these two party system extremes. It discusses the following dimensions: aggregate electoral volatility (section 3), the translation of electoral uncertainty into policy styles and popular expectations (section 4), the barriers of access to the political market (section 5), degrees of interparty competition (section 6), horizontal accountability (section 7), the scope of horizontal linkages (section 8), and the credibility of party politicians (section 9). We conclude with some hints at the dynamics of change within both systems (section 10).

## RESUMEN

La debilidad de las instituciones democráticas representa el problema central que enfrentan los procesos de consolidación democrática. El presente artículo, que concentra su atención exclusivamente en los sistemas de partidos, comienza diagnosticando un doble déficit. Primero, el concepto de 'subdesarrollo' institucional parece estar, él mismo, 'en vías de desarrollo.' Requiere mayor claridad y elaboración. Segundo, el debate acerca de la consolidación democrática toma las 'viejas' democracias consolidadas como modelo normativo, y presupone que la fuerza de las instituciones y la calidad de la democracia están positivamente relacionadas. Este horizonte normativo podría estar distorsionado. Nosotros, en cambio, argumentamos que las instituciones pueden ser demasiado débiles, pero también demasiado fuertes (Primera Sección). Este artículo, entonces, contrasta dos tipos ideales de sistema de partidos: 'subinstitucionalizados' versus 'sobreinstitucionalizados.' Después de bocetar algunos de los elementos definitorios de las instituciones (Segunda Sección), este ensayo presenta las diferencias y semejanzas entre estos dos tipos extremos de sistema de partidos. Se discuten las siguientes dimensiones: volatilidad electoral agregada (Tercera Sección), traducción de la incertidumbre electoral en estilos de políticas y expectativas populares (Cuarta Sección), barreras de acceso al mercado político (Quinta Sección), grados de competencia interpartidaria (Sexta Sección), responsabilidad (accountability) horizontal (Séptima Sección), alcance de las vinculaciones horizontales (Octava Sección) y la credibilidad de los políticos enrolados en partidos (Novena Sección). Concluimos con algunas referencias a las dinámicas de cambio en ambos sistemas.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Democratic Consolidation as Institution Building

During democratic *transitions* (multiple) state and civil society actors struggle to achieve or impede the passage from authoritarian rule to liberal democratic government. These are times of struggle and uncertainty concerning the fundamental 'rules of the game.' When they give way to reasonable confidence in the future persistence of democracy, actors enter a new stage in the adventurous journey of democratization: the stage of democratic *consolidation*. The main problem during this phase is the *weakness or absence of democratic institutions* that lie beyond the definitional minima of democracy (i.e., civic and political rights and qualified—free, competitive, fair, and inclusive—elections). The corresponding main task is *institution building*.

These propositions are shared, though not always made explicit, by the mainstream of 'consolidology' (the 'second generation' of contemporary studies of democratization, succeeding the studies of democratic transitions nicknamed 'transitology'). The proposed definitions of democratic consolidation may vary in their perspectives and levels of abstraction. Guillermo O'Donnell, for example, speaks of a "second transition" "from a democratic government to a democratic regime" (O'Donnell 1993) while Terry Lynn Karl conceptualizes a process leading "from contingent choice to structured contingency" (Karl 1990). The analytical and normative core is nevertheless the same: the consolidation of democracy is about the strengthening of democratic institutions.

In principle, the democratic institutions in question comprise a wide range of 'subsystems' or 'levels' (Morlino 1989) or 'partial regimes' (Schmitter 1991)—among others, the judiciary, the public space, the legislative assemblies, a (truly) public (nonpatrimonial) administration, networks of interest intermediation and, last but not least, the party system. In practice, however, the debate has focused mainly on parliaments and parties. As for the latter, this has led to a remarkable revival of interest in the *degrees of institutionalization* of party systems.

The term 'revival' is appropriate here since we are not dealing with an entirely new concern. In the late '60s and early '70s, when the Latin American 'political pendulum' swung from democracy to military authoritarianism, political scientists had already asserted that institutional weakness constituted a main political liability and

source of instability in developing countries (see especially Huntington 1968). At the same time, the problem of political institutions was not taken seriously by the two main competing paradigms, (linear) modernization theory and dependency analysis. Both treated politics as an epiphenomenon of economics. In general, this 'early neoinstitutionalism' was suspected to be a conservative concern driven by a poorly veiled interest in containing popular demands.

Afterward, the most consequential theoretical work on political party systems in the 1970s, Giovanni Sartori's *Parties and Party Systems* (1976), deliberately excluded 'fluid party polities' from its analysis. Polities at "a highly diffuse, volatile and provisional stage," Sartori argued (285), cannot reasonably be classified within a taxonomy that presupposes a minimum degree of structural differentiation and solidity (chapter 8).

In the wake of the contemporary 'third wave' of democratization, scholarly interest in 'weakly institutionalized,' 'underdeveloped,' or 'nonsystemic' party systems reemerged quite naturally. As a consequence, recent classifications of party systems have moved beyond the conventional limited consideration of the 'format' and 'mechanics' of party systems (in Sartori's terminology). They have progressed toward incipient operationalizations of the 'degrees of institutionalization' of party systems (for Latin America, see Coppedge 1992; Dix 1992; Mainwaring and Scully forthcoming). Comparative systematic research, however, is still at an early stage in which some of the most pressing *lacunae* of knowledge are conceptual, not only empirical or practical.

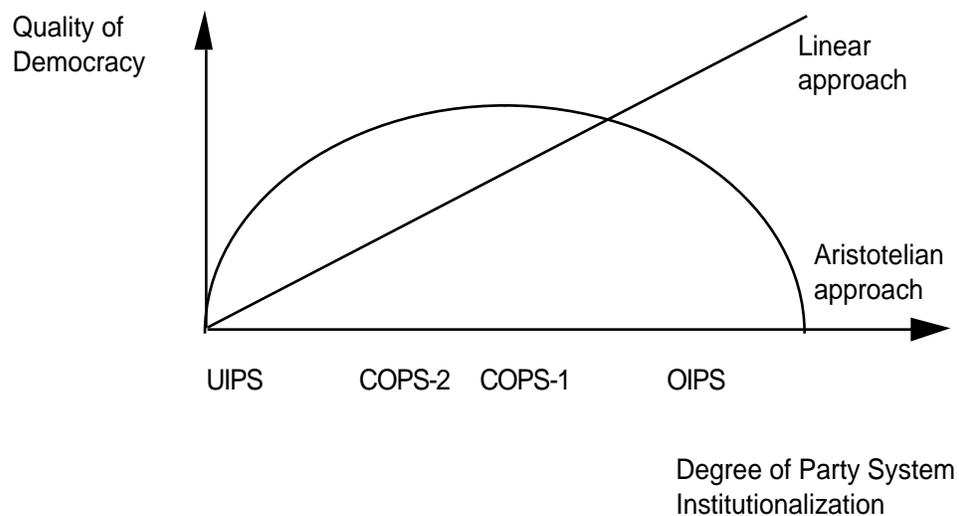
## **1.2. Degrees of Institutionalization: Redefining the Extremes**

In discussions of democratic consolidation, the political-institutional 'hardware' of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member states commonly serves as a normative background and model. Analysts looking from the 'new' democracies South and East to the 'old' ones in the North find the former to be comparatively deficient. So they simply dichotomize them, setting 'nonconsolidated' or 'consolidating' democracies (defined in a purely negative way, by absences, failures, and weaknesses) against 'consolidated' democracies (defined by all the desirable attributes of a functioning democracy). In other words, different degrees of institutionalization are conceptually grouped (and evaluated) along a continuum that displays a negative pole (underinstitutionalization) and a positive pole (institutionalization).

This way of thinking about existing democratic institutions carries a clear message: the stronger the better. Living in Austria, however, one is inclined to suspect that the blessing of high institutionalization may well have its limits and reverse course when given in excessive doses. The controversial proposition of this paper is therefore to adopt an Aristotelian stance on this issue, proclaiming that proper institutionalization is a *middle ground quality* of systems that manage to sail between the Scylla of *too weak* institutions and the Charybdis of *too strong* ones. In this manner the continuum of institutionalization is extended and transformed from a plus-minus to a minus-minus polarity. This move redefines the relation between degrees of party system institutionalization and the quality of democracy. A simple positive linear relationship gives way to an inverted U-curve (see Figure 1).

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FIGURE 1



UIPS = Underinstitutionalized Party System  
 COPS = Consolidated Party System  
 OIPS = Overinstitutionalized Party System

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While the notion of 'underinstitutionalized democracies' is widely accepted (even though its conceptualization, operationalization, and empirical application must still be regarded as insufficient), the suggestion that cases of democratic overinstitutionalization may develop too will certainly give rise to doubt and dispute. The present paper cannot assume the whole burden of argument. It represents nothing more than a starting point: a few provisional and stylized hypotheses (not

without polemic undertones) on the possible meanings of both extremes of institutionalization.

We will describe party system under- and overinstitutionalization not as isolated features but as encompassing attributes of party systems. We will contrast two party system ‘ideal types’: underinstitutionalized party systems (UIPS) versus overinstitutionalized party systems (OIPS). The underlying (simplifying) assumption is that over- and underinstitutionalization both represent rather coherent ‘cluster concepts.’ That is, we assume that their characteristics do not coincide accidentally but are logically interrelated (while in any case they in part just express different analytical perspectives).

At the same time, we are aware that in the real world, party systems may display lesser degrees of institutional homogeneity than we suggest in this paper. Not only regimes but also party systems may be hybrid in the sense that they combine various and variable degrees of institutionalization at different levels.<sup>1</sup> They may be over- or underinstitutionalized only in *some* respects while ‘adequately’ institutionalized in others. Attempts to translate our ideal-typical sketch into concrete empirical research would therefore certainly have to adopt a more disaggregated approach.

Our bibliographical references will be neither systematic nor exhaustive and, with only few exceptions, our empirical references will remain implicit. The portrait we paint, on the one hand, of *excessively* institutionalized party systems draws its abstractions to a considerable extent from postwar Austria and Italy (and secondarily from the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan, and Venezuela). Conversely, the empirical background that nurtures our description of *deficiently* institutionalized party systems consists primarily of Latin American countries, with Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia representing rather neat cases of party underdevelopment. But obviously, though less prominently, Eastern European experiences—above all those of Poland and Russia—will also inspire our typological exercise.

## 2. What Are Institutions?

It is easier to use the notion of institutions than to define it. In our academic jargon we routinely speak of institutions and usually assume we know (more or less) what we are talking about. At the same time, we know we will run into trouble when

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<sup>1</sup> The allusion is to Weffort’s notion of ‘hybrid regimes’ that combine democratic with authoritarian features (see Weffort 1993).

asked to make explicit and precise this everyday concept, for the (mainly sociological) literature on institutions is notoriously and hopelessly broad (after all, one could say that institutions are what sociology is about). It is obvious that for reasons of space (and competence), this extensive and multifaceted discussion can neither be resumed nor continued here. Nevertheless, minimal standards of conceptual transparency oblige us at least to outline the underlying idea of institutions that guides our analysis. In our view, institutions are characterized by two distinct, though interrelated aspects.

## 2.1. Time-Space Extension

Institutions denote continuity (in time and space). They stand for duration, reproduction, repetition, solidity, context transcendence, freezing. The noninstitutional is contingent, fluid, mobile, provisional, uncertain, unstructured, soft, temporary. The institutional is bound, solid, immobile, permanent, predictable, structured, hard, persistent. An institution is the thing that does not change every time we act. In the following, our labeling of party systems will reflect primarily this 'time-space extension' (Giddens 1984) of institutions. We will term underinstitutionalized party systems 'unstable,' 'fluid,' 'underdeveloped', or 'inchoate' and overinstitutionalized ones 'hyperstable,' 'static,' 'overdeveloped,' or 'frozen.'<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2. Actor Independence

Institutions are defined by their relations to actors. Without actors there are no institutions. Actors are the other side of every institutional coin. Without their presence institutional frames are empty—games without players, stages without actors, pictures without public, rules without subjects.

Now, the *concrete functions* institutions fulfill vis-à-vis actors are highly variable. Above all, they differ widely in the *constraining force* they exercise upon actors. Some institutions just provide reliable *parameters* of action that enable actors to develop stable expectations, including stable expectations of expectations (Erwartungserwartungen). Others are associated with *power* (including the power of internalized rules and norms). They compel actors to do certain things. They are

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, this emphasis on continuity and stability just leaves aside the important complementary topic of discontinuity and change—of institutional change as well as the institutionalization of change.

binding and demand compliance. In any case, however, institutions work 'above the heads' or 'behind the backs' of the participants. They are independent, not from actors as such, but from *individual* actors, and it is precisely this independence that accounts for their structuring force.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.3. Definition and Content

The concept of institutions is a formal one. It denotes structure per se and not any particular structure. This is why everybody champions different ideas of what institutions are concretely. The candidates are countless: property rights, formal organizations, gender relations, transportation rules, professional ethics, etc. According to our definition, any continuous and actor-constraining social phenomenon may be understood as an institution. The following considerations, however, do not climb up to the dizzying top of the ladder of abstraction. They have no ambition to develop a general theory of institutions. Neatly circumscribed not only to the political in general but to party systems in particular, they deliberately proceed on more concrete, middle-range grounds. Thus, the various aspects of institutionalization we discuss are tailored to the logics of party systems and are not automatically valid or relevant in other political subsystems.

### 2.4. Persons versus Parties

In the following, the criterion of stability versus instability will guide our analysis of general system stability as expressed by voting stability (section 3), and of the resulting patterns of policy styles and voter expectations (section 4). Subsequently, we will translate our 'guiding distinction' (Leitdifferenz) between actors and institutions into the more concrete opposition between *persons* (individual actors) and *parties* (collective actors). According to this reading, individual actors enjoy the greatest relevance and degree of freedom in UIPS and the least in OIPS. The former system is therefore defined by high 'looseness' and a consequent 'dominance of the subject' and the latter by high 'systemness' and a consequent (postmodern) 'disappearance of the subject.'

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<sup>3</sup> The conceptual decision to equate institutions with structural constraints (of varying intensity) is not trivial. It puts emphasis on the negative, restraining power of institutions (which are characterized in ways analogous to rules, parameters, or incentive structures in theories of rational choice). The positive, creative power of institutions—their ability to produce and reproduce actors and identities, norms and preferences, memories and frames of interpretation, etc. (cf. March and Olsen 1989)—remains neglected.

This contraposition of individuals against parties is pleasantly parsimonious but it tends to obscure a vital distinction: the difference between *parties* and *party systems*. This conceptual obscurity is surely neither desirable nor inevitable. But honestly spoken, it will stay with us throughout considerable parts of this essay.

If parties are *actors*, and party systems *structures of interaction*, the former might simply be understood as the *elements* constituting the latter. Put this way, the distinction between both appears to be less straightforward than at first sight. In the following, we will refrain from investing much analytical energy in clarifying and maintaining it. Instead, we will rest on the easy assumption that the whole is equal to the sum of its parts (which we know is controversial and liable to academic prosecution). Every time we do not analyze either 'macro indicators' (like aggregate volatility) or structures of party interaction (as degrees of competition) we will actually focus on parties—though not on single parties but on *whole sets* of parties. We will use a generalizing (overgeneralizing) language that speaks (without qualification) of parties in a party system while it actually refers to (imaginary *average* characteristics of) *all relevant* parties in a party system (in our sweeping ideal-typical approach we even proceed without discussing exceptions or criteria of relevance).<sup>4</sup>

Having confessed this conceptual fuzziness of our distinction between persons and parties, it is necessary to emphasize that we will apply it from various *different perspectives*. The individual actors we refer to represent actually quite *different sets of actors*. Our propositions on access to electoral candidacy are concerned with potential *candidates* outside and within the party system (section 5). The reflections on different degrees of competition observe the relation between *citizens* and parties (section 6). The remarks on horizontal accountability reflect on the relation between parties and *state servants* as well as *state clients* (section 7). The chapter on horizontal accountability is concerned with the internal and interactive restrictions parties lay upon *party leaders* (section 8). Finally, we speculate about the effects the stability/instability and the power/powerlessness of parties have on the way party politicians are perceived and evaluated by the general public (section 9).

### 3. Electoral Volatility

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4 If we analyzed degrees of *party* institutionalization and thus focused on concrete single parties, we would have to take account of, among others, the four measures of institutionalization proposed by Samuel Huntington: (a) adaptability/rigidity, (b) complexity/simplicity, (c) autonomy/subordination, (d) coherence/disunity (see Huntington 1968).

### **3.1. The Ideal-Typical Extremes**

If degrees of party system institutionalization correspond (by definition) to degrees of party system stability, their most obvious, visible, objective, and consequential measure is provided by the level of electoral volatility. Consequently, the existing proposals of operational measures of party system institutionalization are largely based on this indicator of aggregate stability. The basic idea is simply that inchoate party systems display extreme levels of electoral volatility, while consolidated party systems are distinguished by moderate levels, and hyperstable party systems by extremely low levels, hypothetically approaching zero.

In ideal-typical subinstitutionalized party systems, citizens vote for parties without engaging in long-term investments of trust or loyalty. Their support for specific parties is strictly transitory. Electoral results are therefore highly contingent and discontinuous. Party traditions are constantly devaluated, memories are weak, hysteresis is absent. Elections are plebiscites, acts of faith (and chance), where parties are not sanctioned but barred or enthroned. All apparent 'founding elections' ultimately prove illusory because both 'Bermuda elections' as well as 'Pandora elections' occur frequently. That is, the winners of one election disappear at the next or, inversely, candidates appear from nowhere and conquer public offices by electoral assault.

At the other hypothetical extreme are frozen party systems with absolute stability. Here, the electorate is segmented into captive markets. Preferences are given and fixed. Voters support 'their' parties independent of party performance and are unimpressed by competing offers. They do not decide, but behave however tradition demands of them. Candidates win elections by inheritance, and electoral results seem to be not only predictable but immutable.

### **3.2. The Empirical Disparities**

When we look at real-world cases, mean electoral volatilities actually seem to differentiate rather well between weakly institutionalized party systems (in Latin America) and 'normal' institutionalized party systems (in Western Europe). Bartolini and Mair (1990, 303) report a mean volatility of less than 8 percent for 13 Western European countries in the period from 1945 to 1985. Average volatilities of Latin American polities, as calculated by Coppedge (1992), easily triple this figure (e.g.,

reaching 30.6 percent from 1981 to 1991). All the region's new democracies that Mainwaring and Scully (forthcoming) classify as 'inchoate party systems' (Peru, Brazil, Ecuador, and Bolivia) show levels of electoral volatility that exceed 30 percent, the extreme cases being Peru with 54.4 percent and Brazil with 40.9 percent (national legislative elections from 1978 to 1990, indices based on seats).

### 3.3. Demand- versus Supply-Side Volatility

Electoral volatility may originate from one of two general sources: market structures ('supply side') and voter preferences ('demand side'). More precisely, it is a relational measure. Votes, analogous to prices in economic markets, do not quantify either demand or supply but the *relation* between both.

*Supply-side causes* of electoral volatility encompass all 'autonomous' changes in the electoral market, that is, all changes in the number of parties that are generated 'from within' the system—not by popular preference changes but by independent action of party representatives. Party splits and mergers as well as the foundation of new parties make up this category. In non-consolidated democracies, electoral boycotts and party proscriptions have historically also been of recurrent importance (see Coppedge 1992, 14). *Demand-side causes* refer to citizens' evaluations. This spacious 'black box' of voter decisions accommodates the whole complex of voting studies that try to reconstruct the logic and dynamics of electoral decisions. Studies of electoral volatility have been primarily concerned to quantify composition effects, i.e., changes in the composition of the electorate that affect volatility rates (the key variables are voter turnout, enfranchisement of new groups, and voter turnover by generational replacement).<sup>5</sup>

### 3.4. The Implications of High Volatility

The normative implications of extremely high levels of electoral volatility are rather straightforward. They indicate that parties are unable to generate minimal

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<sup>5</sup> For discussions and tests of these variables, see Bartolini and Mair (1990) and Coppedge (1992). The mentioned factors can be understood as *direct* causes of electoral volatility. Two other groups of variables could be classified as *indirect* causes that correlate with volatility levels without causing them directly: party system features (formats and mechanics) and institutional rules (regime type and electoral rules). Correlation and regression analysis tend to confirm their influence on electoral volatility (see Bartolini and Mair 1990 and Coppedge 1992). Their 'causal force,' however, is an indirect one. They are necessarily 'filtered' either through supply or demand channels.

levels of support and loyalty among citizens. High volatility may therefore be regarded as a valid *operational definition* of party system subinstitutionalization. Average levels of volatility, say, above 30 percent, are sufficient to establish 'party underdevelopment' (Mainwaring 1992/93). Or inversely, they preclude speaking in any meaningful way of party system consolidation.

One *caveat* is warranted here, however. Aggregate volatilities may hide *stable cleavage systems* where votes mainly float *within* determinate ideological blocs (e.g., along the right/left scale) but not *between* them. Interbloc volatility (or cleavage volatility) is low, while intrabloc volatility is high. In those situations aggregate volatilities confer an erroneous, distorted picture that underestimates the degree of continuity of voter preferences. In other words, these are situations of supply-side volatility which go hand in hand with stable collective identities and unchanging axes of party competition.

### **3.5. The Implications of Low Volatility**

At the opposite extreme of the scale, however, low volatility measures do not carry a comparably clear message. First, electoral volatility in some cases that we might be inclined to qualify as hyperinstitutionalized (for example, Italy in the 1980s) does not deviate significantly from the average volatility in 'adequately' consolidated democracies. Second, polities that run through phases of extraordinarily low volatility rates (for example, Austria in the 1970s, with indices between 0.5 and 2.0 percent) cannot automatically be classified as overinstitutionalized. Here, the source of ambiguity is located on the demand side.

Clearly, 'frozen' voting patterns are hardly compatible with the idea of healthy party competition which presupposes a minimum of voter 'responsiveness' or 'availability.' At the same time we cannot, however, lightheartedly speak of 'demand-side overinstitutionalization.' To judge voters' loyalties and allegiances as *too stable* seems to require a certain dose of paternalism or, at least, standards of rationality that are not easily compatible with the democratic assumption of political 'consumer sovereignty.' There is, however, a way to judge voting behavior as hyper-stable.

In consolidated party systems (COPS), voting decisions frequently appear to be not so much choices among programs as expressions of identities, declarations of membership in determinate political communities. However, party systems qualify for the label of hyperinstitutionalization when the past bonds of

community between citizens and party politicians have dissolved (or eroded) while past voting behaviors still persist. In these cases, parties have retreated from civil society into the state and citizens from the political sphere into disengaged privacy—while at the same time the electoral show goes on. At the ballot box, people continue to support ‘their’ parties, but people do not vote any longer based on a strong sense of belonging. They vote out of inertia, traditions, habits, rituals. They do not confer mandates; they confirm fictitious communities. The party system, however, remains stable without noticing the steady erosion of its cultural basis—until preferred and viable electoral alternatives appear. In sum, the happy marriage between parties and party supporters is broken while appearances are kept up and the divorce is not yet formalized.

This stylized description is based on two main assumptions. (a) It is commonplace that elections do not inform about the intensities of popular preferences. The degree of support they express is extremely variable. Party attachments may therefore fade away without triggering corresponding changes in voting behavior. The behavioral consequences of lost party loyalties depend on the *structure of choice* the voter confronts.<sup>6</sup> (b) It makes sense to include elements of ‘political culture’ (citizens’ subjective evaluations of parties) into the definition of party systems. In this case it is not electoral stability *as such* that indicates ‘excessive’ party system institutionalization but high levels of electoral stability *combined* with low levels of popular support. In sum, when we observe very low electoral volatility we are entitled to hypothesize that the party system in question may be overinstitutionalized. This indicator, however, cannot be taken as a necessary or sufficient measure of excessive party system institutionalization.

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6 This argument resembles Przeworski’s hypothesis that transitions from authoritarian rule are not primarily dependent on crises of legitimation but on the availability of viable preferred alternatives (cf. Przeworski 1986).

## 4. Probabilities and Expectations

### 4.1. Uncertainty

Institutions define structures of interaction and thus determine the possible payoffs of interaction and their probabilities. Party systems, by shaping the structure of choice for both candidates and voters, codetermine which electoral results are possible and which ones are probable. Here, different degrees of institutionalization imply different degrees of *electoral uncertainty*. They open (and close) different horizons of electoral possibilities and probabilities.

In UIPS the final outcomes of electoral competition are highly uncertain. Stakes are high, speculative investments boom and are likely to pay off. The status quo is extremely fragile, and everything seems possible. The electoral horizon is wide open. Both the 'Pandora' as well as the 'Bermuda' principle may come into operation. 'Mr. Nobodys' may take the state by electoral coup d'état. Traditional parties may be voted out of office into irrelevance.

In contrast, electoral results in OIPS are nearly certain. The stocks of political capital are fixed, and revaluations are unlikely to occur. The status quo looks immobile, and alternatives are not within the realm of thought. Actors and their power relations are frozen. The future promises ironclad continuity. Contingency seems to be suspended. Actors form their expectations in terms of necessities and impossibilities, and complain about *partitocrazia*—to which they bow down in anticipation.

### 4.2. Time Horizons

Different degrees of uncertainty have obvious implications for actors' time horizons. Institutions reduce contingency and uncertainty, enabling actors to develop stable expectations and to expand their planning horizons. Where reliable institutions are absent, actors flooded by uncertainty are forced to drastically reduce their time horizons to the immediate future.

In consolidated party systems, actors have the chance (and some incentives) to consider at least the medium run. Candidates are forced to be patient. Not adhering to the classical bourgeois values of self-restraint and deferral of satisfaction may lead to disqualification from the political game. Spontaneity is blocked, but

strategic calculation is both more rational and less dominant than in UIPS. Career breaks and jumps are not foreclosed, but as a rule 'party soldiers' have to make their long way from scratch. This provides them with opportunities to learn, to acquire experience, to accumulate political human capital.

In comparison, at the extreme poles of institutionalization we learn that both too much uncertainty as well as too much certainty are political liabilities. In inchoate party systems actors live for the moment; in hyperstable ones they count on eternity. It is difficult to imagine that either the quality of democracy or the quality of policy-making might go unaffected by these contrasting experiences of time and time management.

### **4.3. Redemption and Routine**

The two polar types of party systems predictably lead to different styles and perceptions of politics. Where 'everything is possible,' as seems to be the case in UIPS, the stage is set for 'the politics of redemption' (Whitebook 1985). Personal charisma and caesaristic interventions compensate for the weakness of party organizations. Magicians and saviors enter the scene—demiurgic and messianic figures who promise to renew and to deliver everything quickly. Substituting rhetorics of political will and personal qualities for discourses of scarcity and structural constraints, they advertise a future with clear breaks and radical discontinuities.<sup>7</sup>

Quite different from this quasi-religious 'heroization of politics,' in OIPS, where 'nothing goes,' politics freezes into self-referential routine, into the bureaucratic administration of the status quo. Hyperstable party systems are kingdoms of boredom. Incidentally, that may be why overinstitutionalized politicians are so systematically inclined to engage in political entertainment and 'symbolic politics.'<sup>8</sup>

### **4.4. Pathos and Apathy**

At least logically, systemic probabilities and related policy styles encourage determinate popular attitudes. In overinstitutionalized settings we would expect to find resigned, apathetic, depoliticized or at least politically indifferent citizens. On the

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<sup>7</sup> In other words, the absence of binding institutions paves the way for 'anti-institutional prisoners' dilemmas' (Power 1991) and anti-institutional policy styles (see also O'Donnell 1993).

<sup>8</sup> "Long live boredom!" (Samuel Valenzuela, conversation, February 1994). I fully agree. Democracy is never quite consolidated unless action heroes and scenes of suspense have withdrawn from politics to sports, culture, and privacy. The degree of political boredom may even be taken as a reliable measure of democratic consolidation.

other hand, the logics of UIPS are likely to provoke 'shifting involvements' (Hirschman 1982) as well as 'shifting hopes' (and fears) among citizens, who are torn between the pathos of announced revolutions and apathy, the 'general sense of powerlessness' (Power 1991, 101) produced by the subsequent disillusion. In the end, after iterated cycles of high expectations and deep frustrations, voter attitudes in UIPS may reach a stable equilibrium quite similar to the one typically found in OIPS: political indifference.

## 5. Electoral Market Openness

Institutions, O'Donnell writes, "incorporate and exclude" (1991, 28). Party systems, too, are systems of exclusion and inclusion. They set up boundaries and control them. These boundaries, the barriers of access to party systems, are determined by a complex set of factors: (a) Past and expected electoral volatilities indicate the probabilities of change and thus the probabilities of success of new parties. (b) Electoral laws define rules of admission and thresholds of representation (the percentage of votes necessary for parliamentary representation). (c) The structure of the public space, especially the access to mass media, determines the amount of financial and organizational resources required to reach the electorate. (d) The internal structures of the established parties control the access to elective candidacy for ambitious individuals acting within the system. Each of these four broad factors may be responsible for setting up 'overinstitutionalized boundaries' (which are clear-cut and impenetrable) or 'underinstitutionalized boundaries' (which are diffuse and permeable). For reasons of space, however, we will focus on the last variable—the internal structures of existing parties.

One of the classic functions parties fulfill is to control the access to candidacy for elective offices. They regulate the political market, conditioning and restricting the exercise of political entrepreneurship. They recruit political actors and keep others at a distance. They preselect the persons competing for office and thus decide about democratic eligibility. In sum, they represent the gateways and paths to democratic power.

Party nominations may in principle be controlled by a broad range of actors. Speaking in ideal terms, the decisions over candidacies may be taken either hierarchically, by party *elites*; democratically, by party *members* (via primaries); or individually, by *candidates* themselves. We suggest thinking of these three modes of decision-making as representing different degrees of party system

institutionalization. The first case and the last one correspond, in their ideal forms, to our extreme cases of institutionalization.

On the one hand, 'hyperinstitutionalized' party systems are *closed systems*. They constitute 'administered markets' with rigid and impenetrable boundaries. Unauthorized entries are foreclosed. Power is concentrated, and elites hold firm control of nomination procedures. Top party officials are free to determine the party's lists of candidates, which are then ratified in acclamatory assemblies of delegates. Parties function as disciplined and exclusionary instruments of elite power, as 'closed shops' which monopolize the electoral market and specialize in boundary maintenance.

'Subinstitutionalized' party systems, on the other hand, are excessively *open systems* where entry is easy and thresholds negligible. They constitute 'nonregulated markets' with high mobility and high dispersion of power. Parties do not perform even minimal functions of gatekeeping. System boundaries are diffuse and porous. Guards are down, and the routes to power are open for easy ascent. Candidacies (and offices) may be conquered from the outside or the margins of the system. Entry into the political market is virtually free. It is nearly costless in terms of lifetime invested. Spontaneous self-nomination is feasible. Given efficient mass communication facilities, intraelite cooperation and alliance building are rendered superfluous. When 'antipolitical' moods prevail, it may even turn out to be counterproductive.

## **6. The Degree of Competition**

The existence of party competition is a core element, a defining characteristic of modern democracy. Both OIPS as well as UIPS are under suspicion of scoring low on this variable.

### **6.1. Deficits of Competition**

The concept of party competition is "a bit like the proverbial elephant: easy to spot but hard to define" (Strom 1989, 278). The *ease of access* to the party system we discussed before represents one rather uncontroversial component of competition. The potential for new challengers to enter the electoral market is a valuable measure of potential competition or 'contestability' (ibid.). Another key dimension of competition is the *stakes* parties have in elections. What do they have

to win or lose? How serious are the potential sanctions they might fear from upcoming elections? This variable, which might be called the *electoral dependency* of parties, is once again a composite variable with various subdimensions. Electoral stakes are multiple, and party systems are complex and dynamic, so that generalizations are difficult. We therefore limit ourselves once more to one single question: whether the electoral results are likely to affect the composition of the subsequent government.

There are two situations where this probability is so low that we might be entitled to speak of overinstitutionalization. (a) On the one hand, *corporatist-consociational democracies* may show a conspicuous lack of competition. Indeed, they may be characterized by party collusion instead of competition. Parties may engage in (formal or informal) power-sharing arrangements which, given existing voter loyalties, effectively preclude any change of roles between government and opposition. They may form 'consociational cartels' that make alternation in power (appear to be) *de facto* impossible (e.g., postwar Austria until 1966). (b) On the other hand, a similar picture of immobility and monopolization of power emerges where *predominant parties* rule protected by an aura of invincibility (e.g., Japan until 1993 or Italy until 1993).

Notice that the utilities or disutilities parties expect from elections do not simply depend on their possible payoffs but also on the *probabilities* of these payoffs. So, once again, past and expected volatility rates play a crucial role in defining the probability of electoral change. Both cases we mentioned presuppose *low electoral volatilities*, i.e., low probabilities/low expectations of change.<sup>9</sup>

## 6.2. Surpluses of Competition

Conversely, weakly institutionalized party systems appear to be plagued by too much competition. Of course, this proposition comes under immediate suspicion of being dictated by the exigencies of conceptual symmetry. Is it really ever admissible to speak of *too much* democratic competition?

One rather conventional and easy answer could take the (centrifugal versus centripetal) 'mechanics' of party systems as its point of reference and define excessive competition as excessive *polarization*.

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<sup>9</sup> Schedler (1994) elaborates, clarifies, and corrects the idea of party system collusion (analyzing the case of Austria).

Another, somewhat more adventurous and tentative answer could claim, first, that the number of parties in UIPS tends to be higher than in consolidated settings while, second, the relation between the *number of suppliers* and the *degree of competition* might be quite different in electoral markets from what it is in economic markets. In the latter, we find a *positive* relationship between the two variables: deconcentration appears as a prerequisite of competition. In the former, the relationship might well be *negative* (when passing a certain threshold). Two-party systems can be highly competitive, while fragmented systems may tend to produce not perfect competition but spurious competition. Too many political competitors may contribute to *information overloads*. As a consequence, voters may either decide to limit their attention to a few parties or end up beyond notoriously imperfect consumer information in a state close to perfect confusion.

A third answer would state that the *openness* of UIPS (see Section 5) predictably leads to irrational modes of competition (judged by the criteria of sincerity and effectiveness).

'Disorganized' mass societies are structurally prone to give rise to populist politics. Where systems of representation are fragmentary and weak, political actors search for substitutes. The general recipes are simple. Parties are liabilities? Then create movements. Intermediate organizations are fragile or hostile? Then simulate direct relationships with the people. Citizens lack trust in the system? Then exploit their readiness to invest trust in concrete persons. (In sum, when linkage-institutions fail, telegenic populism is happy to take their place.)

UIPS do not, however, only encourage classical populist invocations of the people, their enemies and their savior. At least when combined with presidentialism, they also tend systematically to fall into the trap of 'electoral populism.' In UIPS, presidential candidates have to attract a heterogeneous nonpartisan (unorganized and unattached) electorate. In order to do so (in an open political market), they are compelled to engage in competitive overpromising, and the eventual winner will be swept into office with a strong electoral 'mandate for change.' However, lacking the institutional basis to implement his program, it is highly probable that he will find himself unable (or unwilling) to carry out this strong 'popular mandate,' which may turn out to be both economically as well as politically impossible. Consequently, our Mr. President might abandon his electoral promises, convert to economic orthodoxy, and try to forge a new 'governing alliance,' often diametrically opposed to the 'electoral alliance' that brought him to power (see Ducatzenzeiler, Faucher, and Castro Rea 1992).

### **6.3. Vertical Accountability**

The logics both of overdeveloped and of inchoate party systems also work against the effective operation of electoral, 'vertical' accountability. At the extreme, they lead to polities where elections are truly inconsequential and where citizens therefore find themselves in a way disenfranchised.

From democratic theory we learn that elected officials want to be reelected and therefore try to rule 'for the people.' The anticipation of eventual electoral sanctions is supposed to work as an effective incentive for leaders to take popular preferences into account. Contrary to this general expectation, UIPS and OIPS once more share an exceptional status. To them, the democratic 'rule of anticipated sanctions' does not apply. Put simply, in OIPS party politicians enjoy too much job security, in UIPS too little. In the former cases they know that voters will not throw them out regardless of what they do. In the latter they know that voters will—also regardless of what they do. In OIPS, elections are riskless 'insurance games,' while in UIPS they are gambles that for officeholders, however, conceal the almost inescapable 'iron law' of nonreelection.<sup>10</sup> In both situations, decisionmakers have become independent of future elections, which consequently no longer put strong institutional restraints on them.

## **7. Horizontal Accountability**

In both under- and overinstitutionalized party systems it proves structurally difficult for parties and parliaments to hold governments 'horizontally' accountable.<sup>11</sup>

### **7.1. The Weight of Party Programs**

Even in consolidated polities, one should not overstate the constraining force that party structures and party programs exert on party leaders. In UIPS and OIPS, however, the practical weight of party platforms may actually approach zero. In both cases, the basic reason is identical: the excessive power of top party officials. Their

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<sup>10</sup> In some UIPS they will fall victims to the hopelessly wide 'expectations gaps' they themselves have produced through their electoral campaigns. In other cases they just face the popular habit of mercilessly refusing any reelection on grounds of a principled suspicion towards politicians. And in most presidential systems the certainty of nonreelection is even constitutionally enshrined.

<sup>11</sup> The notion of 'horizontal accountability' is borrowed from O'Donnell (1991).

abilities to define, interpret, or circumvent official platforms, however, operate in radically dissimilar contexts. In UIPS, party leaders preside over more or less improvised and diffuse personal electoral vehicles, while in OIPS they head highly differentiated and structured mass-membership organizations. The former are powerful because they can do without solid party organizations. Their strength derives from the strategic viability of solitary action. The latter are powerful because they occupy the peak of disciplined pyramidal structures of power. Their strength is based on their controls over functioning bureaucratic apparatuses.

It is especially in inchoate party systems that party programs are of striking irrelevance. Here, the contribution of party organizations to political decision-making is nil. Parties either represent poorly veiled 'patronage machines' (power) or they function as mere advertising agencies for ambitious individuals. They are internally weak and highly vulnerable to takeovers by surprise from their periphery. Unconstrained by party programs, procedures, or members, party leaders are actually free to do what they want. They may break their electoral promises, they may move back and forth along the dividing line of left versus right, they may turn the party program upside down. They may do all this and more, and their as-personalist-as-ephemeral 'parties for rent' (Hagopian 1972) will follow them faithfully. (Most of Brazil's parties fall into this category of loose, low constraint organizations; see Mainwaring 1992/93).

## 7.2. The Weight of Opposition

The probable impact that too little and too much institutionalization have on the effectiveness of legislative control may be sketched very briefly. On the one hand, weak, fragile, and fragmented parties tend to produce weak, fragile, and fragmented parliaments and oppositions.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, and somewhat ironically, in OIPS legislative bodies may be powerless too. This is the case when overdisciplined parties 'exaggerate' the fusion of powers inherent in parliamentary systems (which represent the typical regime type for OIPS), or when 'consociational' 'maximum-size coalitions' eliminate any effective opposition in parliament by integrating it into the government.

## 8. Horizontal Linkages

Parties are usually analyzed (and justified) as institutions that connect citizens and politicians. But parties are not just 'vertical linkage institutions.' They are also 'horizontal linkage institutions' that interconnect state (and parastate) institutions.

The extent to which parties fulfill this function is radically different in our two familiar types of party systems. In UIPS, parties do not link anything, either vertically or horizontally. On the contrary, governments lacking parties worth the name as well as legislative majorities often retreat into confrontational isolation coupled with hermetic technocratic policy-making.

In this respect, OIPS occupy the logical opposite. Here, parties link everything with every-thing. Horizontal linkaging is encompassing and dense. Parties are omnipresent and (seemingly) omnipotent. Retaking Morlino's terminology, parties 'occupy' the state and parastate institutions, or at least, they embrace them in tight 'symbiosis.'<sup>13</sup> Their extensive networks represent one of the

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12 In presidential regimes (typical for UIPS), one should add, parliamentary parties have incentives to unite against the president, blocking his initiatives. As a consequence (or maybe as a prior cause), presidents try to circumvent the parliamentary unity of (negative) action. Executive-legislative relations, however, are not always the zero sum game they are conventionally thought to be. In UIPS, they tend to work as *negative sum games*. Both sides try to accumulate power at the other's expense, and they end up mutually destroying their institutional capacity to act. In short, temporary coalitions of oppositional forces in parliament may acquire strong *veto powers*. But as a rule this acquisition will prove not only ineffective (in terms of policy formulation) but *self-defeating*.

13 Morlino, classifying the possible power relationships between parties and civil society actors, distinguishes 'occupation' (of social actors by parties), 'symbiosis' (symmetric relations of exchange) and 'penetration' (of parties by social actors) (1989, 16–25).

most convincing (and criticized) features of party-system overdevelopment, a.k.a. *partitocrazia*. Parties have migrated into every corner of state and parastate institutions, and everywhere they forge and sustain multiple relations of dependency. They make legislative bodies obedient to the executive branch. They politicize and control the public labor market. They channel access to public services. They codirect state-sponsored nonpolitical institutions like schools, the judiciary, or public television. And they reproduce their pattern of competition and cooperation in neocorporatist interest organizations.

## **9. The Perception of Actors and Actions**

### **9.1. Individual and Collective Identities**

People joining an association are supposed to accept its program and organizational structure. Therefore, crossing the membership boundaries of a determinate organization (in whatever direction) changes their public self-presentation. In this respect, organizations co-define (segments of) their members' identities.

Political parties are normally assumed to do the same. According to the standard wisdom of political science, parties are complexity-reducing and confidence-building institutions. They structure electoral competition by providing candidates with collective identities and thus voters with reliable frames of interpretation to recognize, evaluate, and eventually trust them. In this respect, UIPS operate in an opposite manner to OIPS.

In underinstitutionalized contexts party labels are virtually meaningless. In accordance with their material powerlessness, parties do not have any symbolic value either. They do not represent political communities but personal instruments. They do not give their members a language, only a loudspeaker. The main political actors are not parties but individual persons. Parties have no existence of their own. Their identities (and fortunes) are tied to those of their leaders. Their boundaries are diffuse, and politicians switch opportunistically from one party to another. Individual identities overshadow and neutralize any binding force collective entities may dare to claim.

Inversely, in hyperinstitutionalized contexts "the party is everything" (as former Austrian prime minister Fred Sinowatz once formulated). While UIPS are worlds of personal actors, OIPS are worlds of political corporations. Not individuals

but parties dominate (or even monopolize) the political stage. Their collective identities strongly 'contaminate' or 'colonize' their members' individual identities. In OIPS, people do not embrace or oppose parties because of their personnel (as in UIPS) nor do they embrace or oppose persons because of their membership in determinate parties (as in COPS). Instead, people oppose actors if they belong to a party, that is, to *any* party regardless of its ideological standing, while they support others who appear to be nonpartisan or antipartisan independents.

In sum, UIPS have not yet realized "the passage from a personalized to an abstract perception of parties" (Sartori 1976, 248), while OIPS have apparently overshot the mark. In both cases, the relationship between "the concrete and the abstract" (Claessens 1980) seems out of balance.

## 9.2. Private and Public Spaces

What are the motives of party politicians? Are they just driven by individual interests? Or do they strive to realize determinate principles and programs? And what is the nature of political parties? Are they mere vehicles of personal ambition? Or do they serve to implement the platforms they proclaim?

The psycho-logic of parties and party politicians have often been mistaken for theoretical issues. They are not. They represent an empirical question which has to be answered from case to case. But more importantly, they represent a problem that democratic institutions in principle are designed to render *irrelevant*. Democratic elections make the politicians' pursuit of personal interests and their concern for voter preferences *compatible*. Regardless of their real motives, intentions, and principles, political actors dependent on popular support are forced to take popular preferences into account (whatever that means in practice).

Institutions *embody* values, we often hear. That seems to be accurate if the institutions in question actually *enforce* these values. Because of their shared failure to establish effective mechanisms of accountability, both UIPS and OIPS encourage popular convictions that party politicians are driven by naked self-interest, violating electoral programs as well as majoritarian interests. In both cases, citizens profoundly distrust (party) institutions and doubt their capacity to discipline actors. They tend to feel strongly "that all politics [is] about personal gain and nothing else" (Schöpflin 1993, 277). They perceive (party) institutions "as nothing more than façades hiding different personal interests" (*ibid.*, 276). According to this 'theatrical' or 'dramaturgical' view of politics, the publicly visible 'front stage' of politics inherently

lacks credibility. Political agents are assumed to be mere actors who stage deceptive pillow fights while in reality, that is, in the private and presumptively authentic 'back stage' of politics, they are exclusively dedicated to self-enrichment and self-maintenance in power. Parties appear simply as hollow shells disguising with fancy programs the relentlessly egocentric logics of politics. In essence, according to public perceptions, the public space is withering away.<sup>14</sup>

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14 "[O] descrédito se instala na medida que a população não confia nas instituições [...] ninguém acredita na possibilidade da transparência e da neutralidade da intervenção pública. Qualquer reforma é entendida ou como uma oportunidade oferecida aos amigos do regime para obterem um ganho pessoal, ou como uma ameaça aos opositores do regime de uma perda em proveito do concorrente" (Ducatenzeiler, Faucher, and Castro Rea 1992, 168). "The consolidation of democracy," writes Philippe Schmitter, "involves both the choice of institutions and the formation of a *political stratum*" (1991, 8). In underinstitutionalized contexts, the *simultaneous* "fashioning of credible institutions and a credible political class" indeed represents absolutely urgent (and long-range) "twin necessities" (Power 1991, 77).

## 10. Concluding Remarks

Diagnosing 'institutional illnesses' immediately elicits the practical question about possible therapies or countertrends. What are the chances of curing (whether by self-healing or by medical intervention) 'too weak' and 'too strong' party systems? Obviously, this question could easily fill another paper. Nevertheless, instead of resuming (and repeating) our ideal-typical journey through over- and underinstitutionalized partyscapes (for an overview see table below), we will sketch some tentative ideas about dynamic aspects of both systems.

### 10.1. New Normalities

Any counterfactual inquiry into whether UIPS and OIPS might eventually converge on some middle ground of institutional 'normality' (and normativity) must first try to identify this hypothetical point of (either 'natural' or 'manufactured') convergence. In this respect, we have to be aware that party system 'normalization' today assumes quite a different meaning from, say, one or two decades ago. Since the late 1960s, the institutional reality (as well as the perceived 'normality') of Western European party systems has changed significantly. We would dare to generalize that this change has been one of 'deinstitutionalization.' As a rule, the old party systems have shifted to the left of our scale of institutionalization (see Figure 1). And with this, the *attainable normality* of new party systems in East and South has changed, too.<sup>15</sup> In Figure 1 this simultaneous redefinition of present normalities (of old party systems) and of possible future normalities (of new party systems) is symbolized by the move from COPS-1 to COPS-2.

### 10.2. The Institution of Interdependencies

So far we have stated that our two party systems' eventual point of convergence promises less institutional solidity than was the (exceptional) historical norm of postwar Western European democracies. Fine. But how can these systems be brought to move towards institutional normality?

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15 "Very substantial changes have taken place in the nature and role of parties in well-established Western democracies. It would be anachronistic to presume that parties in today's neodemocracies will have to go through all the stages and perform all the functions of their predecessors." (Schmitter 1993, 3-4).

We hypothesize that for UIPS to move to the center the ‘invisible hand’ of the political market will *not* do the job. Individual rationalities, when not filtered, disciplined, or socialized by institutions, develop strong centrifugal dynamics. Mere ‘habituation’ may be sufficient to reproduce certain institutions and to make them acceptable—but not to create them. That is, we need at least a minimum of purposeful ‘*meta-institutional engineering*’ (without overestimating its often precarious effectiveness).

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**OVERVIEW TABLE**

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**Contrasting Underinstitutionalized Party Systems (UIPS) and  
Overinstitutionalized Party Systems (OIPS)**

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Section	Dimension	UIPS	OIPS
2.1	Extension in time	discontinuous	hyperstable
2.1	Extension in space	regional decentralized	and national and centralized
2.2	Role of individual actors	dominant	marginal
3	Electoral volatility	very high	very low
3.3	Systemic volatility	fluidity	immobility
3.3	Life-world volatility	shifting loyalties	captive voters
4.1	Uncertainty	extremely high	extremely low
4.2	Time horizons	short	long
4.3	Policy styles	politics of redemption	bureaucratization cum entertainment
4.4	Citizen expectations	illusions and disillusion	indifference
5	Market access	open	closed
6	Market structure	fragmentation	collusion or predominance (quasi- monopoly)
6.3	Vertical accountability	low	low
7	Horizontal accountability	weak	weak
7.1	Party leaders’ programmatic discipline	absent	moderate
7.2	Opposition politics	ephemeral coalitions, powerlessness	veto co-optation or permanent minorities
8	Horizontal linkaging	absent	omnipresent

9.1	Collective identities	unstable and weak	hyperstable and dominant	and
9.2	Credibility	negative	precarious	
9.2	Citizen evaluations	antipartisanship	latent antipartisanship	
10	Meta-institutional engineering	establishment interdependencies	of dissolution dependencies	of

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The notion of ‘meta-institutions’ (Stepan and Skach 1992) is here formulated from a party system viewpoint. It refers to institutional arrangements that operate, so to speak, above the party system. Most prominently, they comprise the regime type (presidential versus parliamentary) and the corpus of electoral rules.

Essentially, these meta-institutions constitute *structures of dependency*. In our view, their design and selection in new democracies should be guided by one basic principle: *establish interdependencies*. In Nibert Elias’s terms, mutual dependencies have a ‘civilizing’ impact on interactions. Or, in the more prosaic language of rational choice, they give incentives for cooperation.<sup>16</sup>

### 10.3. All that is solid...

In OIPS the dynamics of change appear to be more predictable and less elite dependent. The thawing of ‘frozen’ party systems bears the mark of fate. Overinstitutionalized systems are simply forced to adapt to changed circumstances. People redefine their allegiances, new oppositional forces surge, party reformers advance the deconstruction of interdependencies (in contrast to their construction in UIPS), elections acquire new competitiveness, etc. In a sense, thanks to the operation of liberal democratic meta-institutions, hyperinstitutionalized party systems fall victim to that venerable ‘iron law’ of modernity (following Marx) that “all that is solid melts into air.” (See Marx and Engels 1989 [1948] and Berman’s commentary, 1982.)

And by way of a postscript: The explanation for this ‘logic of decay’ might be quite simple. Let us adopt a standpoint of artificial naïveté and ask once again: What are overinstitutionalized party systems? Reviewing and rethinking our preceding exercise of ideal-typing at this point leads us to put forward (actually, to confess) a

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16 Of course, this suggestion is only pseudo-practical. Since *dei ex machina* are on the whole not available, every recommendation for institution-building has to deal with the problem of where to get the institutions and the cooperative motives necessary to establish them.

somehow unexpected answer: OIPS are rare and transitory phenomena. Squeezed into a nutshell: OIPS are consociational or predominant party systems which face significant declines of popular support—and (still) fail to respond to them. They are lags of adaptation. And further on: If overinstitutionalized party systems are just rare animals in the process of becoming extinct by way of popular selection, do not waste your time hunting for them. Instead, look for specific *features* of overinstitutionalization within existing consolidated party systems.

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