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# Explaining Party Splits and Mergers in Europe

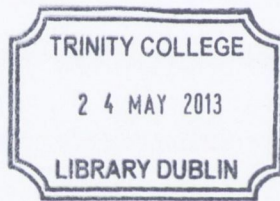
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of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) 2012



Thesis 9827  
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## Declaration

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I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other University. I declare that this thesis represents entirely my own work. I agree that the Library may lend or copy the thesis upon request. At the time of submission of this thesis, a slightly revised version of Chapter 6 was accepted for publication in *Party Politics*.

Rai-

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## Summary

This thesis investigates the following research question: *what explains party splits and mergers?* The thesis argues that splits and mergers necessitate a trade-off between political elites' office and policy or ideological goals. Parties split when political elites expect office gains or when expected office losses are lower than ideological gains. Similarly, parties merge when expected office gains are higher than ideological losses and when the merging parties are able to credibly commit to a merger agreement. These theoretical arguments are tested using statistical analyses of a new dataset recording splits and mergers of the parties with at least 1 percent of vote in 24 European democracies during the post-war period, as well as 11 qualitative case studies. In order to capture more precisely political elites' incentives to split and merge parties, these analyses distinguish between (1) major and minor splits and (2) major and takeover mergers. The size of the splinter faction relative to the parent party is larger in the case of major splits than in the case of minor splits. Major mergers occur when the label of the merged party is different from those of the merging parties, while in the case of takeover mergers the name of the merged party is the same as that of one of the merging parties.

Empirical analyses show that the theoretical argument explains major splits and major mergers to a larger extent than minor splits and takeover mergers. More specifically, the effect of party size on the probability of major splits and major mergers is not linear due to the existence of thresholds at which the party can obtain legislative seats and become a government formateur. Major splits are more likely if intra-party factions expect to remain above these thresholds after fission, while major mergers are most likely when the merged party, relative to its component parties, is more likely to achieve these thresholds. Thus, in countries with moderately restrictive electoral systems and strong national governments, such as most European democracies, political elites will coordinate through fission and fusion on relatively small but viable parties or



relatively large parties. Major splits of medium-sized parties and major mergers leading to relatively small or large parties are therefore most likely. However, this coordination is less likely when parties have well-established labels, because the risk of losing the support of partisan voters due to fission or fusion provides an important obstacle to these organisational transformations. Furthermore, ideological divisions between political elites can lead to splits and prevent mergers. Also, credible commitment problems can prevent major mergers, especially if merging parties are of unequal size and they have not previously cooperated in a pre-electoral coalition.

While the main focus of this thesis is to explain party splits and mergers, Chapter 6 of the dissertation examines another way in which political elites can shape party systems. More precisely, it challenges a well-established argument in the literature suggesting that party membership organisations do not matter in post-communist democracies. The chapter demonstrates that party organisation has a strong positive effect on party system stability in Lithuania. The chapter proposes an innovative measure of party organisation, which is based on the number of individuals that parties delegate to serve as members of electoral commissions and election observers. This measure can be used in the future comparative analyses of membership organisation.

These findings emphasise the crucial role of political elites in shaping party systems. This project implies that under fairly proportional electoral systems and relatively strong national government political elites are likely to impede the stabilisation of new party systems if some existing party organisations are medium-sized. In established democracies elite re-coordination is most likely if the electoral support of existing parties decreases below the threshold necessary for obtaining seats or forming government, although strong party roots in society may limit elites' ability to reshape party systems. Finally, elites can also assure party system stability by building strong membership organisations.



## Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation benefited from the help of many people. I would first like to thank to my supervisors Gail McElroy and Ken Benoit. Ken's guidance was crucial in the early stages of this project. His insights preceded my own thinking by months or even years, but most of them finally appeared in one form or another in different parts of this thesis. His methodological advice was also very useful. Gail's supervision was invaluable in the later stages of this project. Her advice on various theoretical, methodological and empirical aspects of this project, her enthusiasm, good sense of humour and constant encouragement were critical components of my successful PhD experience.

Other members of staff and PhD colleagues at Trinity College Dublin also contributed to the development of this thesis. In particular, Robert Thomson was always encouraging, willing to discuss my research and to provide me with excellent comments. My discussions with Thomas Daeubler substantially improved the quality of this thesis. Mirjam Allik, Raj Chari, Ed Coughlan, Michael Gallagher, Sander Ensink, Stephen Erskine, Jacqueline Hayden, Henrik Hermansson, Tim Hicks, Martin Hooper, Eddie Hyland, Koji Kagotani, Justin Leinaweaver, Rene Lindstaedt, Edwina Love, Sarah Maas, Michael Marsh, Caroline McEvoy, Corina Miller, Shqipe Mjekiqi, Will Phelan, John Slapin, Marta Smolen, Magda Staniek and Janis Umblijs have also provided me with advice and other forms of support.

A number of other scholars have provided insightful comments on various drafts of this project. I would like to thank to Nicole Bolleyer, John Carey, Kevin Deegan-Krause, Sergiu Gherghina, Tim Haughton, Yael Shomer, Allan Sikk, Maria Spirova, Istvan Szekely, Jack Vowles and Steven Wolinetz, as well as to the participants of various conferences and workshops that I have attended in the last three years.

I am grateful to my friends, former colleagues and teachers at Central European Uni-

versity, who inspired me to start my PhD studies. My thanks goes to Monica Andriescu, George Jigla-Labunet, Hristo Hristov, Lena Li, Razvan Manta, Olga Osinovskaya-Romanova, Nina Rozhanovskaya and many others.

I am also greatly indebted to my parents and my brother Andrius. This project would have been impossible without their support. Finally, I am also grateful to Adriana. Her constant encouragement and belief in me provided the impetus for this project and the results of our discussions on party politics are reflected on almost every page of this thesis.



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# Chapter 1

## Party instability: effects and causes

### 1.1 Introduction

The parliamentary elections held in Greece in May and June of 2012 represent an important episode in the evolution of the European sovereign debt crisis throughout the early 2010s. The initial election held in May resulted in a stalemate with the two incumbent parties, the centre-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and the centre-right New Democracy (ND), *together* achieving two seats less than the absolute majority. No other elected party was willing to support the bailout deal with international lenders, and these anti-bailout parties were too divided to form an alternative government. As a result, a new election in June was called, with New Democracy and the main anti-bailout party, the leftist SYRIZA, dubbed the front-runners. After an intense electoral campaign New Democracy received the largest share of vote and acquired the 50 seats bonus, which enabled it to form a coalition government with PASOK and the Democratic Left (DIMAR) party. The formation of this government provided assurance, in the short term at least, that Greece would continue to implement the austerity measures agreed with international lenders and thereby avoid the unpredictable consequences of an exit from the eurozone.

The occurrence of several splits and a merger during this period had a considerable impact on the outcomes of these elections and the associated policy implications. The Democratic Alliance (DISY), a splinter group of New Democracy established in 2010,



won 2.6 percent of vote in the May election, but fell short of the 3 percent electoral threshold. In the event that DISY had not split from New Democracy prior to the election, it is likely that PASOK and New Democracy could have obtained an absolute majority of seats. Interestingly, SYRIZA also split prior to the May election, resulting in the foundation of the DIMAR party, which obtained 6.1 percent of the vote and 19 seats. This split prevented SYRIZA from winning the bonus seats and forming a minority anti-bailout government. However, while New Democracy re-integrated its splinter group prior to the June election<sup>1</sup>, SYRIZA failed to merge with any other significant parties. This provided New Democracy with a crucial advantage over its competitor and led to the formation of the three-party coalition government after the June election.

The above exemplifies how party splits and mergers, or the absence thereof, can have important implications for election and public policy outcomes. It is therefore surprising that the political science literature has relatively little to say about the causes of these party transformations. The literature is dominated by single case studies or small-n comparisons, while systematic comparative studies of these phenomena are absent. The main goal of this research project is to fill this gap in the literature by answering the question *what explains party splits and mergers?* In order to answer this question, the project uses a new dataset that records the splits and mergers of political parties which gained at least 1 percent of vote in 24 democracies in the European Union in the period between the late 1940s to the late 2000s. The descriptive analysis shows that party splits and mergers are relatively frequent in many of these countries, but are, on average, more common in post-communist democracies. The theoretical framework of this research project suggests that parties split when political elites expect office gains or when expected office losses are lower than policy gains. Similarly, parties merge when expected office gains are higher than policy losses and when merging parties are able

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<sup>1</sup>Antonis Samaras' New Democracy wins the Greek General Elections, European Elections monitor, the Robert Schuman Foundation.

to credibly commit to a merger agreement. Large-n statistical analyses and qualitative case studies support these expectations.

In particular, one of the main findings of these analyses is that the effect of party size on the probability of fission and fusion is not linear due to the existence of thresholds at which the party can obtain legislative seats and become a government formateur. The results of this research project provide strong support for the notion that splits are more likely if intra-party factions expect to remain above these thresholds after fission, while mergers are most likely when the merged party, in contrast to its component parties, is likely to achieve these thresholds. These findings imply that in countries with relatively proportional electoral systems and reasonably strong national governments, such as most of the established and newer post-communist European democracies, political elites will coordinate on relatively small parties, which can serve as junior coalition partners, or relatively large parties, which could become government formateurs. However, this coordination is most likely when parties are young. Once they have well-established labels, the risk of losing the support of partisan voters due to fission or fusion provides an important obstacle to these transformations. Thus, if a system consisting of many medium-sized parties endures over time, it is unlikely to evolve to a system with large and small parties due to elite coordination. This finding provides important implications for explaining various dimensions of party systems, which I discuss in the conclusions of the dissertation.

While this project seeks to explore and explain the patterns of party splits and mergers, it also considers such patterns as part of the broader phenomenon of instability in party supply or simply party instability (Birch, 2003; Rose and Munro, 2003; Kreuzer and Pettai, 2003; Spirova, 2007; Tavits, 2008*a*; Powell and Tucker, 2009; Herron, 2009), which is an indication of elite coordination (Cox, 1997). In order to achieve their goals (such as office or policy), political elites coordinate into a different set of parties than those which competed in the preceding election. In addition to splits and mergers, sev-



eral other forms of elite coordination, which have been subject to systematic research, can result in party instability. For example, new parties which are not splinters of existing parties can emerge, existing parties can form pre-electoral coalitions and individual legislators or candidates can switch between parties. These other forms of coordination are conceptually close to party splits and mergers. For example, the literature on new parties usually seeks to explain the emergence and electoral success of both genuinely new and splinter parties. Similarly, studies on legislative party switching examine both individual switching by legislators and splits and mergers of legislative parties. Furthermore, pre-electoral alliances, especially involving joint candidate nominations, are reminiscent of temporary mergers. In fact, an important puzzle in the literature on pre-electoral coalitions is why parties choose these temporary coalitions instead of merging (Golder, 2006*a*, 25). Thus, this research project draws on insights from the literatures on these alternative forms of coordination for designing explanations of splits and mergers. One section of this chapter provides the review of the research on each of these forms of electoral coordination. At the same time the findings of this project also contribute to an improved understanding of new party emergence, party switching and pre-electoral coalition formation.

While the primary focus of this thesis is to explain two forms of elite coordination rather than understanding the effects of elite behaviour on party systems (although the project provides important insights into what these effects could be), Chapter 6 nevertheless examines the effect of elites on party systems. More precisely, it explores the effect of party membership organisation and campaign spending on party system stability in the post-communist democracy of Lithuania.

The remainder of the present chapter places the main question addressed by this dissertation (explaining splits and mergers) in the context of the broader comparative politics literature, by demonstrating the relevance of the question and the potential explanations of fission and fusion. However, it is firstly important to define what is



meant by splits and mergers. I define a party split as the emergence of a splinter party. The splinter party is defined as a party whose significant share of senior members and/or the leader come from another existing party (or several parties in rare cases), although this original party(ies) continue(s) to exist after the split, even if under a different name. Furthermore, I only consider those splits following which both successor parties participated in the next national parliamentary election (irrespective of their vote share) or merged with third parties that participated in the next election. I define a merged party as a party with a significant share of its senior members coming from two or more existing parties, which following fusion, do not participate in the next national parliamentary election independently.

The remainder of this chapter consists of three sections. The next section discusses the (reciprocal) linkage between elite coordination and party systems, thus providing the justification of the importance of this dissertation, and also pointing to some explanations of elite coordination. I then review the research on five forms of elite coordination that provides the basis for the explanation of splits and mergers tested in this project. The chapter concludes with the overview of the thesis.

## **1.2 Party instability and party systems**

The study of party instability is important first and foremost due to its effects on party systems. Political elites can shape party systems by adjusting the supply of alternative parties which voters can choose between at elections. This research project argues that elite coordination is not simply pre-determined by institutional or sociological factors, but plays an independent causal role in shaping party systems. As such, elite coordination provides a complementary explanation of party systems to the most established institutional and sociological approaches. This explanation, however, is highly endogenous to the explanandum itself, because elites' ability to shape party systems is constrained by previous election outcomes. In this section I discuss these linkages

in greater detail. In particular, I first describe dimensions of party systems that are affected by elite behaviour. Secondly, I describe how existing institutional and sociological approaches to party systems do not sufficiently consider the role of elites. Finally, I show how party system characteristics affect elite coordination, thus giving some clues to the explanations of party splits and mergers that are outlined in Chapters 2 and 4.

The main dimensions on which party systems vary are fragmentation, polarisation and institutionalisation and/or stability (Sartori, 2005; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995). These party system features have important implications for the quality of democracy and public policy. For example, higher fragmentation increases political representation but reduces electoral accountability (Powell, 2000) and the propensity of policy change (Persson and Tabellini, 2003). Under-institutionalised party systems can undermine electoral accountability and political representation, leading to unpredictable policy outcomes (Mainwaring, 1999; Birch, 2003).

While party system fragmentation and polarisation are relatively easy to conceptualise, the institutionalisation and stability concepts are more ambiguous and thus require a more extensive discussion. Mainwaring (1999) defines an institutionalised party system as one in “which actors develop expectations and behavior based on the premise that the fundamental contours and rules of party competition and behavior will prevail into the foreseeable future”. He distinguishes four dimensions of institutionalisation: regularity in the patterns of inter-party competition, stable party roots in society, the legitimacy of electoral process and parties, and strong party organisations. While his concept of institutionalisation is well-suited for broad comparisons of party systems, it is less useful for explaining these differences. The broadness of its dimensions and indicators, and the lack of empirical correlation between them (Luna and Altman, 2011) means that it is difficult to design and test causal theories of explanatory value. Furthermore, many of these dimensions and indicators are causally related. For example, the legitimacy of electoral process and parties is intrinsically linked to



the democratic consolidation concept and as such may also be a consequence of the other three dimensions. Similarly, the second and fourth dimensions can be causes of the regularity in the patterns of party competition, which is usually measured by the index of electoral volatility (Pedersen, 1979).<sup>2</sup> For example, Roberts and Wibbels (1999) and Bischoff (2012) find that party system age, as an indicator of stable partisan identities, reduces electoral volatility. The strength of party organisations also affects electoral volatility (Tavits, 2012), as demonstrated in Chapter 6 of this dissertation. In addition, party instability, which according to Mainwaring (1999) is also an indicator of strong party organisations, affects electoral stability (Tavits, 2008a) and the formation of stable partisanship bonds (Dalton and Weldon, 2007).

These linkages imply that the understanding of the causes of party system institutionalisation, including the effect of party instability on this phenomenon, is hardly possible without considering each dimension or indicator separately. As a result, the concept of institutionalisation as defined by Mainwaring proves less useful for such an endeavour. This research project avoids this problem by narrowing down the concept of party system institutionalisation and defining it as stable party roots in society, especially as the existence of stable partisanship bonds. This narrower definition of party system institutionalisation has been applied by several other researchers. For example, Cox's study on electoral coordination, on which this research project builds extensively, uses a very similar definition (based on that proposed by Sartori 1968) referring to the existence of "habitual allegiances in the electorate" (Cox, 1997, 152). Studies on electoral volatility also use the same definition of institutionalisation (Roberts and Wibbels, 1999; Tavits, 2005). Party system stability is defined as the stability of electoral outcomes in terms of electoral volatility and new party success and thus is very close to the first dimension of Mainwaring's definition of institutionalisation. Thus, the project

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<sup>2</sup>Recently several researchers proposed various variants of the electoral volatility index trying to differentiate the volatility caused by elites and voters (Toka, 1997; Markowski, 2001; Rose and Munro, 2003; Meleshevich, 2007; Powell and Tucker, 2009; Mainwaring, España and Gervasoni, 2009)



considers party system institutionalisation, party system stability and party instability not as dimensions of the institutionalisation concept, but as separate concepts that are nevertheless causally linked.

Two of the most established explanations of the variation in various dimensions of party systems (fragmentation, polarisation, institutionalisation and stability) are electoral and constitutional institutions and social cleavages. Institutions have the most direct effect on party system fragmentation (as well as polarisation, which is closely related to fragmentation) (Duverger, 1954; Rae, 1967; Taagepera and Shugart, 1989; Lijphart, 1994; Cox, 1997; Benoit, 2002; Clark and Golder, 2006). At the district level, electoral systems shape party systems in two ways (Duverger, 1954; Rae, 1967; Taagepera and Shugart, 1989; Lijphart, 1994; Cox, 1997; Benoit, 2002; Mozaffar, Scarritt and Galaich, 2003; Clark and Golder, 2006). The “mechanical” effect limits the number of viable parties, or parties that have a chance to gain seats, to  $M+1$ , where  $M$  stands for district magnitude (Cox, 1997). The “psychological” effect of electoral system refers to the strategic behaviour of both voters, who desert non-viable parties in order to avoid the wastage of their vote, and elites, who also leave non-viable parties in the expectation of voters’ strategic behaviour, thus leading to  $M+1$  entrants at the district level. At the national level voters and elites should coordinate around the parties that have a chance to secure a powerful chief executive (president or prime minister), especially if this executive is selected using disproportional rules and if executive and legislative elections are proximally close. In addition, the number of parties should be higher if policymaking powers are concentrated at the regional or local level, as the regional or local parties would have fewer incentives to establish national parties (Chhibber and Kollman, 2004; Hicken, 2009). Institutions indirectly influence the level of electoral or party system stability, since party system fragmentation is closely related to electoral volatility (Bartolini and Mair, 1990). In addition, the change in electoral institutions could also increase electoral volatility (Roberts and Wibbels, 1999).

The social cleavage approach suggests that party systems are shaped by politicised social cleavages that provide the basis for party competition (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Deeply rooted social cleavages, once politicised, close the electoral marketplace and restrain the electoral mobility of voters. This increases party system institutionalisation and stability (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Roberts and Wibbels, 1999; Tavits, 2005; Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007), which can then be reduced only if significant social changes take place. Furthermore, a higher number of cleavages should also lead to greater party system fragmentation and possibly polarisation, although restrictive electoral institutions may reduce party proliferation (Clark and Golder, 2006).

While these two explanations provide a lot of leverage in explaining party systems, a key limitation, which also provides the main rationale for the present research project, is that they do not sufficiently consider the role of political elites in shaping party systems. The institutional approach largely considers the behaviour of political elites as a transmission belt of the institutional effects on party systems. However, while the electoral system does limit the freedom of action by elites of action by establishing the upper bound of viable parties, it still leaves a lot of space for elite-level coordination to determine the actual number of parties (and indirectly party system stability) if the electoral system is at least somewhat proportional. Similarly, presidential systems which employ the run-off formula also allow for variation in party system size. Duverger's theory suggests that under these proportional institutions the number of parties will be related to the number of social divisions. However, elite coordination can mould party systems of different sizes from the same social structure, especially in newer democracies or established democracies that recently experienced party system collapse (Zielinski, 2002). For example, Lipset and Rokkan (1967, 117) argue that "a crucial point in the discussion of the translation of the cleavage structures into party systems [concerns] the costs and the pay-offs of mergers, alliances, and coalitions". Similarly, party system stability also depends on whether elites have politicised existing social



divisions. Unfortunately, the cleavage approach does not yet have a well-established and general theory on how elites politicise some but not other social divisions (Chhibber and Kollman, 2004, 17; Mair, 2006).

Thus, in order to understand the variation in party systems, it is important to consider the independent effect of elite coordination, including party splits and mergers. Several studies have already provided evidence in this regard. For example, it has been suggested that volatile elites undermine party system institutionalisation by impeding the formation of voter partisanship (Moser, 1999; Birch, 2003; Brader and Tucker, 2001; Dalton and Weldon, 2007; Lupu and Stokes, 2009). Elite instability also increases electoral volatility (Tavits, 2008*a*) and undermines strategic voting (Crisp, Olivella and Potter, 2012). Case studies also show that volatile elites can undermine party system institutionalisation and stability (Gwiazda, 2009; Sitter and Bakke, 2005). While these effects are most pronounced in new democracies, political elites change party systems in established democracies as well, in particular through new party entry (Hug, 2001).

If elite coordination has an independent causal effect on party systems, it is important to understand when elites will coordinate into stable parties and when they will re-shuffle party supply through splits, mergers or other means. The theory of strategic coordination between elites and voters suggests that elites respond to previous electoral outcomes, meaning that, while it is an explanation of party systems, it is also endogenous to them. In particular, party system dimensions such as fragmentation, polarisation, institutionalisation or stability are aggregates of party size, ideology, institutionalisation and stability. In line with the logic of electoral coordination, this project argues that these party-specific variables, in the interaction with electoral and constitutional institutions, determine political elite incentives to pursue splits and mergers. As discussed in the next section, these characteristics have already been used for explaining several other forms of elite coordination. For example, the literature emphasises that new party emergence and party switching are less frequent



under institutionalised party systems (Tavits, 2006, 2008*b*; Heller and Mershon, 2005; Kreuzer and Pettai, 2009). This research project, however, provides the very first statistical analyses of party splits and mergers that carefully operationalise all of these variables. The large-*n* analyses, combined with qualitative party case studies, significantly advance our understanding of splits and mergers and thus provide important insights into how political elites shape party systems.

### **1.3 Explanations of party instability**

While the previous sections have already pointed to some explanations of party instability, such as electoral institutions and party system institutionalisation, this section reviews in greater detail the literature on five of its forms. The purpose of this section is twofold. Firstly, it provides the basis for the theoretical and empirical explanatory models of splits and mergers used in this project. Secondly, it highlights the gaps in the existing literature on elite volatility which this project seeks to address. In order to achieve these goals, each sub-section below summarises the evidence on the prevalence of one form of party instability and the associated theoretical and empirical explanations, and demonstrates how this research project contributes to the scholarship on that phenomenon.

#### **1.3.1 Party splits**

As mentioned in the introduction, case and small-*n* studies on specific splits dominate the empirical literature on party splits. Splits in Argentina (Wellhofer, 1974), Bulgaria and Hungary (Spirova, 2007), Italy (Giannetti and Laver, 2001; Rizzi, 1974), Estonia (Grofman, Mikkel and Taagepera, 2000), France (Ivaldi, 2003), Japan (Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995), Malawi (Rakner, Svasand and Khembo, 2007), Poland (Szczerbiak, 2001), South Korea (Park, 2010), Spain (Hopkin, 1999; Gunther and Hopkin, 2002), the UK (Crewe and King, 1995) and other countries have been analysed. These studies

provide rather impressionistic evidence on the prevalence of splits, but it is nevertheless suggested that they are much more frequent in new, especially post-communist, democracies (Mair, 1997; Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2011).

The most developed theoretical explanation of both splits and mergers is the partition function-form model developed by Kaminski (2001), which assumes seat-maximising parties. In this game, splits and coalitions (which are considered as equivalent to mergers) occur when they bring electoral benefits to parties. The model predicts that if electoral laws and electorate preferences remain stable for a longer period of time, splits and coalitions should be unlikely. Some of these implications are supported by the evidence from Poland in the 1990s.

Empirical case studies suggest that party unity is sustained or broken as the result of the bargaining between intra-party factions. A split is likely if a faction expects that it would enable it to gain a higher number of executive and legislative offices or to achieve its policy goals as compared to the option of remaining within the party (Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995; Kohn, 1992; Mair, 1990; Hopkin, 1999; Laver and Kato, 2001; Giannetti and Laver, 2001; Spirova, 2007; Crewe and King, 1995; Rakner, Svasand and Khembo, 2007). The exit option is more attractive when the current party of the faction is in electoral decline, electoral markets are open for new parties, there are other parties or factions with whom the faction could unite, the cost of competing in an election as a new party is low and there are ideological differences between intra-party factions. Hopkin (1999) also suggests that the party with limited possibilities for voice in terms of Hirschman (1970) (e.g. with the intra-party power concentrated in the hands of party leader) is more likely to split.

Notwithstanding these important findings, the literature on party splits remains under-developed. Theoretical explanations of case studies are too contextual and inductive. The more developed theoretical explanations, while providing important advances in understanding splits, make rather narrow assumptions about politicians' motivations.



For instance, Kaminski assumes that political elites are interested in votes only. In a similar vein, the role of voice in Hopkin's model seems to be in contradiction to the exit, voice and loyalty framework, which implies that the effectiveness of voice should depend on the benefit of exit and not vice versa (Hirschman, 1970; Clark, Golder and Golder, 2012). Furthermore, the lack of large-n studies on party splits means that existing empirical tests of theoretical explanations are of limited generalisability. The analysis of party splits in this research project seeks to fill these gaps by incorporating the aforementioned factors in a comprehensive explanatory framework of party fission and testing it in a cross-country comparative perspective.

### **1.3.2 Party mergers**

Case studies also dominate the research on party mergers. The cases of fusion in such diverse countries as Bulgaria and Hungary (Spirova, 2007), Canada (Belanger and Godbout, 2010), Estonia (Grofman, Mikkel and Taagepera, 2000), France (Knapp, 2003; Haegel, 2004), Germany (Olsen, 2007; Poguntke, 1998), Italy (Rizzi, 1974; Bordandini, Di Virgilio and Raniolo, 2008; Giannetti and Laver, 2001), Japan (Kohno, 1997), Malawi (Rakner, Svasand and Khembo, 2007), the Netherlands (Lees, Hough and Keith, 2010; Coffé and Torenvlied, 2008; Lucardie et al., 1995), Poland (Kaminski, 2001), South Korea (Park, 2010), Spain (Hopkin, 1999), the UK (Crewe and King, 1995) and others have been studied. While most of these countries are established democracies, it is suggested that party mergers are more frequent in new democracies with fluid party systems (Mair, 1997; Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2011).

Most of these case studies suggest that parties will merge if they expect gains in terms of legislative or executive office. However, mergers are less likely if only one party is likely to obtain the gains from fusion. For example, a major obstacle to the merger of centre-right French parties was their inability to agree on a common presidential candidate (Knapp, 2003). In addition, ideologically close parties are also more likely to

merge. Several case studies also suggest that the integration of the parties of unequal size is complicated, as the smaller party is concerned about being taken over by its larger partner (Olsen, 2007; Lees, Hough and Keith, 2010; Knapp, 2003; Szczerbiak, 2001). Indeed, in some cases the larger party defected on a merger agreement, which resulted in a split of a merged party (Park, 2010; Rizzi, 1974).

Although these mostly inductive and contextual accounts of party fusion are an important step in understanding this phenomenon, the more general theory of fusion is still under-developed. This research integrates most of the insights from the aforementioned case studies into such a theory and provides the very first systematic and comparative analysis of party fusion.

### 1.3.3 New parties

In addition to the case study research on party splits and mergers, this research project also draws on more developed literatures on other forms of elite coordination. In this sub-section I review the large and diverse scholarship on new party emergence. This literature considers splinter parties as one type of new parties and is therefore particularly relevant for the analysis of party fission. Conversely, the analysis of splits can provide important insights into the emergence of all new parties, as explained below.

The research explaining the formation and electoral success of new parties can be divided into two strands. The first group includes formal spatial models of new party entry (Palfrey, 1984; Greenberg and Shepsle, 1989; Feddersen, Sened and Wright, 1990; Cox, 1997) while the second group encompasses more empirical research (with the exception of Hug (2001), who also proposes a formal signalling model). Some of the studies in the second group explain the emergence and success of new niche parties, such as left-libertarian, radical or populist right and regional parties, in OECD democracies using small-n and large-n comparative methods (Kitschelt, 1988; Ignazi, 1992; De Winter and Türsan, 1998; Golder, 2003). Others focus on the emergence of all new



parties by using statistical methods for identifying factors which drive the number of new parties in an election (Harmel and Robertson, 1985; Hauss and Rayside, 1978; Hug, 2001; Tavits, 2006, 2008*b*).

The research provides quite strong evidence that the number of new entries has generally been on the rise in established Western democracies, especially since the 1960s (Hug, 2001; Wren and McElwain, 2007). Intra-country variation is nonetheless significant: new entries were more frequent in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK than in other advanced democracies. On average, the number of new parties per election was around 1.4 (see Hug 2001, 86 and Tavits 2006, 106). However, it is recognised that these numbers actually underestimate the real number of new entries, as many other small new parties are reported in the “others” category in electoral statistics (Golder, 2003). New post-communist democracies have had a higher rate of new party entry: Tavits (2008*b*, 114) reports that on average 5.6 new parties with at least 0.3 percent of vote emerged in these countries in the period of 1990-2004, although the number of new entries has been higher in early years of democracy.

In explaining new party entry, some formal spatial models find that entry is less likely when it entails high costs (e.g. registration and campaigning costs) (Feddersen, Sened and Wright, 1990). However, generally these models generate few clear testable implications (Hug, 2001; Kitschelt, 2007; Golder, 2003; Laver and Michel, 2007). Another criticism of these models is that they are neutral, meaning that the electoral support of parties is determined by their spatial positions and thus the established parties do not have an advantage due to strategic voting. This is in contradiction with significant empirical evidence which finds that voters are strategic.

Cox (1997) suggests that the models of new party entry should incorporate non-spatial advantages of the established parties arising due to strategic voting. Building on spatial models, he argues that the potential new party will enter electoral competi-

tion when  $p * b > c$ , where  $p$  is the probability of winning (which includes candidates' expectations about strategic voting),  $b$  is the benefit of office and  $c$  is the cost of electoral participation. Thus, when  $p$  is low (e.g. strategic voting is high, as would be the case under disproportional electoral system), new party is less likely to enter. In addition, Cox also argues that new party entry will be affected by the incentives of the potential new party to join one of the established parties. He develops a decision-theoretic model, which shows that the potential new party will enter electoral competition when the advantage of running on the label of the established party is low relative to the establishment of a new party (i.e. when the established party does not have a significant advantage due to strategic voting and costs of entry are low) and when the candidate selection procedures of the established parties are not permeable. However, Cox's model assumes that the established parties are non-strategic in their response to new party emergence. Other informal theoretical arguments in the literature also make a similar assumption (Kitschelt, 1988; Ignazi, 1992). This is problematic, because the established party may prefer to offer concessions to a potential new party in exchange for the agreement of the latter not to enter electoral competition.

In contrast, Hug (2001) develops a signalling game-theoretic model in which the potential new party seeks to place an under-represented issue on the established party's agenda. The model predicts that new parties will emerge when the established party rejects some policy demands of the potential entrant due to the fact that it has incomplete information about its electoral strength. However, the assumption of informational asymmetry between the established party and the potential new party is questionable (Kitschelt, 2007, 539). For instance, Hug argues that potential new parties would be able to gain an informational advantage due to their social networks, but not all groups considering forming new parties would have such networks. In addition, many established parties could use their membership organisations for collecting information about the strength of potential new parties. Furthermore, his model assumes that in condi-



tions of complete information new parties will never emerge, because established parties will always prefer to accept demands and potential new parties will always prefer not to enter if their demands are accepted. The latter assumption has also been challenged (McElroy, 2002; Kreppel, 2003).

For testing his model Hug pulls together all previous informal arguments about new party emergence, which can be broadly divided into two groups. First, new parties should be more likely to enter when some new issues, such as environment or immigration, are under-represented, or when economic performance is poor. Second, new parties are more likely to emerge under conducive political and institutional environments, such as proportional electoral systems and low legal costs for party formation. Tavits, building on Cox's model, re-formulates these two factors as the probability of winning ( $p$ ) and the cost of entry ( $c$ ), suggesting that the former will be higher in new democracies due to under-institutionalised party systems. Both Hug and Tavits, as well as other authors, find empirical support for both of these two broad theoretical factors. In addition, Tavits also finds that higher benefits from the participation in electoral politics, for instance the presence of powerful presidency or pluralist interest group system, make new party entry more likely (Tavits, 2006, 2008b).

However, an important problem in large- $n$  party entry studies is that country- and election-level variables are used for testing theories based on party behaviour. For example, Hug (2001, 87) acknowledges in his empirical analysis that

The major problem in this undertaking is that my theoretical model captures the interaction between two actors, namely an established party and a potential new party. The empirical tests, however, rely on data at the level of election years.

An important implication of the omission of party-level variables from large- $n$  studies is that the results of these analyses can be biased. While small- $n$  comparisons, which allow observing the non-emergence of new party, may attenuate this problem, their causal inferences are less reliable due to a small number of cases. In addition, the

findings of these studies may not be generalisable to all new parties.

This theoretical framework of party fission and fusion proposed in this project draws quite extensively on the literature on new parties. It uses the age of democracy and economic performance for capturing elites' expectations about the probability of electoral success after fission and electoral system disproportionality and legal entry costs for measuring the cost of entry.

At the same time the analysis of party splits in this dissertation contributes to the literature on new party emergence by addressing the above-mentioned theoretical and empirical shortcomings. With regard to the former, I propose a straightforward theoretical argument according to which intra-party factions (which are the equivalent to the established and potential new parties in Cox's and Hug's models) are strategic, have complete information about each other's strength and may actually prefer fission. Arguably, this argument thus makes more realistic assumptions than Cox's and Hug's models.

Empirically, I argue that the analysis of party fission provides an important way of testing the theory of strategic entry which has not been employed in the literature so far. More specifically, the absence of a split can be conceptualised as one type of non-entry, thus allowing the direct observation of the non-emergence of new parties across many countries and long time periods. Unfortunately, the use of party-electoral-period as a unit of analysis does not allow directly observing the incentives of the potential new (splinter) party and the rest of the party which does not consider fission. Also, the study of splinter parties reduces the number of cases analysed, as it leaves out genuinely new parties. Despite these shortcomings, this research design allows for the measurement of variables at the level of the dyad of the potential splinter faction and the dominant faction in the party. As such, it provides an important advancement over large-n studies based on election years as a unit of analysis because it significantly reduces the probability of omitted variable bias. Furthermore, this research design



provides a much better measure of political elite incentives to establish new parties in comparison to existing studies that use only system-level sociological or institutional variables.

#### **1.3.4 Party switching**

This research project also relates and contributes to the literature on legislative party switching. This literature defines switching as the change in legislator's party affiliation, which may be a result of various factors: individual switching by legislators between party groups, party splits and mergers, the fall in the size of the legislator's current party group below the minimum threshold required for the existence of party group and others (Heller and Mershon, 2009). The literature usually acknowledges these differences, but tends to conceptualise switching as the decision of an individual legislator to switch from one existing legislative party to another. In other words, switching is conceptualised as the split of an individual legislator from her current party and the merger with another party. While this research project examines how groups of legislators split and merge, explanations of party switching are nevertheless relevant for the analysis of both splits and mergers. Conversely, the findings of this project also provide insights into explaining legislative party switching.

This literature is dominated by quantitative case studies, which have examined legislative party switching in the US (Nokken, 2009), Italy (Heller and Mershon, 2008; Giannetti and Laver, 2001), Japan (Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995; Reed and Scheiner, 2003; Kato, 1998), Brazil (Desposato, 2006), Poland (Zielinski, Slomczynski and Shabad, 2005; McMenamin and Gwiazda, 2011), Ukraine (Herron, 2002; Thames, 2007; Slomczynski, Shabad and Zielinski, 2008), Russia (Mershon and Shvetsova, 2009), the European Parliament (McElroy, 2009) and other contexts. Furthermore, Heller and Mershon (2009) compile evidence on party switching in 19 countries and O'Brien and Shomer (2011) provide a comparative study of party switching in 20 countries. Shabad and

Slomczynski (2004) and Kreuzer and Pettai (2003) examine candidate switching in several post-communist democracies. The evidence from these studies suggests that party switching is significantly more frequent under the presence of under-institutionalised party systems, especially in new democracies. Among established democracies France, Japan, Israel and Italy have high or moderate rates of switching.

Most theoretical explanations of party switching are informal, although Aldrich and Bianco (1992), Desposato (2006) and Heller and Mershon (2008) developed formal models and Laver and Benoit (2003) produced a computational model. Following the conceptualisation of switching given above, most authors acknowledge that it is the result of the interaction between political parties and individual legislators. However, few authors explicitly emphasise the strategic element in this interaction. More commonly switching is theorised to be the decision of an individual legislator between staying in her party and switching to another party, which is driven by her ambition to achieve her goals. Most studies agree that three goals matter (cf. Strom 1990). Legislators seek to be re-elected (cf. “electoral connection” in the legislative behaviour literature), which implies they will be more likely to switch if they are electorally vulnerable in the current party (e.g. due to a low list position or the lack of seniority) or if they think that the party as a whole is electorally vulnerable (e.g. due to its small size, unclear policies or electoral decline). Second, legislators also seek to obtain power positions in the legislature (e.g. committee chairmanship) or the executive, which can be accessed through the membership in government parties. Finally, legislators also seek to achieve their policy goals, which may be easier in the parties with policies close to their ideal policy points (Heller and Mershon, 2008; Desposato, 2006; McElroy, 2009; Herron, 2002; Thames, 2007; McElroy and Benoit, 2010) or larger parties (Heller and Mershon, 2009). Empirical evidence supports the relevance of all of these motivations.

The few attempts to consider the strategic interaction between party leaders and legislators include Laver and Benoit (2003), who model the incentives of both individual



legislators to switch and political parties to accept them based on the assumption that legislators are office-seeking. The game-theoretic model of Desposato (2006), which generalises the model of Aldrich and Bianco (1992), also examines the extent to which “receiver” parties are interested in accepting switchers, although in his empirical analysis Desposato assumes that Brazilian parties are open to all in-switchers. Heller and Mershon (2009) propose an informal theoretical model in which the leaders of all legislative parties strategically set the level of party discipline by trying to assure party unity, strengthen party’s position in the negotiations with other parties, retain party members and possibly gain switchers, and to move party’s policy to their most preferred point. Individual legislators then respond by staying in their parties or switching to other parties by also keeping an eye on the next election. However, they also recognise that the formal model of such an interaction would be intractable. Indeed, in their formal model of switching developed in another paper (Heller and Mershon, 2008) party discipline is an exogenous parameter which affects legislators’ decisions to switch.

This dissertation contributes to these still quite under-developed theoretical and empirical attempts to study the strategic interaction between party leaders and legislators that leads to party switching. While studying all elements of this interaction may indeed be infeasible, it is possible to examine them in isolation from each other. As mentioned above, the literature conceptualises party switching as the split of an individual legislator from her current party and a merger with another party. This thesis considers each of these two steps separately. The analysis of fission thus provides insights into the interaction between legislators and their current parties while the analysis of mergers sheds light on the interaction between legislators and parties that could potentially accept them. Furthermore, unlike most of the studies of party switching, the analyses in this thesis are cross-national comparative, which provides better means for measuring the effect of party-specific variables, such as size or age, on the incentives of legislators to switch and of party leaders to encourage or discourage switching.

The findings of this research particularly emphasise that the effect of party size on legislative switching is complex. While the literature on switching suggested that legislators should switch to larger parties which provide better re-election opportunities and policy influence, party size also affects leaders' incentives to encourage or discourage in- and out-switching from their parties. The results of this project suggest that under fairly proportional electoral systems, leaders of relatively small or relatively large parties would suffer more from losing out-switchers and gain more from attracting in-switchers than the leaders of medium-sized parties. This is because party switching would have a stronger effect on the electoral viability of small parties and the chances of relatively large parties to become government formateurs. This suggests that the effect of party size on switching is not necessarily linear, as indicated by the literature.

### **1.3.5 Pre-electoral coalitions**

The explanation of party fusion in the present project also draws on the literature on the formation of pre-electoral coalitions. Golder (2005), Golder (2006*b*) and Golder (2006*a*) provide the only comparative studies on this phenomenon, which are defined either as electoral cooperation (through joint nominations, lists, vote transfer rules or dual ballot instructions) or public commitments to govern together. Her research focuses on 23 established democracies in the period of 1946-2002. The countries with most pre-electoral coalitions (including those coalitions which were also formed in a previous election) include Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Portugal and Spain, but all countries in the sample experienced at least a few coalitions.

Golder develops a complete information game of pre-electoral coalition formation. In this game party leaders seek to participate in the formation of government after an election and to influence policy. Pre-electoral coalitions will be formed if they are expected to bring electoral gains and if the leaders solve disagreements over the policy of the coalition and the distribution of election candidacies and executive positions.



The model implies that pre-electoral coalitions will be formed when the parties are ideologically close. Furthermore, coalitions will be more likely if they increase parties' chances to win, which will be the case if the expected coalition size is large but not too large and the asymmetry in size between the coalition partners is not too high. Finally, parties will also form coalitions when an alternative government is ideologically distant, but only if a coalition would provide an electoral advantage. This implication is tested by interacting two variables measuring ideological polarisation and electoral system disproportionality variables.

The model of Blais and Indridason (2007) examines the bargaining between party leaders (who are interested in seat maximisation) over pre-electoral coalition formation under the French-style run-off system (see also Tsebelis (1990)). Similarly to Golder, their model suggests that pre-electoral coalitions in the first round will be formed when they increase the chances of parties to win, as is the case in pivotal constituencies, and that parties with higher costs of ceding a constituency and higher patience gain more and better constituencies. These results are supported by empirical evidence from the 2002 French election.

An important question in the research on pre-electoral coalitions is why parties decide to keep their independence rather than merging. While this is not the main question of this research project, it still suggests some answers to it. In particular, it shows that unlike pre-electoral coalitions (at least in most cases), party mergers are marred with the problems of credible commitment. Interestingly, pre-electoral coalitions is one way to overcome these problems. In addition, this project finds that older parties are less likely to merge, which is due to the fact that their voters have stronger partisanship and would therefore disapprove of fusion.

## 1.4 Outline of the dissertation

The rest of this dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents the theory of party fission, which emphasises the strategic interaction between the office- and policy-seeking leaders of the majority and minority factions in the party. I test the implications of this theory using a new dataset that records more than 300 party splits in 24 European democracies in the post-war period. The analysis supports most of the implications of the theory. It particularly emphasises that splits are most likely when they do not significantly reduce factions' chances to keep legislative presence and participate in government as junior coalition partners or to become government formateurs. When intra-party factions are of roughly equal size, this will be the case when the party is medium-sized; when the majority faction is much larger than the minority faction, splits of relatively large parties are more likely. Furthermore, fission is more likely when the label of the party is not well-established and there are favourite conditions for the entry of new labels, especially when economic performance is poor, although institutional barriers of entry have no direct effect on the probability of fission. The results also provide relatively weak support to the importance of intra-party ideological divisions, but this is probably the consequence of the difficulties in measuring this theoretical variable in the large-n setting.

Chapter 3 sets out to explore the implications of the theory in qualitative case studies. The studies of five ethnic parties in Central and Eastern Europe allow for the isolation of the effect of party size due to the electoral stability of these parties' support and their similarity in other respects. This small-n comparative analysis illustrates the theoretical proposition that parties representing smaller minorities are less likely to split than medium-sized parties due to the greater risk of losing all seats and chances to participate in government. Furthermore, they also suggest that the ideological disagreements in these parties, especially between more radical supporters of ethnic



minority rights and their moderate opponents, were one of the major causes of the splits of ethnic parties. The second part in this chapter focuses on the case of the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan in the so-called 1955 system. This dominant party was able to sustain its unity for long periods of time mainly because its factions did not want to risk losing their almost guaranteed access to government. However, eventually splits did occur and were caused mainly by the policy disagreements over electoral reform and/or favourable electoral and party system environments.

Chapter 4 outlines the theory of party fusion and tests it using the data on mergers in 24 European democracies in the post-war period. The theory examines the bargaining between the leaders of two parties with office- and policy-seeking goals and implies that parties will merge if expected office gains outweigh the cost of ideological compromises and the commitment of the larger party to the merger agreement is sufficiently credible. Statistical analyses support these implications. In particular, the analyses show that parties use fusion as a tool to increase their electoral viability and/or the chances to become government formateurs. Mergers are also more likely to occur if they would make the merged party dominant in the system. Despite these potential office gains, several factors limit their utility for party elites which explains why they are quite rare empirically. More specifically, in an established party system where most of the parties have well-known labels and partisan following, fusion may be disapproved of by the parties' supporters and thus would not provide office gains. Furthermore, ideological differences may prevent fusion. Finally, but not least importantly, mergers are less likely if credible commitments are hard to achieve which would be the case if parties did not previously cooperate in a pre-electoral coalition and the asymmetry in their size is large.

Chapter 5 illustrates the causal mechanisms of the theory of fusion using five case studies: the creation of the Left Party in Germany in 2007, the United Socialist Party in Italy in 1966, the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan in 1955 and the Conservative

Party of Canada in 2003, as well as the failure of centre-right parties in Poland to form a unified party in the period between 1996 and 2001. The case studies show that office gains due to increased electoral viability or greater chances to become government formateur were the main benefit of fusion in all cases, while the uncertainty about such benefits prevented the fusion of centre-right parties in Poland. Ideological disagreements were also an important obstacle to fusion. Most importantly, the case studies illustrate the risks of reneges on earlier promises. However, this risk was less important when the asymmetry in party size was relatively low.

Chapter 6 examines whether political elites can increase party system stability in new democracies by building strong party membership organisations. The results of three parliamentary elections held in Lithuania suggest that both party membership organization and campaign spending have approximately equal effects on the electoral persistence of political parties, although new parties also benefit from both strong membership organizations and high campaign spending. The chapter proposes an innovative measure of party organisation, which is based on the number of individuals that parties delegate to serve as members of electoral commissions and election observers. This measure can be used in the future comparative analyses, thus allowing for a better understanding of the causes and consequences of the variation in party organisational strength.

Finally, the concluding chapter summarises the main findings, their implications and some directions for future research.



# Chapter 2

## Explaining party splits: theory and statistical analysis

### 2.1 Introduction

Causes of party fission represent an important but under-researched puzzle in the party politics literature. The introductory chapter has already emphasised the importance of this question by demonstrating how splits of Greek parties on the right and left largely determined the outcome of the May 2012 election and subsequent political instability with significant policy implications. More generally, splits matter for the quality of democracy and public policy due to their effects on party systems. Fission, by definition, results in the emergence of a new party, which, if supported by voters, increases party system fragmentation and instability. Depending on the characteristics of the party system prior to the split these changes may be normatively positive or negative, but in both cases they would have important implications for democracy and public policy. Moreover, a comparative study of the incentives of candidates and legislators to leave their current parties and establish new ones sheds light on the question “why parties?” (Aldrich, 1995), in a similar vein as the research on legislative party switching does (McElroy, 2003). Finally, party splits are also important empirically: this study found that on average 1.4 splits occurred in 24 European democracies in the post-war period and many of them involved government parties.

Two bodies of literature are the most relevant for the study of splits. First, a number of case studies provide important explanations of party fission based on intra-party interaction between factions and/or individual politicians (Wellhofer, 1974; Giannetti and Laver, 2001; Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995; Laver and Benoit, 2003; Rakner, Svasand and Khembo, 2007; Park, 2010; Hopkin, 1999; Crewe and King, 1995; Mair, 1990; Kaminski, 2001). However, empirical tests in these studies are limited to one or several cases and, consequently, the literature lacks a large-n systematic study of splits. Second, since splinter parties are a subset of new parties, comparative research on the emergence of new parties also provides insights into explaining fission (Harmel and Robertson, 1985; Kitschelt, 1988; Ignazi, 1992; Golder, 2003; Hug, 2001; Tavits, 2006, 2008*b*). These studies consider new party emergence either as a strategic decision of a potential new group to enter electoral competition (Cox, 1997; Tavits, 2006) or the outcome of the strategic interaction between the established party and the potential new party (Hug, 2001). However, despite an explicit theoretical focus on the incentives of political elites, empirical large-n studies of new party entry lack any party- or group-specific variables, because the non-emergence of new parties is considered to be not directly observable. Instead, these studies focus on system-level variables for capturing the incentives of political elites. Such a research strategy, however, reduces the role of elite behaviour in determining party splits and shaping party systems through them to that of the transmission belt of institutional and sociological variables without much independent effect. Furthermore, using country- and election-specific variables for testing theories that build on the strategic interaction of parties or potential parties also causes the risk of omitted variable bias.

This chapter seeks to improve our understanding of the causes of party fission by conducting the very first large-n comparative analysis of this phenomenon. The theoretical argument of this study is that party splits are the result of the strategic interaction between intra-party factions that trade expected office losses for ideological gains. For



the empirical analysis I constructed a new carefully constructed dataset that records more than 300 splits in 24 established and newer European democracies in almost all democratic electoral periods in the post-war period. In contrast to existing statistical analyses of new party entry, which use the count of new parties as the dependent variable, this research employs the party-electoral-period as the unit of analysis. The dependent variable is dichotomous (split vs. no split), which captures the non-emergence of a new splinter party (i.e. the absence of split) and uses party-level variables for testing theoretical expectations. Furthermore, the study also analyses major and minor splits as two separate dependent variables, thus capturing the effect of the asymmetry in the size of intra-party factions on the probability of split. These methodological improvements allow for the examination of the independent causal effect of elite behaviour on party fission in the comparative perspective, thus increasing our understanding of the role of political elites in shaping party systems. In particular, in line with theoretical expectations, the findings of the analysis suggest that when intra-party factions are of roughly similar size, they have more incentives to avoid a split if the size of the party is small (because successor parties would be electorally non-viable) or large (because successor parties, unlike the parent party in the absence of split, would be unlikely to get a chance to form a government). In contrast, when one of the factions is much larger than the other, the probability of split rises with the size of the party, as the chances of the minority faction of establishing a viable splinter party increase. Furthermore, the probability of a split also depends on the electoral value of the party's label relative to new party labels. Thus, splits are most likely if parties are young and the economy is performing poorly. Finally, high levels of party system fragmentation also increase the probability of fission, as splinter groups expect to increase their chances of electoral success by allying with other parties.

The remainder of this chapter first presents the theory of fission followed by the discussion of measurement, data and the actual analysis. The last section summarises

the findings and their implications.

## 2.2 Theory

The theory assumes that party splits occur after the bargaining between the leaders of intra-party factions. Factions are defined as groups of party members who coordinate their behaviour in order to achieve their common goals (Zariski, 1960). The party consists of a majority faction, headed by the party leader, and a minority faction. The party leader and the minority faction leader seek to maximise the share of governmental office controlled by their factions, both in the current and next legislative terms, either because they value office intrinsically or because the control of office allows them to achieve their policy goals (Strøm and Müller, 1999). In addition, faction leaders also have policy preferences and therefore seek to establish the policy of the party at their ideal policy points.

As in other models of intra-party politics (Heller and Mershon, 2009; Kam, 2009), the party leader has the first-mover advantage and therefore proposes the policy of the party and the division of office benefits. This proposal may include the division of government portfolios or, if the participation of the party in government is uncertain, the division of party positions and election candidacies.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the party leader's proposal is such that, if accepted by the minority faction leader, it would provide the majority faction with at least the same expected utility as what this faction would obtain by establishing a splinter party. The party splits only if the leader of the minority faction rejects the proposal. The "acceptance" of this proposal could but does not necessarily lead to observed party unity, because the minority faction could also dissent (e.g. in parliamentary voting) without leaving the party. Such dissension would occur if both factions prefer it to unity and fission.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A faction with a higher share of party positions and legislative seats should also be able to obtain more positions in future governments should the party participate in them.

<sup>2</sup>A number of studies show that dissension in parliamentary voting is quite common in most par-



These assumptions imply that splits are likely when factions prefer fission (i.e. the exit of one or both factions) to unity or intra-party dissension. This is because the minority faction only accepts the proposal of the party leader if its expected utility from exit is less than the value of this proposal. However, the party leader will only make such a proposal if its expected utility is at least the same as the utility the majority faction would acquire after it leaves the party or after the minority faction leaves the party.

In order to compare leaders' expected utilities from these outcomes, consider first the absence of fission. In this case leaders experience a utility loss due to policy compromises they have to make.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, leaders and their factions also obtain some of the office benefits that the party expects to gain in the current and next electoral periods. These office benefits can be expressed as the product of the probability that the party participates in government and its expected share of portfolios in this government (cf. Golder 2006a). On the basis of extensive empirical evidence (Laver, 1998; Warwick and Druckman, 2001, 2006), I assume that the party's expected share of government portfolios is proportional to its seat share. The probability of the participation in government in the current electoral period is higher if the party is already part of the incumbent government, because in most cases it can reasonably expect to remain in office until the next election. More importantly, the probability that the party participates in government, either in the current legislative term (if the incumbent government collapses) or after the next general election, is positively related to its seat share. In particular, every office-seeking party should strive to become one of the largest parties in the system, because such parties have high chances of becoming government formateurs (Glasgow, Golder and Golder, 2011; Warwick, 1996). Dominance provides

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liamentary democracies (Bowler, Farrell and Katz, 1999; Carey, 2007; Kam, 2009). It is reasonable to assume that in some cases it is caused by inter-factional conflict. A more complex model of intra-party politics should distinguish between dissension, party switching and splits more systematically.

<sup>3</sup>While intra-party dissension may partially offset this utility loss, it is unlikely that policy compromises would be completely eschewed, because such deep divisions are likely to be damaging for the electoral prospects of the party (Snyder Jr and Ting, 2002).



parties with a further advantage because dominant parties are particularly likely to be included in government (Van Deemen, 1989; Laver, 1998).<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the relationship between the probability of participation in government and party size is weaker for smaller parties that aim to become junior partners in coalition governments. Larger size for such parties may even be a drawback, because formateur parties may prefer smaller partners with which they have to share fewer governmental positions (Warwick, 1996; Mattila and Raunio, 2004; Isaksson, 2005).

Party fission changes faction leaders' utility in several ways. Leaders no longer experience a utility loss due to policy compromises, because they are able to set the policies of their parties at their ideal policy points. However, a split may reduce their office benefits through its effect on expected shares of government portfolios and the probability of being included in government. As mentioned above, I assume that parties' shares of government portfolios are proportional to their shares of legislative seats. This implies that until the next election the split should not affect leaders' expected share of government portfolios, because their parties together have the same seat share as the "parent" party before a split. However, parties resulting after a split will control fewer government portfolios after the next election (provided that they are included in government) if their combined seat share is lower than what the party would have obtained if it did not split. More importantly, a split also changes the probability of a party's participation in government. In the current legislative term splits of governmental parties increase the risk of a government collapse and the change in the party composition of government. Thus, splits of government parties make their continued control of the executive branch less probable. More generally, a split of any legislative party decreases its size, which means that the party and its splinter would be less likely to be included in any new governments formed before the next election. Similarly, each

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<sup>4</sup>Dominance implies that there are at least two mutually exclusive losing coalitions, which could not form a winning coalition in the absence of the dominant party, but each of which would become a winning coalition if the dominant party joins it (Laver, 1998). The dominant party is very likely to enter government, because it can play off these two coalitions against each other.



of the parties resulting after a split has a lower chance of participating in government if it gains fewer legislative seats in the next election relative to the expected seat share of the “parent” party in the absence of fission. However, the size of the party affects the extent to which its split decreases the chances of its successor parties participating in government. Parties established after a split of a large party, in particular if this party is also dominant, have significantly lower chances to be included in government, because contrary to the “parent” party (in the absence of split) they would be unlikely to become government formateurs. In contrast, parties resulting after a split of a party that is too small to become a government formateur can expect to participate in government with a probability close to that of the “parent” party without split (provided that they gain legislative seats), because, as mentioned above, formateur parties may prefer to cooperate with smaller coalition partners.

In short, party splits imply a trade-off in leaders’ utility between office and policy. It is also possible that there is another trade-off between the control of executive office in the current and next electoral periods, because being in government in the present period may be electorally costly (Strøm and Müller, 1999). I assume that leaders weigh more heavily the expected office benefits in the next period. This is because fission does not necessarily change the composition of government in the current electoral period and many splits anyway occur shortly before the next election. Furthermore, all splinter parties recorded in the dataset used for the analyses below participated in the next general election after the split, which implies that political elites’ expectations about their electoral prospects played an important role in determining these splits. For these reasons the explanatory analysis in this research focuses more on political elites’ electoral incentives.

A number of implications follow from this theory. With regard to policy, the increase in the distance between the ideal points of faction leaders makes policy compromises more costly. Thus, *higher intra-party heterogeneity makes party fission more likely*

*(Hypothesis 1).*

However, leaders are unlikely to split the party if they expect that policy gains will be offset by substantial losses in terms of office. As mentioned above, in the *present legislative term* the change in the expected share of office benefits depends on two factors. First, the incumbent government may fall if one of its member parties splits. As faction leaders in a governmental party are uncertain whether the successor parties created after the split will be included in subsequent governments, they should have strong incentives to avoid fission. This implies that *government parties are less likely to split (Hypothesis 2)*. A caveat that comes with this implication, as mentioned above, is that being in government in the current period could also reduce the party's chances to enter government after the next election. Second, successor parties formed after a split are smaller than their "parent" party, which means that they are also less likely to be included in government. The effect of the change in party size on the probability of participation in government is especially strong if the "parent" party is a dominant party while none of its successor parties would be able to achieve this status. Thus, intra-party factions in a dominant party should have strong incentives to keep their dominance in the party system by avoiding fission, which implies that *dominant parties are less likely to split (Hypothesis 3)*. This implication is further supported by the study of Laver and Benoit (2003) on legislative party switching, which shows that dominant parties are more likely to attract party switchers and less likely to lose their own members.

Intra-party factions should also avoid a split if it would significantly reduce their chances to participate in government after *the next election*. As mentioned above, this becomes more likely if successor parties expect to obtain significantly fewer legislative seats than the "parent" party would gain in the absence of split, especially if the latter is expected to become one of the largest parties or even a dominant party. One implication of this argument (already stated above) is that higher intra-party heterogeneity should



increase the probability of split because parties established after a split would be able to cover a broader policy ground.

Another factor influencing parties' expected seat shares is electoral resources, such as activists, well-known politicians or financial resources. These resources are directly unobservable. However, it is reasonable to assume that those parties that obtained more votes and seats in the past elections also have more electoral resources. Thus, the previous electoral support of the party indirectly captures its electoral resources and therefore the expected seat share in the next election. This also means that successor parties established after a split of larger party can expect to obtain higher seat shares. Furthermore, the expected seat shares of successor parties also depend on the size of the faction from which this successor party originates from. In particular, parties resulting from larger factions should have their seat share closer to the seat share of the party in the absence of a split. This implies that the effect of party size on the probability of split is conditional on asymmetries in faction size. Furthermore, it is also important to consider the effect of electoral institutions. In particular, small parties may not have enough resources to gain legislative seats due to the mechanical and strategic effects of electoral systems (Duverger, 1954; Cox, 1997).<sup>5</sup>

While the asymmetry in faction size is not directly observable, it can be captured by analysing major and minor splits separately. The difference between these two types of splits is that more party members (operationalised in this research by the number of legislators as explained below) join a splinter party in the case of a major split (Janda, 1980; Rose and Mackie, 1988). Thus, the underlying assumption in the analysis of major (minor) splits is that the asymmetry in the size of intra-party factions is relatively low (high).

In order to understand the interactive effect of these three variables (party size, the

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<sup>5</sup>Voters may also strategically desert smaller parties in the countries with very proportional electoral systems, as they expect that these parties are unlikely to participate in government and influence policy outcomes (Abramson et al., 2010; Blais and Gschwend, 2011).

asymmetry in faction size, and electoral institutions), consider first the effect of party size on the probability of major splits. The probability of a split should be low when the party is relatively small, because parties established after a split would be even smaller and at the risk of losing all of their seats due to the effects of electoral institutions. As party size increases somewhat, electoral risks of a split recede, as both successor parties should be more likely to obtain legislative seats. Although being smaller than they would be had the party not split, their chances to participate in government would not decrease significantly. This is because, as already mentioned, party size is somewhat less relevant for the participation in government as a junior coalition partner. Thus, splits of medium-sized parties are expected to be more likely. Finally, as party size increases further to the extent that it can expect to become a government formateur, its split becomes less likely again. This is because none of the successor parties are likely to be large enough to aspire to the status of a government formateur. Furthermore, large parties are likely to be over-represented under most electoral systems and may also attract strategic voters who seek to affect the outcome of government formation (Abramson et al., 2010; Blais and Gschwend, 2011). Thus, *if asymmetry in the size of intra-party factions is relatively low, the probability of fission is the highest when the party is not too small and not too large (Hypothesis 4.1).*

Now consider the case of minor splits (i.e. the majority in the party is much larger than the minority). In this case the majority faction expects that after the next election its seat share and by extension its office benefits will not decrease substantially due to a split. This implies that the probability of split will depend mostly on the incentives of the minority faction. As a marginal group, the best that this group can expect after a split is to establish itself as a small but viable party. The probability that the minority faction will succeed in doing this increases with the size of the party. In particular, a small minority in a large or even medium-sized party should be more likely to overcome institutional thresholds and establish a viable splinter party than a small minority in



a small party. However, the strength of the effect of party size on the probability of a split should be decreasing, because once the party expects to become a government formateur, the incentives of the minority faction to split should decrease. This implies that *if the asymmetry in the size of intra-party factions is high, the probability of party fission increases with party size, but the effect is marginally decreasing (Hypothesis 4.2)*.

Besides the electoral resources of factions, the value of a party's electoral label relative to new party labels also affects the difference in a party's expected seat shares before and after a split. Intra-party factions should have higher incentives to stay in the parties with valuable labels. This implies that *parties with more established labels are less likely to split (Hypothesis 5)*. Older parties should have more valuable labels, as on average they should have more partisan voters (Converse, 1969; Dalton and Weldon, 2007; Lupu and Stokes, 2009).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, factions should also relate the value of the party's label with its recent electoral performance. A severe decline in a party's electoral support in the last election may be taken as an indication that its electoral base is starting to unravel and its support will further decrease in future elections.<sup>7</sup>

The probability of fission also increases if a new party label is likely to attract voters. Sociological environment, institutional and political contexts affect the probability of new party entry (Harmel and Robertson, 1985; Hug, 2001).<sup>8</sup> Thus, *party splits are more likely under the sociological, institutional and political contexts that are conducive to new party emergence (Hypothesis 6)*. In particular, new parties should enter when new issues are on the rise. Poor economic conditions provide a clear issue on which new parties can capitalise in garnering voter support (Harmel and Robertson, 1985; Lucardie, 2000a; Hug, 2001). Furthermore, new parties are more likely to achieve an electoral breakthrough in younger democracies, because older parties in these countries

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<sup>6</sup>In addition, the value of running under a new label is also lower when several well-established parties already exist.

<sup>7</sup>In this situation a splinter party also has more chances to capture the voters who deserted its parent party, thus increasing the value of running under a new label.

<sup>8</sup>Tavits 2006 reformulates these two factors as the probability of electoral success and the cost of entry.

have fewer partisan voters and, generally, are less well established (Cox, 1997; Tavits, 2008*b*).

Several further variables capture the conduciveness of institutional and political contexts. New parties are less likely to succeed under more disproportional electoral systems.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, the cost of entry is higher if parties are required to submit a monetary deposit in order to be able to run in the election. The existence of public funding, however, decreases the cost of entry and should make splits more likely. Finally, the extent to which political context is conducive to new party emergence should be related to party system fragmentation, although two contradicting expectations could be formulated. On the one hand, greater fragmentation means that a new party would be less likely to find an electorally attractive ideological position. On the other hand, existing parties could also serve as partners for pre-electoral coalitions, thus increasing the chances of electoral success.

While most of the hypotheses stated above apply to all splits, Hypotheses 4.1 and 4.2 are applicable to major and minor splits, respectively. The empirical analysis will therefore test the effect of all independent variables on three dependent variables (split, major split and minor split).

## **2.3 Data and measurement**

### **2.3.1 Party splits in Europe**

For testing the theory of party fission I constructed a new dataset on party splits in 24 countries of the EU with the population of at least 1 million. The dataset includes almost all electoral periods in these countries in the post-war period, with 280 in total considered.<sup>10</sup> On the basis of some 200 sources, it provides information on the identity

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<sup>9</sup>While Hypotheses 4.1 and 4.2 already consider the effect of electoral system, they do so in an indirect manner.

<sup>10</sup>The following time periods for each country was considered (the number of electoral periods in parentheses): Austria 1949-2008 (18), Belgium 1946-2010 (20), Bulgaria 1990-2009 (6), Czech Republic



of splinter and rump parties, their electoral performance and a number of other relevant independent variables, as discussed below.<sup>11</sup> The dataset includes splits of the parties that obtained at least 1 percent of the vote in the last parliamentary election. The main reason for the choice of threshold is practical, since finding information about splits of smaller parties is highly challenging due to the lack of reliable data sources. However, parties with less than 1 percent of the vote are less important substantively. They are highly unlikely to play any significant role in policymaking as even their blackmailing potential is low.

This dataset itself represents an important contribution to the literature on party system change. The existing datasets on new parties (Hug, 2001; Golder, 2003; Tavits, 2008*b*) do not provide information about the origins of splinter parties, which has been the major obstacle to conducting party-level analysis of party fission. By contrast, the present dataset rigorously traces party transformations (not only splits, but also mergers and alliances). Moreover, comparative studies of new parties usually record only those new parties that obtained some electoral support. This is problematic methodologically, as the entry decision precedes the participation in elections. Contrary to these studies, the dataset used here selects new (splinter) parties independently from their initial success. Furthermore, unlike other studies on new parties, this research examines party splits in both established and new democracies, thus providing a broader comparative perspective.

The unit of analysis in the dataset is party-electoral period. The theory has two types of implications. Hypotheses 4.1 and 4.2 express implications with regard to major

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1990-2010 (6), Denmark 1945-2007 (23), Estonia 1992-2007 (4), Finland 1945-2007 (17), France 1946-2007 (15), Germany 1949-2009 (16), Greece 1974-2009 (11), Hungary 1990-2010 (5), Ireland 1948-2007 (16), Italy 1946-2008 (16), Latvia 1993-2011 (6), Lithuania 1992-2008 (4), Netherlands 1946-2010 (19), Poland 1991-2007 (5), Portugal 1975-2009 (12), Romania 1990-2008 (5), Slovakia 1990-2010 (6), Slovenia 1990-2008 (5), Spain 1977-2008 (9), Sweden 1944-2010 (20), United Kingdom 1945-2010 (16).

<sup>11</sup>The main sources of information on party splits were handbooks on political parties, such as McHale and Skowronski (1983), Bugajski (2002), Szajkowski (1995), Day (2002), Szajkowski (2005), Sagar (2009) and others, as well as a number of country-specific sources. These sources are listed in the reference list at the end of this thesis together with the sources that are cited in the dissertation.



and minor splits while all other hypotheses state implications for all splits. Therefore, the empirical test of the theory requires constructing three dependent variables: split, major split and minor split. The literature proposes at least two ways to distinguish between major and minor splits. Janda (1980) defines a minor split as the loss of no more than 25 percent of party activists while a major split is defined as the loss of between 25 and 50 percent activists. Rose and Mackie (1988) distinguish between splits, where an existing organisation terminates its existence and divides into two new parties, and minor splits, where the party loses a splinter group. Unfortunately, neither of these criteria can be implemented here, either due to the lack of reliable time-series data on party membership (Janda's criterion) or the lack of clearly specified operational measures (Rose and Mackie's criterion). The alternative used in this research is therefore based on the share of legislators who left the party. More specifically, a major split is defined as the split that involved at least 10 percent of the party's legislators elected to the lower house of the legislature in the last election. While unavoidably somewhat arbitrary, this threshold distinguishes well between major and minor splits as described in the case study literature.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, I consider the splits of non-parliamentary parties and those parties that had few MPs (3 or less) as major splits.<sup>13</sup>

In total the dataset includes 378 splits that occurred in 142 electoral periods (50.7 percent of all electoral periods in the sample). Figure 2.1 shows the share of legislators who left the party in the case of these splits.<sup>14</sup> The figure illustrates that most splits involved only a small share of legislators (the median of the variable is 0.07 and the mean is 0.17). However, in some cases more than half of legislators left the party.

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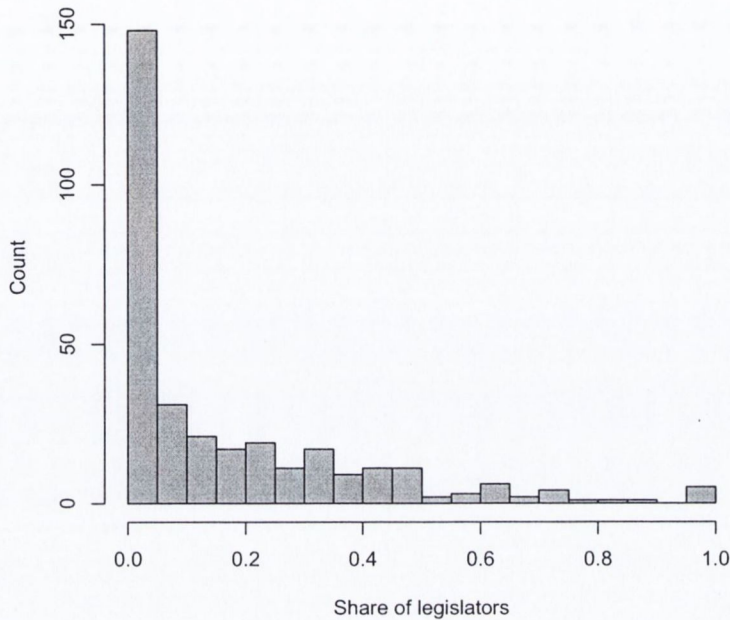
<sup>12</sup>For instance, a bit higher threshold would classify the split of the UK Labour Party in the early 1980s as a minor split, because the party was left by 10.8 percent of its MPs.

<sup>13</sup>While this may seem arguable, recall that the distinction between major and minor splits captures the difference in the size of the two factions in the party. It is therefore quite likely that in some cases minor parties divide themselves into two roughly equal groups. However, assuming that splits of non-parliamentary parties are minor does not change the results of empirical analysis, as discussed below.

<sup>14</sup>Non-parliamentary parties, parties with 3 and fewer MPs and few parties for which the information on the number of leaving legislators was not available are not shown in the figure.



Figure 2.1: Share of breakaway legislators



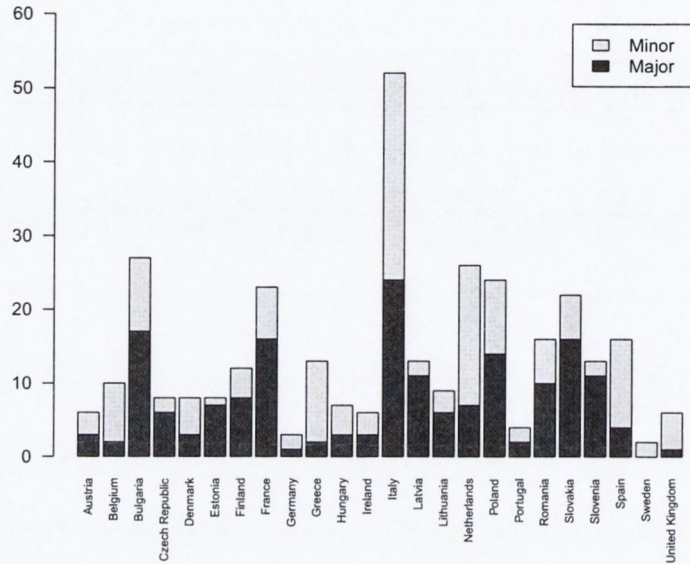
While in few peculiar cases the whole parliamentary delegation of the party deserted it, this does not mean that the party disappears, as it still keeps its extra-parliamentary organisation. Overall, out of 378 splits recorded by the dataset, 195 were major and 183 were minor.<sup>15</sup> These splits led to the formation of 345 splinter parties.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, some parties split two or more times in the same electoral period. Since the unit of analysis is party-electoral-period and the dependent variable is dichotomous (split vs. no split), such cases were simply considered as one split in statistical analyses. This reduces the number of splits used in analyses to 310. In the same vein, the number of major and minor splits in statistical analyses was 177 and 157. Figure 2.2 shows

<sup>15</sup>While the median number of leaving MPs (0.07) is lower than the threshold at which a split is considered major (0.10), the number of major splits is still higher, because, as mentioned above, the splits of non-parliamentary parties or parties with few MPs are considered major. For those cases where it was not possible to establish whether a split was major or minor, a qualitative judgement based on the reading of secondary literature was used.

<sup>16</sup>The number of splinter parties is lower than the number of splits for two reasons. First, in some cases a breakaway party was established after a split of several parties. Second, if in the same electoral period two or more parties merged and the merged party split, the dataset codes that each of the original merging parties split.

Figure 2.2: Number of major and minor splits



the number of major and minor splits (as used in statistical analyses) per country. The figure demonstrates a substantial variation at the country level, with Italy in particular having a high number of splits. The instability of Italian parties, especially pronounced after the collapse of the country's party system in the mid-1990s, is in line with the findings of other studies (Giannetti and Laver, 2001). Furthermore, among established democracies France, the Netherlands and Spain have also experienced a relatively high number of splits. In addition, as suggested by other studies (e.g. Mair 1997), splits have been frequent in more or less all Central and Eastern European countries due to the tumultuous process of party system formation and institutionalisation after the collapse of communism.

### 2.3.2 Independent variables

One of the main implications of the theory of fission proposed here is that ideologically heterogeneous parties are more likely to split. Finding a proxy of this theoretical variable for a large number of parties and electoral periods is nevertheless a challenging task.



For example, the Comparative Manifestos Project does not provide the data on internal party cohesion. A measure based on parliamentary roll-call vote data would not be applicable to parties with few or no legislative seats and, more importantly, would not be able to distinguish between the effects of party cohesion and discipline. This research therefore uses another measure based on the standard deviation of the self-placements of parties' supporters on the left-right scale (1-10 scale was used) in various opinion surveys (listed in 2.1) conducted in the beginning of electoral periods. Unfortunately, this measure could be constructed for only 62 percent of the observations in the sample, as left-right self-placements were not available for many electoral periods in Western Europe for the first few decades after the 1940s. Furthermore, it was not possible to construct heterogeneity scores for some small parties, either because they were not listed among party alternatives that respondents could choose from or there were too few respondents mentioning them.<sup>17</sup>

In order to measure factions' expectations about office benefits in the next electoral period, two dichotomous variables were used. The first variable captures whether the party was in government for the whole or part of the electoral period. The second variable indicates whether the party was dominant in that electoral period. Following Laver (1998), a party was coded as dominant if it was the largest legislative party and if it could form a majority coalition with either the second- or the third-largest party, but the latter two could not form a majority coalition on their own.

Party size is operationalised as the mean share of votes that the party obtained in the two parliamentary elections preceding the electoral period under analysis. Considering the last two elections instead of one provides a better measure of party's electoral strength. In particular, it avoids the potential bias introduced by highly successful flash parties (prevalent in many countries in the sample, especially but not only in Central and Eastern Europe) or parties in early years of democracy that still have to

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<sup>17</sup>This is despite that the minimum of only 3 respondents supporting the party was required to estimate its heterogeneity.



Table 2.1: Surveys used for the ideological heterogeneity measure

Country	Survey and electoral period
Austria	Eight nations study: 1971-1979; WVS2: 1990-1994; EB Trend: 1995-2002; ESS3: 2006-2008
Belgium	EB Trend: 1974-2003; CSES2: 2003-2007; ESS4: 2007-2010
Bulgaria	WVS2: 1990-1991; CEEB Trend: 1991-1994; WVS3: 1997-2001; CSES2: 2001-2005; ESS3: 2005-2009
Czech Republic	CoD: 1990-1992; CEEB Trend: 1992-1996; CSES1: 1996-1998; WVS3: 1998-2002; CSES2: 2002-2006; CSES3: 2006-2010
Denmark	EB Trend: 1971-1981, 1984-1994; Danish NES: 1981-1984, 2005-2007; CSES1: 1998-2001; CSES2: 2001-2005
Estonia	Election survey 1992: 1992-1995; Election survey 1995: 1995-1998; EVS1999: 1999-2003; CEEB: 2003-2007
Finland	Eight nations study: 1972-1979; WVS2: 1991-1995; EB Trend: 1995-2003; CSES2: 2003-2007
France	French NES: 1967-1973; EB Trend: 1973-2002; CSES2: 2002-2007
Germany	Eight nations study: 1972-1976; EB Trend: 1976-2005; CSES1: 1998-2002; CSES3: 2005-2009
Greece	EB Trend: 1981-2000; ESS2: 2004-2007
Hungary	CoD: 1990-1994; Hungarian ES: 1994-1998; CSES1: 1998-2002; CSES2: 2002-2006; ESS3: 2006-2010
Ireland	EB Trend: 1973-2002
Italy	Italian NES: 1968-1976, 2001-2006; EB Trend: 1976-1996; CSES2: 2006-2008
Latvia	Election survey 1993: 1993-1995; Election survey 1995: 1995-1998; CoD: 1998-2002; Election survey 2002: 2002-2006; ESS3: 2006-2010; EES2009: 2010-2011
Lithuania	Election survey 1992: 1992-1996; WVS3: 1996-2000; EVS1999: 2000-2004; CEEB2003.5: 2004-2008
Netherlands	Eight nations study 1971-1977; EB Trend: 1977-1998; CSES1: 1998-2002; CSES2: 2002-2003; Dutch PES: 2003-2006; CSES3: 2006-2010
Poland	CEEB Trend: 1991-1997; CSES1: 1997-2001; CSES2: 2001-2005; CSES3: 2005-2007
Portugal	EB Trend: 1985-2005; CSES2 2005-2009
Romania	CoD: 1990-1992; CEEB Trend: 1992-1996; CSES1: 1996-2000; EVS1999: 2000-2004; CSES2: 2004-2008
Slovakia	CoD: 1990-1992; CEEB Trend: 1992-1994; WVS3: 1998-2002; CEEB2003.5: 2002-2006; ESS2: 2006-2010
Slovenia	CoD: 1990-1992; CEEB Trend: 1992-1996; CSES1: 1996-2000; EVS1999: 2000-2004; CSES2: 2004-2008
Spain	DATA1979: 1979-1982; WVS1: 1982-1986; EB Trend: 1986-2004; CSES1: 2004-2008
Sweden	Swedish NES: 1973-1998; CSES1: 1998-2002; EB Trend: 2002-2006; CSES3: 2006-2010
UK	EB Trend: 1974-2001; British NES: 2001-2005; CSES2: 2005-2010

Survey names: CEEB - Central and Eastern European Barometer; WVS - World Values Survey; EB Trend - Eurobarometer Trend File; ESS - European Social Survey; CSES - Comparative Study of Electoral Systems; CoD - the Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe 1990-2001; Danish NES - Danish National Election Survey; EVS - European Values Survey; French NES - French National Election Survey; Hungarian ES - Hungarian Election Study; Italian NES - Italian National Election Survey; EES - European Election Study; Dutch PES - Dutch Parliamentary Election Study; DATA1979 - DATA post-election survey of the Spanish election in 1979; Swedish NES - Swedish National Election Survey; British NES - British National Election Survey.



Table 2.2: Descriptive statistics: party splits

	Min	Median	Mean	Max	StDev	Expect
Split	0.00	0.00	0.13	1.00		
Major split	0.00	0.00	0.08	1.00		
Minor split	0.00	0.00	0.07	1.00		
Ideological heterogeneity	0.00	1.612	1.660	3.606	0.430	+
In government	0.00	0.00	0.35	1.00		-
Dominant party	0.00	0.00	0.06	1.00		+
Average vote share	0.005	0.058	0.109	0.511	0.121	
Party age	0.00	14.00	30.16	175.00	34.74	-
Change in electoral support	4.68	50.00	50.00	99.22	11.63	-
GDP growth	-21.69	2.40	1.46	19.13	5.29	-
Age of democracy	1.00	28.00	32.78	87.00	25.51	-
Effective electoral threshold	0.067	0.070	0.099	0.375	0.093	-
Deposit	0.00	0.00	0.33	1.00		-
Public funding	0.00	1.00	0.750	1.00		+
Effective number of electoral parties	2.13	4.73	5.12	13.82	1.96	+

consolidate their electoral base. Following Hypothesis 4.1, the relationship between the probability of major splits and party size was modelled as quadratic. In contrast, in line with Hypothesis 4.2, the natural logarithm of party size was used as a predictor of minor splits. Both transformations were tried in the case of all splits, but, as discussed below, the model specification with the squared term of party size had a better fit.

The first variable used for testing the effect of party labels is the natural logarithm of party age. As noted above, older parties should have more established labels, but at the same time it is reasonable to expect that the effect of party age on the value of its label would be marginally decreasing. The second variable for capturing the value of a party's label is the change in the party's electoral support, which is measured by the percentage ratio between its share of the vote in the last election and the sum of the shares of the vote in the last two elections. The index can theoretically take values from 0 to 100, where 0 indicates that in the last election the party lost all of its votes it had in the second last election. The value of 100 means that the party gained some votes in the last election, but no votes in the second last election, and the value of 50 indicates

that party's electoral support remained stable. Consider an example where the party gained 10 percent of the vote in the second last election and 5 percent of the vote in the last election. The value of this variable for this party would be  $5/(10 + 5) * 100 = 33.3$ , indicating that its support declined. For the parties which did not participate in the second last election the index takes the value of 50. Since one would expect for a non-linear relationship between the change in party's electoral support and the probability of split, I include the natural logarithm of this index.

The average change in GDP per capita across all years in the electoral period captures each country's economic performance. The data source of this variable was Madison (2008), which provides data on economic growth in Western Europe in the 1940s that was lacking in other sources. The natural logarithm of this variable was used in the analysis. Carey and Hix (2011) provide the measure of the logged age of democracy. They also provide the values of Lijphart's effective electoral threshold (Lijphart, 1994), which is used for measuring electoral system disproportionality. For measuring institutional entry costs I use the dummy variable indicating whether a monetary deposit is required for parties running in election and another dummy variable capturing whether public funding of political parties was available. Hug (2001), Tavits (2006) and Tavits (2008*b*) were the sources for these two variables. The effective number of electoral parties captures party system fragmentation. Gallagher (2012) provides the data for this variable. In addition, all analyses control for the number of years in the electoral period, as the probability of splits should be more likely in longer periods. Table 2.2 provides the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analysis.



## 2.4 Analysis and results

### 2.4.1 Main results

Since the dependent variable is dichotomous, a binary response model is required for testing the theoretical hypotheses. Furthermore, the data is grouped, as observations are clustered by parties, elections and countries, which raises the possibility that some unobserved variables at the level of these units have an effect on the dependent variable. Two most common approaches used for accounting for these unit effects are fixed effects and random effects (Greene, 2008; Gelman and Hill, 2007).<sup>18</sup> However, fixed-effects model is less appropriate than random-effects model for this analysis for several reasons. Including a large number of dummy variables in order to control for the unobserved effects of electoral periods could make it more difficult to estimate the effect of independent variables of substantive interest on the dependent variable. Furthermore, using the random-effects model allows to make inferences about the larger population of democracies in Europe and elsewhere from the sample used in this analysis. Another drawback of using fixed effects at the level of electoral period is that it would imply dropping all electoral periods in which no party splits occurred. As mentioned above, almost one half of all periods did not experience a split, which means that the fixed-effects model would use a much smaller sample than the random-effects model. This increases the risk of selection bias. Finally, using fixed effects at the electoral period level would also mean that those covariates that do not vary within elections, such as electoral institutions, would have to be excluded from analysis.

Due to these reasons the relationship between party fission and independent variables is modelled using random intercept terms at the level of elections and countries. Table 2.3 presents two model specifications for three dependent variables (split, major split and minor split). Two specifications for each dependent variable are needed,

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<sup>18</sup>Gelman and Hill (2007) refer to random-effects models as mixed-effects models.

because one independent variable capturing intra-party ideological heterogeneity has missing values for 38 percent of observations in the sample.<sup>19</sup> Including this variable therefore greatly reduces the size of the sample, which may lead to selection bias. Thus, for each dependent variable one model specification includes the intra-party heterogeneity variable while the other one does not.

The analyses show that the ideological diversity variable has a statistically significant effect (although the coefficient just reaches the 0.05 level of significance) only on the probability of major but not minor splits. The increase in ideological heterogeneity from its value one standard deviation below the mean to one standard deviation above the mean increases the probability of major split by 55 percent (with the 95% confidence interval being 4.4 and 122.2 percent).<sup>20</sup> This result, however, does not imply that ideological heterogeneity has a weak or no effect on the probability of fission, because it may also be a consequence of a rather distant proxy used for measuring this theoretical concept. Furthermore, the case studies in Chapter 3 provide evidence that ideological differences do matter. The difficulty of measuring ideological heterogeneity also prevents a clear interpretation of the different effect of this variable on major and minor splits. This difference could indicate that policy differences matter less for minor splits. Another interpretation could be that even if ideological differences are strongly pronounced, the minority faction is too small for these differences to be reflected in the heterogeneity score of the party.

The results also suggest that government parties are more likely to split, although the coefficient of this variable is not a statistically significant predictor of major splits. This result contradicts Hypothesis 2, which indicated that government parties should avoid splits in order to remain in office. By contrast, it supports the proposition that the membership in government involves costly trade-offs in terms of votes and ideology

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<sup>19</sup>As mentioned above, this independent variable is estimated by the standard deviation of the self-placements of parties' supporters on the left-right scale. A large number missing values arises due to the lack of surveys for some elections or missing respondent placements for small parties.

<sup>20</sup>First differences for statistically significant variables are presented in Table 2.4.



Table 2.3: Mixed-effects logit model of party splits

	All	All	Major	Major	Minor	Minor
(Intercept)	-0.729 (1.438)	-0.384 (1.220)	-0.771 (1.497)	-0.429 (1.263)	-2.214 (2.122)	-1.228 (1.821)
Ideological heterogeneity	0.213 (0.217)		0.518* (0.252)		-0.265 (0.293)	
Government	0.281 (0.179)	0.319* (0.151)	0.281 (0.221)	0.224 (0.186)	0.305 (0.230)	0.407* (0.202)
Dominant	0.901* (0.424)	0.497 (0.340)	1.139 (0.605)	0.891 (0.521)	0.193 (0.384)	-0.135 (0.327)
Size	14.945*** (2.684)	14.537*** (2.082)	15.813*** (3.896)	17.903*** (3.310)		
Size squared	-32.463*** (7.236)	-30.417*** (5.407)	-49.087*** (12.402)	-56.323*** (10.972)		
Ln (size)					0.698*** (0.130)	0.779*** (0.111)
Ln (party age)	-0.157* (0.075)	-0.124* (0.060)	-0.277** (0.093)	-0.258*** (0.076)	-0.106 (0.094)	-0.058 (0.081)
Ln (electoral change)	-0.404 (0.275)	-0.427 (0.232)	-0.555 (0.307)	-0.473 (0.260)	0.234 (0.405)	0.008 (0.345)
Ln (GDP change)	-0.377 (0.276)	-0.591* (0.230)	-0.358 (0.247)	-0.558** (0.207)	-0.075 (0.453)	-0.357 (0.369)
Ln (democracy age)	-0.366* (0.162)	-0.173 (0.106)	-0.434** (0.156)	-0.209 (0.110)	-0.148 (0.199)	-0.060 (0.135)
Electoral threshold	2.382 (1.770)	2.179 (1.461)	0.498 (1.662)	0.878 (1.437)	4.328* (2.072)	3.427 (1.907)
Deposit	-0.137 (0.364)	-0.021 (0.290)	-0.140 (0.326)	0.066 (0.296)	-0.271 (0.442)	-0.316 (0.367)
Party funding	0.477 (0.336)	0.368 (0.289)	0.413 (0.331)	0.348 (0.296)	0.574 (0.398)	0.404 (0.365)
ENEP	0.115 (0.060)	0.119* (0.051)	0.039 (0.058)	0.073 (0.051)	0.187** (0.067)	0.180** (0.065)
Election-level st. dev.	0.52	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.22	0.51
Country-level st. dev.	0.73	0.70	0.54	0.59	0.87	0.85
Log-likelihood	-560.570	-817.529	-392.696	-552.018	-369.675	-512.783
Countries	24	24	24	24	24	24
Elections	280	280	280	280	280	280
N	1455	2348	1455	2348	1455	2348

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 2.4: Substantive effect of independent variables on party fission

Variable	% Change in probability		
	All splits	Major splits	Minor splits
Ideological heterogeneity (1.23 to 2.09)	-20.0 (-15.3; 63.8)	55.0 (4.4, 122.2)	-15.5 (-49.0, 31.3)
Government	35.3 (3.6, 71.6)	24.5 (-13.2, 72.8)	50.6 (0.2, 116.5)
Party size (1 to 16)		250.6 (113.9, 443.6)	
Party size (16 to 51)		-99.6 (-100.0, -97.3)	
Party size (1 to 51)			1852.5 (771.7, 3935.3)
Party age (1 to 10)	-21.8 (-37.6, -2.6)	-42.0 (-58.1, -21.6)	-10.8 (-38.4, 23.6)
GDP change (-6.8 to 3.8)	-17.4 (-25.8, -7.7)	-25.0 (-33.9, -14.3)	-10.1 (-24.8, 7.3)
ENEP (3.2 to 7.1)	56.1 (9.5, 116.5)	33.7 (-11.0, 86.9)	99.0 (22.6, 203.9)

The table presents first difference estimates for the variables that were statistically significant in the analyses presented in Table 2.3. The estimate for the ideological heterogeneity variable is based on the models in the table that use the incomplete sample. All other estimates are computed on the basis of the models that use the complete sample. The table presents no first difference estimate for the effect of party size on the probability of all splits, as the theory did not provide a specific prediction with regard to this relationship. The values of other independent variables are held constant at their means for continuous variables and medians or modes for ordinal and categorical variables.

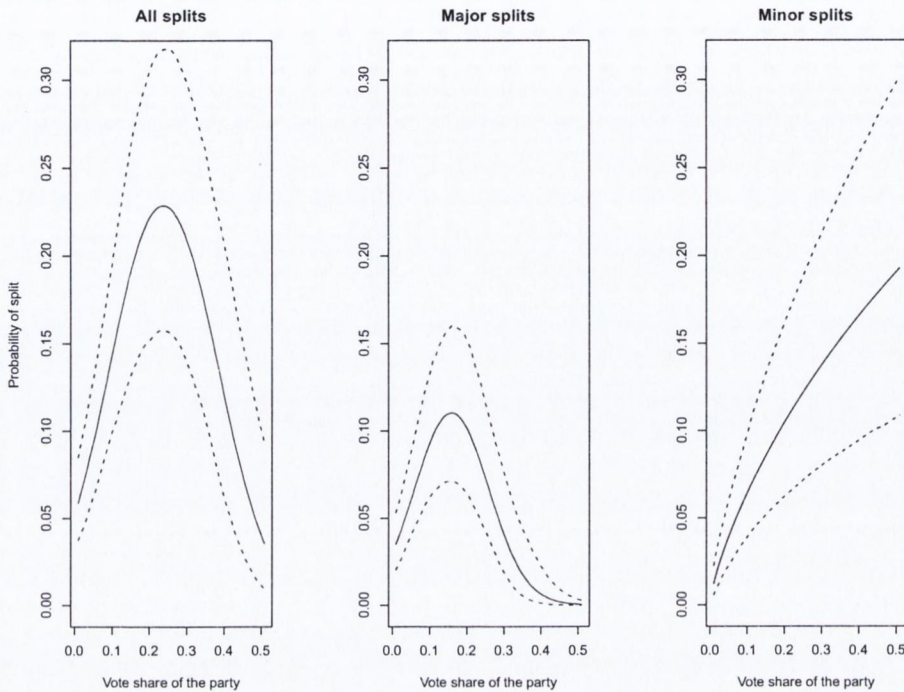
that can precipitate party splits. The finding that government parties are more likely to experience minor but not major splits suggests further evidence to the existence of this trade-off. Since major splits are potentially more likely to lead to a government collapse, political elites in government parties have more incentives to avoid them.

The results of the analysis show no support for the expectation that dominant parties are less likely to split. In fact, the coefficient of this variable is even positive and statistically significant in one model specification, but this result may arise due to the use of an incomplete sample.

However, the findings strongly support the expectations about the effect of party



Figure 2.3: The effect of party size on the probability of split



size. This variable emerges as statistically the most significant and substantively one of the most important predictors of party fission. Figure 2.3 plots the predicted probability of splits, major splits and minor splits with 95% confidence intervals for the empirically observed values of party size while keeping other variables constant.<sup>21</sup> The middle panel shows that major splits occur with the highest probability (0.11) when the size of the party reaches around 16 percent while major splits of small and in particular large parties are much less likely. This finding is consistent with Hypothesis 4.1, which suggested that medium-sized parties are most likely to experience major splits.

By contrast, the right panel in Figure 2.3 shows that the probability of minor splits increases with party size, although for higher values of the size variable the 95% confidence intervals are very broad. However, according to the likelihood ratio test,

<sup>21</sup>This and other plots with predicted probabilities were produced using the estimates of the analyses conducted on the complete sample and Zelig package in statistical environment R (Imai, King and Lau, 2007, 2008). The values of other independent variables are held constant at their means for continuous variables and medians or modes for ordinal and categorical variables.

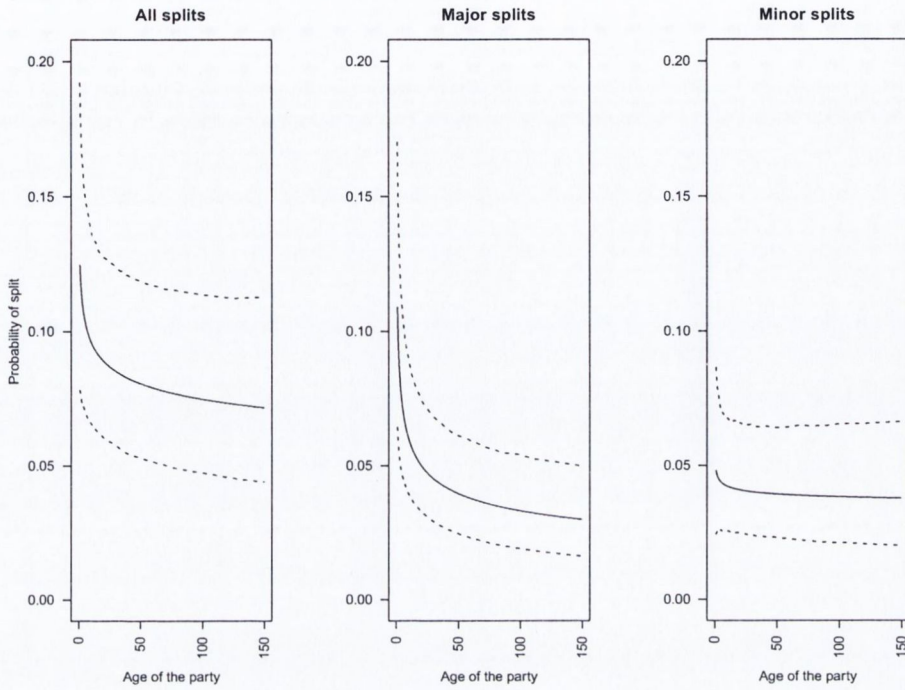
an alternative model specification with the squared term of the size variable instead of its natural logarithm had a significantly higher (p-value equal to 0.02) value of the log-likelihood of the model, suggesting that the natural log of the size variable is a more appropriate functional form for modelling the effect of this variable (full-sample analyses were used). Overall, this evidence can be interpreted as suggesting that the probability of minor splits increases with party size for relatively low values of the latter variable, but as party size increases further, its effect becomes much weaker. This finding supports Hypothesis 4.2, which suggested that minor splits of larger parties are more likely, although the effect is marginally decreasing.

Finally, the left panel in the figure presents the predicted probability of all splits for the empirically observed values of party size. Since the theory does not provide a clear expectation with regard to this relationship, the functional forms with the square and natural logarithm of the size variable were tried. The former performs better according to the likelihood ratio test (p-value = 0.001) and therefore the effect of the size variable is modelled using the squared term. The plot shows that the probability of party fission is most likely when the size of the party is around 24 percent. This value, however, is less interesting substantively, because it results from using one dependent variable capturing all splits. Such a variable, however, ignores the size of the splinter group, which has important effects on the probability of split.

Contrary to theoretical expectations the variable measuring the change in electoral support is not significant. However, in line with Hypothesis 5 older parties are less likely to experience major splits. Figure 2.4 plots the predicted probability of splits for the values of the party age variable. It shows that very young parties are particularly susceptible to splits: all else held constant, the change in the age of the party from one to ten years decreases the probability that it would experience a major split from 0.11 to 0.06 or by 44 percent. This effect is consistent with the theoretical expectations about the importance of party labels. In particular, the value of party label increases



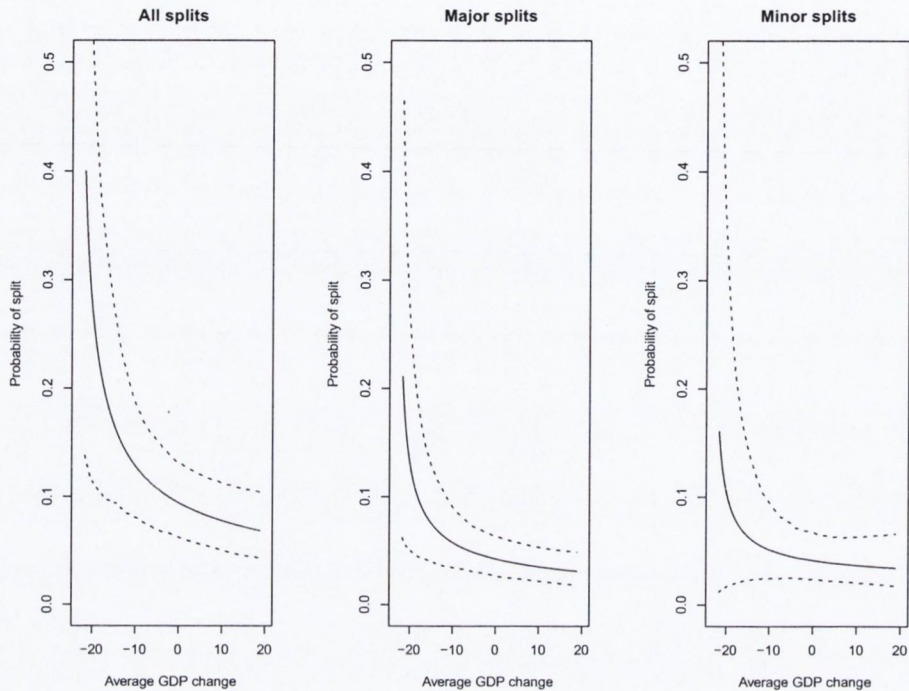
Figure 2.4: The effect of party age on the probability of split



the most in the first few elections while further elections only marginally increase its value.

With regard to the effect of sociological, institutional and political contexts, the results demonstrate that splits, especially major splits, are more likely to occur during an economic recession. Figure 2.5 plots the predicted probability of fission for the empirically observed values of the change in GDP per capita. The left and middle panels show that splits are particularly likely when the GDP per capita decreases by more than 10 percent. However, the observations with such extreme values of this variable make up only 5 percent of the sample. Thus, a substantively more important interpretation of this effect is that the increase from the value of the economic growth variable equal to one standard deviation below the mean (-6.8 percent) to the value of one standard deviation above the mean (3.8 percent) decreases the probability of major split by 0.01 (95% confidence interval is -0.02 and -0.006) or 25 percent.

Figure 2.5: The effect of the change in GDP on the probability of split



Moreover, opposite to theoretical expectations, the democracy age variable is significant in only two model specifications that used an incomplete sample. This can be partially explained by the high correlation of this variable and party age; indeed, once the party age variable is excluded from analysis, the democracy age variable becomes statistically significant.

Surprisingly, with the exception of the positive effect of effective electoral threshold on the probability of minor splits in the model using an incomplete sample, none of the three institutional variables has a significant effect on the probability of splits in any other model specification. Estimations using alternative measures of electoral system disproportionality, such as median district magnitude, Taagepera's effective threshold (Taagepera, 2002) and a 3-category variable that combines information on various dimensions of electoral systems, show no significant effect as well. The lack of direct institutional effects is consistent with a recent comparative study on legislative

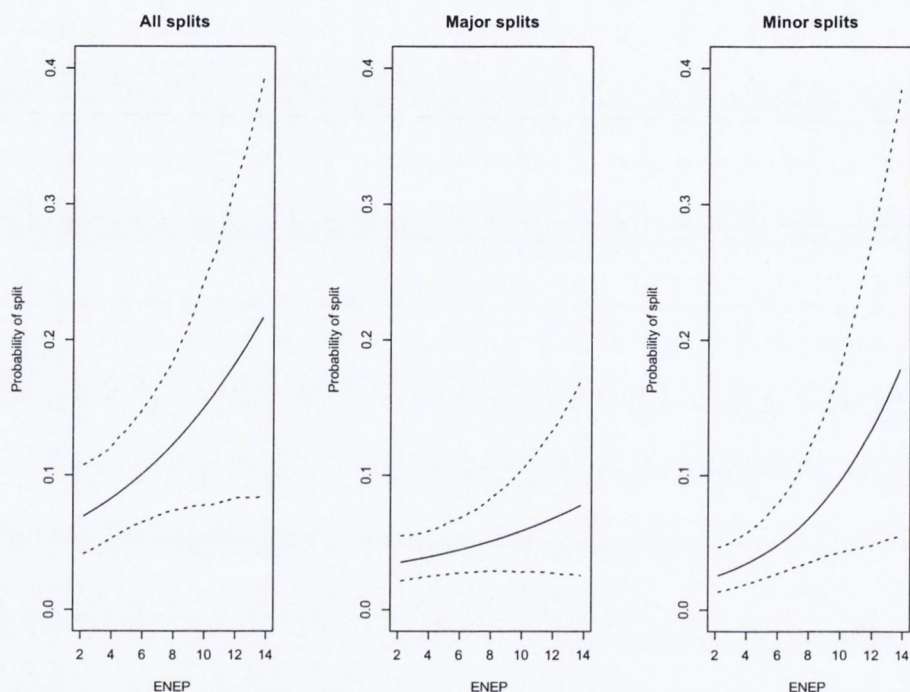


party switching (O'Brien and Shomer, 2011), which finds no effect of electoral system.

However, recall that the hypothesised relationship between the probability of split and party size indirectly considers the effects of electoral institutions and that these hypotheses are supported by empirical evidence. This suggests that electoral institutions have an effect on the probability of splits, but it is highly conditional on political elite preferences, in particular on their expected electoral performance. A similar reasoning can explain why the monetary entry costs and public funding variables are insignificant. The effect of these institutional variables should be conditional on the resources of potential splinter parties, making it hard to discover their direct effects. In addition, electoral institutions affect electoral outcomes at the district level, which makes it challenging to discover their effects at the national level. For example, some minor splinter parties in the UK were established by MPs who could reasonably expect to be re-elected in their constituencies on the basis of their personal appeal, even if their mini-parties had no chance to gain seats anywhere else.

Finally, the results show that higher levels of party system fragmentation increase the probability of party fission, although this variable is insignificant in predicting major splits. These findings suggest that the availability of potential allies is an important factor determining party splits. The lack of an effect of fragmentation on the probability of minor splits further supports this conjecture, because one would expect that minor splinter groups need allies more in order to achieve an electoral breakthrough. Figure 2.6 plots the predicted probabilities of party fission for empirically observed values of party system fragmentation. As demonstrated by this figure, the substantive effect of party system fragmentation is quite sizeable. More precisely, the change of this variable from the value one standard deviation below the mean (3.2) to the value of one standard deviation above the mean (7.1) increases the probability of split by 0.02 (95% confidence interval is 0.008 and 0.05) or 99 percent.

Figure 2.6: The effect of the effective number of electoral parties on the probability of split



### 2.4.2 Robustness checks

One potential criticism against these findings is that the dataset includes both established and newer democracies of Europe. Tables 2.5 and 2.6 address this issue by presenting the results of statistical analyses for each of these two groups of countries. These tables show that the effect of party size remains very robust in almost all analyses, thus supporting one of the key findings of this research. However, the statistical significance of several other variables decreases, whilst others become statistically significant. More specifically, the significance of the ideological heterogeneity and government membership variables drops below the 0.05 level for both groups of countries. This is not surprising, as these two variables just reached the 0.05 level of significance in some analyses that used the full sample.

Furthermore, there are some changes in the significance of the variables capturing



Table 2.5: Mixed-effects logit model of party splits (Western and Southern Europe)

	All	All	Major	Major	Minor	Minor
(Intercept)	14.961*	3.020	22.254*	4.486	8.802	2.150
	(7.259)	(3.403)	(9.762)	(4.168)	(7.803)	(4.371)
Ideological diversity	0.337		0.714		-0.244	
	(0.283)		(0.366)		(0.368)	
Government	0.229	0.219	-0.173	-0.147	0.487	0.460
	(0.257)	(0.197)	(0.394)	(0.278)	(0.293)	(0.244)
Dominant	0.775	0.161	1.433	0.657	0.402	-0.104
	(0.545)	(0.416)	(1.120)	(0.901)	(0.474)	(0.387)
Size	9.096**	9.130***	9.207	11.227*		
	(3.472)	(2.526)	(6.210)	(4.668)		
Size squared	-18.637*	-17.040**	-34.512	-40.754**		
	(9.090)	(6.388)	(19.937)	(15.621)		
Ln (size)					0.482**	0.640***
					(0.153)	(0.127)
Ln (party age)	-0.144	-0.096	-0.193	-0.134	-0.181	-0.120
	(0.100)	(0.075)	(0.146)	(0.104)	(0.115)	(0.096)
Ln (electoral change)	-1.154*	-0.822*	-1.958**	-1.089*	0.025	-0.189
	(0.537)	(0.380)	(0.708)	(0.447)	(0.646)	(0.514)
Ln (GDP change)	-4.540*	-1.229	-6.079*	-1.523	-3.577	-1.297
	(2.105)	(0.861)	(2.835)	(1.067)	(2.254)	(1.083)
Ln (democracy age)	-0.551	-0.258	-0.981*	-0.368*	-0.234	-0.107
	(0.343)	(0.151)	(0.446)	(0.180)	(0.360)	(0.191)
Electoral threshold	1.716	1.096	2.016	-0.120	1.783	1.684
	(2.650)	(1.816)	(3.517)	(2.013)	(2.888)	(2.400)
Deposit	1.128	0.556	1.324	0.899	0.945	0.253
	(0.664)	(0.397)	(0.897)	(0.512)	(0.717)	(0.490)
Party funding	0.597	0.170	1.002	0.238	0.455	0.126
	(0.598)	(0.433)	(1.007)	(0.583)	(0.614)	(0.518)
ENEP	0.279*	0.223*	0.271	0.238*	0.334**	0.261*
	(0.121)	(0.090)	(0.152)	(0.107)	(0.124)	(0.109)
Election-level st. dev.	0.61	0.57	0.14	0.00	0.37	0.67
Country-level st. dev.	0.84	0.69	1.00	0.70	0.91	0.87
Log-likelihood	-299.602	-506.463	-144.434	-273.651	-237.421	-361.343
Countries	14	14	14	14	14	14
Elections	131	228	131	228	131	228
N	943	1694	943	1694	943	1694

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

the value of running under established parties' labels as opposed to running under new party labels (i.e. Hypotheses 5 and 6). In the context of Western and Southern Europe, the party age variable drops below the 0.05 level of significance in all analyses. The economic performance variable remains significant only in the analyses that used the reduced sample. On the other hand, the democratic age variable becomes a statistically significant predictor (at the 0.05 level) of major mergers. In addition, the variable measuring the decline in party's electoral support also becomes statistically significant in four out of six model specifications. Finally, the effective number of parties remains a significant predictor of minor splits, but also reaches statistical significance in one specification with major splits as the dependent variable. Overall, these results support the effect of party labels on the probability of fission. The variables capturing party age and democratic age are closely related in theoretical and empirical terms, which can explain the change in their significance levels. It is also not surprising that electoral decline becomes significant while economic performance loses its significance in most models. In the countries where parties have well-established labels, economic recessions might not be sufficient to assure the electoral success of new parties. In contrast, the electoral decline of established parties provides a stronger signal of the weakening linkages between established parties and voters, which opens electoral space for new parties.

As one would expect given the relative youth of democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, the variables capturing the value of party labels are somewhat less important for splits in this region. Party age is a statistically significant factor of major splits while democratic age affects the probability of minor splits. Moreover, one of the institutional variables becomes significant. More specifically, the existence of monetary deposit requirements reduces the probability of fission, especially that of minor fission as it could be expected. These findings reflect the fact that stable linkages between parties and voters in this region are still in formation, although they already somewhat



Table 2.6: Mixed-effects logit model of party splits (Central and Eastern Europe)

	All	All	Major	Major	Minor	Minor
(Intercept)	-1.235 (1.672)	-0.885 (1.457)	-0.855 (1.690)	-0.815 (1.493)	-2.874 (3.077)	-1.395 (2.415)
Ideological diversity	0.155 (0.338)		0.316 (0.352)		0.058 (0.533)	
Government	0.197 (0.266)	0.216 (0.247)	0.391 (0.281)	0.305 (0.265)	0.029 (0.406)	0.234 (0.381)
Dominant	0.808 (0.731)	1.145 (0.729)	0.780 (0.729)	0.826 (0.721)	-0.371 (0.735)	-0.154 (0.688)
Size	21.970*** (4.879)	25.642*** (4.459)	16.794** (5.311)	22.117*** (4.979)		
Size squared	-48.244** (14.816)	-58.984*** (13.406)	-46.258** (17.237)	-61.218*** (16.349)		
Ln(size)					1.279*** (0.269)	1.205*** (0.237)
Ln(party age)	-0.132 (0.116)	-0.155 (0.108)	-0.215 (0.127)	-0.272* (0.120)	0.048 (0.157)	0.081 (0.147)
Ln(electoral change)	-0.066 (0.337)	-0.062 (0.309)	-0.227 (0.353)	-0.100 (0.333)	0.504 (0.571)	0.214 (0.513)
Ln(GDP change)	-0.380 (0.301)	-0.362 (0.296)	-0.490 (0.272)	-0.446 (0.269)	0.984 (0.868)	1.001 (0.801)
Ln(democracy age)	-0.476 (0.279)	-0.358 (0.271)	-0.207 (0.261)	-0.122 (0.254)	-1.109* (0.498)	-1.020* (0.460)
Electoral threshold	-1.137 (2.017)	-0.125 (1.978)	-2.562 (1.937)	-1.529 (1.825)	1.654 (2.679)	1.282 (2.339)
Deposit	-0.874** (0.338)	-0.843* (0.335)	-0.602* (0.296)	-0.590* (0.283)	-0.857 (0.504)	-0.888* (0.446)
Party funding	0.809* (0.380)	0.479 (0.352)	0.559 (0.336)	0.354 (0.303)	0.968 (0.594)	0.764 (0.498)
ENEP	0.074 (0.071)	0.039 (0.069)	0.015 (0.068)	-0.001 (0.065)	0.125 (0.099)	0.068 (0.091)
Election-level st. dev.	0.32	0.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Country-level st. dev.	0.24	0.26	0.00	0.00	0.33	0.09
Log-likelihood	-244.869	-290.049	-221.234	-258.100	-118.541	-134.827
Countries	10	10	10	10	10	10
Elections	50	50	50	52	50	52
N	512	654	512	654	512	654

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

reduced schismatic tendencies in parties.

Furthermore, the results did not change substantially when the vote and seat shares of the parties in the last election or the average seat share in the last two elections were used for measuring party size. I have also tested the extent to which the results are sensitive to different thresholds separating major and minor splits. In particular, in one version of this threshold I coded all splits of extra-parliamentary parties or the parties with 3 or fewer MPs as minor instead of major. Two other versions of threshold coded splits as major if 5 or 20 percent of party's legislators left (splits of non-parliamentary parties and very small legislative parties were coded as major). The substantive results remained the same with these versions of the threshold.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Political parties can be conceptualised as coalitions of politicians with similar but not identical ideological preferences. Given the almost unavoidable preference heterogeneity in the party, there is always a risk that schismatic tendencies will tear the party apart. The glue that holds parties together is that party members are more likely to enjoy office benefits and achieve their policy goals through cooperation. Cooperation provides politicians with economies of scale, for instance, they are more likely to overcome electoral thresholds or obtain the highest executive office in the political system (Cox, 1997). Parties also provide politicians with brand labels that reduce informational costs for voters (Snyder Jr and Ting, 2002) and bring habitual voters with them (Campbell et al., 1960).<sup>22</sup>

This chapter provides empirical support to these ideas and demonstrates that splits are more likely when office benefits provided by the party due to the economies of scale or the brand of the party are lower. This is most likely to be the case when the party is not sufficiently large for it to become a government formateur, but large enough

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<sup>22</sup>Of course, there are a number of other reasons for the existence of parties.



for its internal factions to establish electorally viable parties. Furthermore, splits are also more likely if the party does not have a well-established party brand because, for example, it is recently established, or when electoral markets are open for new party labels to enter, as would be the case under adverse economic conditions.

The chapter also provides important insights into how elite coordination through party fission shapes party systems within the constraints provided by institutions and social structure. In particular, the finding that medium-sized parties are most likely to split implies that under fairly proportional electoral systems and relatively strong national governments political elites could politicise social divisions in such a way that would lead either to many small parties or moderate fragmentation with few large and few small parties. Furthermore, party systems with medium-sized parties should be less stable than those dominated by small and large parties. However, the role of elite coordination in shaping party systems is reduced once parties with well-established labels emerge.

Moreover, an important methodological implication of the findings of this chapter is that explaining new party entry requires using group- and party-level variables. The research on new party emergence recognises the theoretical importance of the strategic interaction between potential new parties and established parties (Hug, 2001), but empirical tests are conducted at the systemic level. This chapter shows that such a research strategy is problematic, because party-specific variables, such as size or age, are equally or even more important for explaining new party entry in comparison to systemic variables. Furthermore, this research also shows how the difference in the size of two groups matters by using two types of splits as a proxy. In particular, it demonstrates that this difference conditions the effect of systemic variables, such as economic performance or party system fragmentation. This finding may explain why some of these variables were insignificant in the previous research on new party emergence. For example, Tavits finds no effect of economic performance on the emergence

of new parties neither in new nor old democracies (Tavits, 2006, 2008*b*). The findings of this study show, however, that economic performance is a significant predictor of the emergence of more viable new parties while it has no effect on the emergence of weak new parties. Thus, pooling all new parties together decreases the chances of finding a significant correlation between the new party count and economic performance.



# Chapter 3

## Explaining party splits: case studies

### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 argues that parties split when intra-party factions expect that the losses in terms of office will be lower than their ideological gains. The large-n analysis largely supports this argument. In particular, it demonstrates that faction leaders' expectations about office benefits in the next electoral period is the main determinant of party fission. Several proxies of faction leaders' expectations about office gains are significant predictors of party splits, but the most important of these variables in terms of substantive and statistical significance is party size. In line with the theoretical expectations the analysis shows that parties are most likely to split when they are neither too small nor too large, provided that intra-party factions are of roughly equal size. The causal mechanism of this relationship is that intra-party factions in moderately large parties can establish separate electorally viable parties without foregoing the benefits of being members of one of the largest parties in the system. However, at the same time electoral system disproportionality, which is expected to be an important factor in determining parties' electoral viability, is not a statistically significant predictor of party splits.

Furthermore, statistical analysis provides little support to the argument that fac-

tions' expectations about office benefits in the present electoral period and intra-party ideological disagreements affect the probability of party fission. The lack of effect of intra-party ideological disagreements, however, goes against well-established theoretical expectations and it may be a consequence of the lack of good empirical proxies for measuring this theoretical variable.

Case studies in this chapter, while lacking the generalisability of large-n analysis, provide useful illustrations of the causal mechanisms behind observed correlation patterns. More specifically, five brief case studies of small and medium-sized parties representing ethnic minorities in post-communist democracies presents examples of how size influences the probability of fission. The case of the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, a party that dominated the Japanese party system for decades, further illustrates theoretical expectations with regard to party size.

### **3.2 Ethnic parties in Eastern Europe**

This section examines splits of ethnic parties representing five minority communities in Eastern Europe: a Turkish minority party called the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) in Bulgaria, several parties representing the minority of Russians and other Eastern Slavs in Latvia, the Electoral Action of Poles (LLRA) in Lithuania, the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) and the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) in Slovakia. While these ethnic parties represent only a small part of all ethnic minority parties in post-communist democracies (Bochsler, 2011; Gherghina and Jigla, 2011), they provide good cases for illustrating the differences between small and medium-sized parties in terms of their propensity to split. This is because these parties, unlike many other ethnic parties in the region, have been able to capture almost completely the support of their ethnic minorities (with a partial exception of the LLRA). At the same time their opportunities for electoral expansion are very limited because as with most other ethnic parties they have not been able to gain much support beyond their respec-



tive minorities. The combination of these two factors means that the total electoral support of the parties representing each minority has been stable and dependent on the size of the minority groups, which varies quite considerably (see Table 3.1). This allows one to isolate the effect of party size on the probability of split. In addition, all these parties have been functioning since the early 1990s, which allows keeping constant any effects of party age. They are also similar in terms of the main intra-party division between “radicals” who demand greater rights of ethnic minorities even if that may lead to a conflict with the majority parties and “moderates” who have more limited goals and prefer a less conflictual strategy for achieving them (Szöcsik and Bochsler, 2012). Finally, all these parties exist in the countries that have similar historical legacies.

The analysis of the splits in ethnic parties is closely related to the literature on the internal political competition in ethnic groups. The main argument proposed in this literature is the risk of ethnic outbidding, when several political organisations compete for the votes of the group by radicalising their demands (Mitchell, 1995). Bochsler (2012) focuses on the reasons for such competition in post-communist democracies and finds that it emerges if the group is regionally concentrated and if it is sufficiently large to be able to obtain at least two seats in the national legislature. While his argument focuses on intra-group competition more generally, which also includes the emergence of new non-splinter parties or even the takeover of a regional branch of a non-ethnic party by members of the minority, it still supports the main argument of this research, which suggests that smaller parties are less likely to split. Furthermore, analysing several splits of ethnic parties, Szöcsik and Bochsler (2012) emphasise the importance of participation in government, which exacerbates the conflict between moderates and radicals (defined on the basis of their attitudes to the relationship with the majority group) and increases the probability of split. This argument supports the finding of the large-n analysis which suggests that government parties are more likely to split, because the participation in government implies a trade-off between office and ideology

Table 3.1: Ethnic parties and their electoral performance

Minority and size	Election year	Party	Vote share	Seat share
Turks (Bulgaria): 8.2% (2011)	1990	DPS	6.0	5.8
	1991	DPS	7.5	10
	1994	DPS	5.4	6.3
	1994	PDP	0.3	0
	1997	DPS (in coal.)	7.6	7.9
	2001	DPS (in coal.)	7.5	8.8
	2005	DPS	12.8	14.2
	2005	NMRF (in coal.)	1.3	0
	2009	DPS	14.5	15.8
Eastern Slavs (Latvia): 20.2% *	1993	SL	12.0	13.0
	1993	L	5.8	7.0
	1993	LKPP	1.2	0
	1995	LSP-L	5.6	5.0
	1995	TSP	5.6	6.0
	1998	TSP-LSP-L-LKPP	14.2	16.0
	2002	TSP-LSP-L	19.1	25.0
	2002	LKPP	0.5	0
	2006	TSP-LSP-NC	14.4	17.0
	2006	L-BITE	6.0	6.0
	2010	SC-LSP	26.0	29.0
Polish (Lithuania): 6.1% (2009)	2010	PCTVL (former L)	1.4	0
	2011	SC-LSP	28.4	31.0
	2011	PCTVL (former L)	0.8	0
	1992	LLRA	2.1	2.8
	1996	LLRA	3.1	0.7
	2000	LLRA	2.0	1.4
	2004	LLRA	3.8	1.4
	2004	LLLP	0.4	0
	2008	LLRA	4.8	2.1
Hungarians (Romania): 6.7% (2001)	1990	UDMR	7.2	7.3
	1992	UDMR	7.5	7.9
	1996	UDMR	6.6	7.3
	2000	UDMR	6.8	7.8
	2004	UDMR	6.2	6.6
	2008	UDMR	6.2	6.6
Hungarians (Slovakia): 10.7% (2002)	1998	SMK	9.1	10.0
	2002	SMK	11.2	13.3
	2006	SMK	11.7	13.3
	2010	SMK	4.3	0
	2010	Most	8.1	9.3

Parties: Bulgaria: DPS - Movement for Rights and Freedoms; PDP - Party for Democratic Change; NMRF - National Movement for Rights and Freedoms. Latvia: SL - Harmony for Latvia; L - Equal Rights for Latvia; LKPP - Party of Russian Citizens in Latvia; LSP - Latvian Socialist Party; TSP - National Harmony Party; NC - New Centre; BITE - Free Choice in a Europe of Nations; SC - Harmony Centre. Lithuania: LLRA - Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania; LLLP - People's Party of Lithuanian Poles. Romania: UDMR - Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania. Slovakia: SMK - Party of Hungarian Coalition; Most - Most-Hid. \*Includes the members of the minority with voting rights only in the 2000s (source - Bochsler 2012). This share has increased quite significantly since the 1990s. Source for the size of other minorities: CIA World Factbook.



(or votes). In what follows I discuss each of the five cases by building on the insights from these studies.

### **3.2.1 Movement for Rights and Freedoms**

The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) was established in 1990 by the members of Bulgaria's Turkish minority. The party has successfully mobilised Turkish voters in the first parliamentary election after the regime change in 1990 by gaining 6 percent of the vote and 23 out of 400 seats. While its electoral support remained under 10 percent in the 1990s, the party made significant gains in the 2005 and 2009 elections, partially through its successful efforts in reaching out to Bulgaria's Roma community (Savkova, 2006). The party has provided legislative support to governments in the period of 1991-1994 and has been a junior coalition member in 2001-2009.

While the DPS is considered as one of the most successful ethnic parties in Central and Eastern Europe, it has experienced a number of splits during its existence that have threatened its dominance among the Turkish minority. A radical group demanding the federalisation of the country established the Turkish Democratic Party in 1993, but failed to obtain registration (Bugajski, 2002, 813). The officially registered splinter parties included the Party for Democratic Change (established in 1994), the National Movement for Rights and Freedoms (founded in 1998) and the Movement of Democratic Wing (founded in 2003 by a DPS deputy expelled two years earlier) (Chukov, 1999; Karasimeonov, 2001). The electoral support of these splinter parties was quite low. The Party for Democratic Change obtained 0.27 percent of vote in the 1994 election. The National Movement for Rights and Freedoms formed a coalition with the Union of Democratic Forces in 2001 but withdrew from it after the coalition submitted candidate lists to the electoral authorities (Székely, 2009). For the 2005 election it formed a pre-electoral coalition with the Movement of Democratic Wing, two other small Turkish parties and two leftist parties, which however received only a little over 1 percent of

vote but no seats.<sup>1</sup> However, the splits did affect the support of the DPS, especially in 1994, when its support declined to 5.4 percent from 7.5 percent in 1991. Although this was still within a healthy margin of the electoral threshold of 4 percent, the ability of the DPS to reach the 4 percent threshold in the elections in 1997 and 2001 was uncertain (Spirova, 2007; Vassilev, 2001). As a result, the DPS formed pre-electoral coalitions with smaller Bulgarian parties for both 1997 and 2001 elections.

Overall, schismatic tendencies have been quite strong in the DPS. The size of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria (8.2 percent), combined with the ability of its parties to draw support from smaller ethnic minorities, is theoretically sufficient for sustaining two small parties when the electoral threshold is 4 percent, especially if one or both parties establish electoral alliances with other parties in the system. This has encouraged a number of factions in the DPS to split off and the leadership of the DPS to take a belligerent attitude towards rebellious factions (Chukov, 1999).<sup>2</sup> As a result, while the DPS has effectively remained the only strong representative of the Turkish minority, the possibility of the emergence of the second viable Turkish party in the 1990s was not negligible.

### **3.2.2 Eastern Slav minority parties in Latvia**

The share of Russians and other Eastern Slavs in Latvia is the highest among the cases studied here (although not all of them are entitled to vote due to the Latvian citizenship laws adopted in the early 1990s), but none of these ethnic parties participated in government since the first election in the independent Latvian state in 1993. As predicted by theory of party fission, given the large size of the minority, schismatic tendencies among these parties have been heavily pronounced. The main cleavage in the minorities has been their rights, which led to the emergence of moderate and radical

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<sup>1</sup>Novinite.com, May 17, 2005.

<sup>2</sup>The DPS is highly centralised under the leadership of its founder Ahmed Dogan.



parties, although socio-economic issues were also a salient dividing line.<sup>3</sup>

As seen in Table 3.1, three Russian parties participated in the 1993 election: the moderate Harmony for Latvia - Revival for the Economy, which also included a number of ethnic Latvians, and two more radical parties called the Equal Rights Movement and the Party of Russians. The Harmony for Latvia bloc split in 1994, leading to the emergence of the National Harmony party with a clearer ethnic profile. The Equal Rights Movement also split in 1994, leading to the emergence of the Socialist Party of Latvia with an orthodox Communist programme (Ikstens, 2006). The latter two parties participated in the 1995 election as a pre-electoral coalition while the National Harmony ran independently. While both blocs managed to cross the 5 percent threshold, for the 1998 election the three parties and the Party of Russians formed a bloc called "For Human Rights in United Latvia". The bloc has largely maintained its unity until 2003 (although the Party of Russians left in 2001), when the National Harmony and the Socialist Party of Latvia left it due to disagreements with more radical attitudes of the Equal Rights Movement. However, some members of the first two parties split off and established the party called "Free Choice in a Europe of Nations", which allied itself with the Equal Rights Movement. Another split (leading to the foundation of the New Centre) of the National Harmony party occurred in 2004. The consolidation of these multiple parties occurred in the late 2010s, however, when the Harmony Centre bloc that included (through mergers or pre-electoral coalitions) a large Social Democratic Party "Harmony" (formed by the merger of the National Harmony, the New Centre and few smaller parties) and a much smaller Socialist Party of Latvia squeezed out other ethnic parties in the elections of 2010 and 2011.

In line with the theory proposed in this research, the Latvian case shows strong schismatic tendencies in the parties representing a large minority with relatively high internal ideological heterogeneity. Political entrepreneurs and intra-party factions have

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<sup>3</sup>The summary of splits in ethnic minority parties in Latvia presented below is largely based on Ikstens (2006) and Mednis (2007).

had low incentives to keep their parties united, given that the size of the Eastern Slav minorities was sufficient to sustain two or even three small parties under the 5 percent electoral threshold used in Latvia. Splits have also been encouraged by the relative ease of forming pre-electoral alliances. Indeed, in at least two cases the parent and splinter parties formed alliances for the following election after they split.

It is also interesting to note that the united party or bloc of the Eastern Slav minorities could be one of the largest parties in the fragmented Latvian party system (e.g. the alliances of the ethnic minority parties gained the highest share of seats in 2011 and came close second in 2002 and 2010) and therefore should be less likely to split. However, this incentive has been rather weak so far, because ethnic Latvian parties have been reluctant to form coalition governments with minority parties. In fact, after the 2002 election the bloc of ethnic parties failed to participate in government precisely because ethnic Latvian parties considered some of the parties in the bloc as too radical.<sup>4</sup>

### **3.2.3 Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania**

The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (LLRA) was established in 1994 as a political arm of the Union of Poles in Lithuania, which participated in the first parliamentary election of the independent Lithuanian state in 1992 as a civic organisation. As seen in Table 3.1, the LLRA has been able to capture only some votes of the Polish minority in Lithuania, although its electoral support has generally increased since the 1990s. Still, in the parliamentary elections until 2012 the party was unable to reach the 5 percent threshold, which was applicable to all parties running in the PR tier since 1996 (no threshold was applied for ethnic minority parties in the 1992 election (Krupavičius, 1996, 80)). As a result, the party gained seats (between 1 and 3 out of 141 seats in the national legislature) only in the majoritarian tier of Lithuania's mixed electoral system since 1996 due to its regional concentration mainly in the areas around the capital city

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<sup>4</sup>“New Latvian political movement seen as having no future”, BBC Monitoring, 20 January 2004.



of Vilnius. Despite its low representation in the national legislature of Lithuania, the party has not limited itself to local politics, but has constantly sought to increase its influence at the national level. To this end, it sought to increase its support among the voters of the Polish minority in order to pass the 5 percent electoral threshold and gain seats in the PR tier. It came very close to reaching this goal in the 2008 election, when it won 4.8 percent of vote while being in a pre-electoral alliance with a small Russian minority party. The party's public profile was further boosted after its leader was elected as an MEP in 2009 and the question of the rights of the Polish minority became highly salient in the bilateral relationship between Lithuania and Poland in the early 2010s. As a result, the party leadership was optimistic about its chances of reaching the 5 percent threshold in the 2012 election and hoped for the participation in the government coalition formed after this election.<sup>5</sup> The party has already participated in a centrist minority government in 2000-2001.

The LLRA was exceptional among other Lithuanian parties for its organisational stability. It only experienced one minor split in 2002, when a small group of party's members established the People's Party of Lithuanian Poles (LLP) that presented itself as a more moderate representative of the Polish minority. The LLRA accused the new party of working with Lithuanian majority parties in order to break the unity of the Polish minority.<sup>6</sup> However, the threat of this split to LLRA's positions was minimal at best. This was partially because very few of its members joined the new party. For example, only one of the more well-known members of the LLRA (Rysard Macejkianec) joined the splinter group. The minor extent of the split is further demonstrated by the fact that in the 2002 local elections the LLP candidates did not include any of the 53 local councillors of LLRA elected in the previous election in 2000.<sup>7</sup>

As a minor splinter party, the LLP failed in attracting the support of the Polish

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<sup>5</sup>Lietuvos rytas, 18th of March, 2012.

<sup>6</sup>Lithuanian Poles to found new party, BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union, 26th of July, 2002.

<sup>7</sup>Based on the data on the website of the Central Electoral Commission of Lithuania.

minority. In the 2002 local election it gained only 0.4 percent of vote and 1 local councillorship against 3.2 percent of vote and 50 mandates obtained by the LLRA. In the 2004 parliamentary election the LLLP did not present a candidate list in the PR tier and ran only 9 candidates in SMDs with a significant share of Polish minorities. The average support of these candidates was 2.9 percent compared to 17.6 percent obtained by the LLRA in the same districts. In total the LLLP obtained only 0.4 percent of vote in the majoritarian tier of electoral system.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, the case of the LLRA illustrates that intra-party factions in a small party have strong incentives to maintain party unity. The split of the LLRA was very marginal and had very limited effect on its electoral support. The case study also exemplifies the difficulties of estimating the effect of electoral system on the probability of party splits, as emphasised in the previous chapter. In particular, due to the regional concentration of its electorate, the LLRA has been electorally viable under the majoritarian rather than proportional tier of Lithuania's mixed electoral system. In addition, the case study also illustrates the importance of intra-party ideological heterogeneity for party unity, as it showed that the split of the LLRA was partially caused by the divisions between those party members who took more radical positions concerning the minority rights issues (the majority in the party) and those who had less radical views on this dimension of competition (the minority group).

### **3.2.4 Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania**

The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) was established in late 1989 as a conglomerate of various Hungarian organisations in Romania (Gherghina, 2012). The party has successfully captured the votes of Hungarians in Romania since the first parliamentary election in 1990, as demonstrated by a very close match between the party's vote share and the share of Hungarians in Romania. It remained in opposition

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<sup>8</sup>All computations in this paragraph are based on the data available on the website of the Central Electoral Commission of Lithuania.



to the governments led by the communist successor party until 1996, when it joined the government led by Christian Democrats. After the 2000 elections, the party has controversially provided the parliamentary support to the minority government of its former adversary, the Social Democrats. It became a full-fledged coalition partner again in 2004-2008 in several governments led by the National Liberal Party and in 2009-2012 in the government of the Democratic Liberal Party.

Since its establishment the party has been divided into two broad groups: the moderates, who preferred the gradual expansion of minority rights through engagement with other parties in Romania, and the radicals, who sought autonomy for the Hungarian-dominated regions. Internal divisions have led to high degree of internal decentralisation in order to assure the representation of different views in the party (Gherghina, 2012). While the radicals dominated the party in the early 1990s, the moderates have had a stronger hand since the mid-1990s (Jigla and Gherghina, 2011; Székely, 2009), as is also demonstrated by the inclusion of the party in coalition governments. The party has thus toned down its rhetoric, especially with regard to the autonomy issue. However, this has caused the dissatisfaction of some more radical groups in the party, who dissolved their internal faction in the UDMR in 2003 and started organising a splinter party (Székely, 2009). After the failed attempt of one splinter group to register a party before the 2004 general election, two splinter parties were eventually registered: the Hungarian Civic Party (MPP) in 2007 and the Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania (EMNP) in 2011. The UDMR responded to the formation of these parties with a vehement criticism, pointing out that their emergence could split the Hungarian votes and leave them with a only a token representation at the national level (according to the Romanian Constitution, the Hungarian minority, as well as a number of smaller minorities, is entitled to one seat in the legislature). It seems that despite their hostility to the UDMR, the splinter parties also have similar concerns. For instance, the MPP only participated in the sub-national elections in 2008 and 2012, but did not run in the 2008

parliamentary election in order not to split the Hungarian vote (Jigla and Gherghina, 2011, 452). The splinter parties also have a limited support in the sub-national elections: the MPP gained only around 1 percent of vote in 2008 and 0.4 percent in 2012 while the EMNP obtained 0.5 percent of vote in the 2012 election. While at the time of writing it is unclear whether the splinter parties will participate in the general election in the fall of 2012, overall it seems that the splinter parties are primarily interested in gaining representation at the sub-national level rather than in the national legislature.

The UDMR case thus illustrates that small parties are less likely to split if they expect that split will undermine their electoral performance. Since the support for UDMR has always been stable but only somewhat higher than the 5 percent electoral threshold, its internal factions had strong incentives to keep party unity intact even under important ideological divisions. While the party experienced a minor split in 2003, which led to the establishment of two parties several years later, these splinters are small and seem to be primarily interested in the representation at the sub-national level, which they have achieved due to the regional concentration of the Hungarian minority. Furthermore, the policy concessions of the UDMR, due to its participation in or support for government, was an important reason for its split. This corroborates the finding in the previous chapter that government parties tend to split more often.

### **3.2.5 Party of Hungarian Coalition**

The Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK) in Slovakia was established as a merger of three Hungarian parties in 1998. The merger was first and foremost caused by the electoral law that substantially increased the electoral threshold for pre-electoral coalitions. The merging parties have previously participated in a pre-electoral coalition and effectively captured all Hungarian votes. The electoral support of the merged party was very stable in its first ten years and the party played an important role in the centre-right coalition governments formed between 1998 and 2006. As member of government,



it adopted a moderate stance with regard to the rights of the Hungarian minority, which however caused a lot of dissatisfaction in the party (Szöcsik and Bochsler, 2012).

The disagreements between moderates and radicals led to the major split of the party in 2009. Five of its members of parliament (out of 20 in total), including its former leader Bela Bugar, established a new party called Most-Hid in protest to what they perceived as too radical attitudes of the majority faction in the SMK towards the minority rights issues (Szöcsik and Bochsler, 2012). The new party sought to attract the votes of the Slovak majority and formed a coalition with a minor Slovak party called the Civic Conservative Party for the parliamentary election in 2010. Despite the appeals of Most-Hid to the Slovak majority, the combined electoral support of this party and its parent party SMK was 12.3 percent and thus only slightly higher than the 11.7 percent scored by the SMK in 2006. However, given the 5 percent electoral threshold used in Slovakia, only Most-Hid and its coalition partner gained seats in the legislature with 8.1 percent of vote, while the SMK lost all of its seats with 4.2 percent of vote.

The SMK case illustrates the theoretical explanation of party fission proposed in this research project. Both factions knew that, given the size of the Hungarian minority (close to 11 percent), one of them would certainly reach the 5 percent threshold and that there was a quite substantial chance that both of them would be able to achieve that given the similar size of the groups. Moreover, in the case of one party not passing the threshold, the larger successor party would have gained additional seats, because the votes of the parties which do not pass the electoral threshold are redistributed to other parties. Thus, the expectations about relatively low losses in terms of office combined with salient policy disagreements made the split option attractive.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>This case study draws on the analysis of the split by Kevin Deegan-Krause in his blog on Czech and Slovak politics. “New Parties: Most-Hid now on display”, June 10, 2009, <http://www.pozorblog.com/2009/06/new-parties-most-hid-now-on-display>.

### 3.2.6 Summary

The case studies above exemplify the theoretical explanation of party fission proposed in this research. By examining the parties that represent five ethnic minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. The analysis above provided some evidence that medium-sized ethnic parties are more likely to split than small ethnic parties. More specifically, the case studies show that splits of ethnic parties in Lithuania and Romania, where ethnic minorities are relatively small in comparison to the total population, have been less frequent and consequential than splits of ethnic parties in Bulgaria, Latvia and Slovakia, where the size of minorities is larger. The Polish party in Lithuania and the Hungarian party in Romania each experienced only one minor split. However, the splinter group in Romania participated in sub-national elections only, thus avoiding the risk of depriving the Hungarian minority from national representation due to the split in its vote. The splinter Polish party in Lithuania ran in both local and national elections, but only in the majoritarian tier in the latter. While this decision could have been a consequence of the party's perceived weakness, it also assured that the chances of the main Polish party to reach the 5 percent threshold in the PR tier would not be undermined by a split. Furthermore, even with two Polish parties running in the majoritarian tier, the Polish minority was guaranteed to win one SMD seat (as compared to two it gained in the previous election) due to its concentration in that district. In contrast, the minority parties in Bulgaria, Latvia and Slovakia, where the size of ethnic minorities exceeded the electoral threshold at least twice, experienced more splits and in most cases splinter parties participated in parliamentary elections. These illustrative case studies are in line with the findings of the large-n study by Bochsler (2012) on pluralism in ethnic minority representation, which suggest that the ethnic minority is likely to be represented by more than one party if its size allows it to have at least two seats.

The case studies also illustrate the theoretical expectation suggesting that electoral



institutions have an important effect on the probability of fission. Electoral system disproportionality in interaction with party size influences the electoral viability of the parties, as exemplified by the concerns of ethnic parties about passing relatively high electoral thresholds in post-communist democracies. At the same time the case studies, especially the case of Lithuania, where the Polish party was not able to reach the PR electoral threshold but was viable in several SMDs, manifest the difficulties in estimating the complex effects of electoral systems at the national level (Taagepera, 2002; Gallagher and Mitchell, 2005). This is in line with the speculation in Chapter 2 on the null effect of electoral system disproportionality on the probability of fission.

Another finding that emerges from these studies, especially on Latvia, Romania and Slovakia, is that internal ideological heterogeneity affects the probability of fission. This provides some limited evidence to the speculation that the lack of the significant effect of this variable in the some specification of statistical analysis may indeed be a consequence of a somewhat problematic proxy variable rather than the lack of the genuine effect. In addition, the cases of Romania and Slovakia show that the participation of ethnic parties in government was one of the main reasons for splits of these parties, as radical factions in these parties saw policy concessions to coalition partners as too excessive. This illustrates the finding of the large-n analysis showing that government parties are somewhat more likely to split.

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### **3.3 Liberal Democratic Party in Japan**

While the case studies of ethnic parties in Central and Eastern Europe provide useful illustrations of the theory of party fission, their evidence only partially exemplifies the relationship between the probability of party split and party size. This is because these ethnic parties, with a partial exception of Eastern Slav parties in Latvia, are too small to serve as government formateurs. As a result, the part of the argument on party size, which suggests that large parties are less likely to split than medium-sized parties (as

intra-party factions have strong incentives to stay together in order to maximise their chances of the participation in government) cannot be highlighted by these case studies.

This case study of the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan seeks to fill this gap. With a short exception in 1993-1994, the party participated in all governments in the period between 1955 and 2009, either as the only party in government or in coalition with smaller parties. As such, it provides an excellent case for examining the fission propensity of large parties which have high chances to participate in government. Furthermore, the factionalism in the party and its splits have been extensively studied (Leiserson, 1968; Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995; Kohno, 1997; Bouissou, 2001; Reed and Scheiner, 2003; Kato, 1998; Curtis, 1999; Kato and Mershon, 2006). This allows for a better illustration of the causal mechanisms of the theory, something which is difficult to achieve in less studied cases.

The Liberal Democratic Party in Japan was formed in 1955 as a merger of two conservative parties (see Chapter 5 for the detailed discussion of the merger). The party was notable for its high level of stability, in particular given the highly fluid politics in Japan in the first decade after the end of the Second World War (Kohno, 1997). This stability was particularly pronounced under the so-called 1955 system lasting between 1955 and 1993, which was remarkable for the dominance of the LDP in the Japanese political system with an almost permanent parliamentary majority. During this period, the party experienced only one minor split in 1976 leading to the formation of the New Liberal Club by six of its legislators led by Yohei Kono (Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995). In 1993 the party experienced two other splits. Ten legislators of the LDP, led by Masoyashi Takemura established the Sakigake party and 44 other MPs established the Japan Renewal Party (Shinsei-to) under the leadership of Tsutomu Hata and Ichiro Ozawa (Kohno, 1997). The LDP experienced further splits in the 2000s, but this case study seeks to understand both the stability and splits of the LDP in the period between 1955 and 1993, which is better documented than the development of the party after



1993.

The stability of the LDP until 1993 provides a nice illustration of the theory of party fission proposed here. In particular, in line with the theory, the literature suggests that one of the most important factors of this stability was the permanent access of the LDP to power. For example, referring to the party during this period, Reed and Scheiner (2003, 472) argue that “the sharing of power proved more than sufficient to hold the party together”. Similarly, Masumi (1995, 208) argues that “[a] split would have meant the collapse of LDP governance and the loss of the means to secure posts and nurture support bases”. That said, the party was frequently shaken by factional conflicts and disagreements over the distribution of government and party positions. In particular, the divide between mainstream and anti-mainstream factional coalitions (created on the basis of support to different party presidential candidates) was a permanent feature of the LDP. Factions did invoke split threats in these conflicts (Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995), but they were rarely followed through as discussed above. This is because fission was a risky option for the dominant coalition in the party and in particular for the dissenting faction.

More specifically, the dominant faction in the party could have been deprived from the majority of seats in the Japanese Diet. This did not necessarily mean exclusion from government, since the rump party could form a coalition government with a splinter group or opposition parties. In fact, until the 1970s a splinter party would have had no choice but to form a coalition with the LDP, because the ideological distance between the LDP and the second largest party in the party system, the Japanese Socialist Party (JSP), was very wide (Bouissou, 2001). However, the levels of polarisation between the two parties decreased somewhat in the 1970s (Curtis, 1999, 78) and two smaller centrist parties emerged, which made coalition governments between parts of the LDP and other parties more credible. For instance, Bouissou (2001, 592) argues that in the late 1970s, at the time of an intense factional strife in the LDP, “[m]ost political

pundits foresaw a grand coalition stretching from the liberal wing of the LDP to the right wing of the JSP". Thus, a substantial splinter group could have been able to form a majority government through coalition with opposition parties, thus depriving the dominant faction in the LDP from governmental office.

Fission was by far a riskier option for a dissenting faction. Its electoral performance had to be sufficiently strong to deprive the LDP of a parliamentary majority, because only in this case could a splinter group have formed a coalition government with opposition parties or the rump LDP. However, even if a splinter party would have succeeded in achieving that, it could still be excluded from government if the LDP formed a coalition with one or few opposition parties. This was quite likely, because since the 1960s the opposition was fragmented and divided, which meant that coalition governments including most of the opposition parties would have been unstable. Indeed, the seven-party government between two LDP splinters and opposition parties formed in 1993 lasted less than one year, followed by a government by the LDP and two parties from the coalition.

Furthermore, the chances of a splinter party obtaining a high share of seats that would give it an important voice in coalition negotiations were lower because of the LDP's organisational strength. For example, the New Liberal Club (NLC) splinter faced difficulties in finding candidates (Reed, 1999), partially because the LDP intentionally lured potential NLC candidates (Curtis, 1999, 67). The lack of finance was also an important obstacle, even for large potential splinters, because electoral campaigns in Japan were expensive in comparison to other industrialised nations. For instance, in one of the most serious internal conflicts in 1980 two rebel factions controlling more than one quarter of the LDP legislators decided against establishing a splinter party due to insufficient funds for an electoral campaign, which threatened the re-election of the members of these factions (Masumi, 1995, 200).

In contrast to the uncertainties related to fission, minority or anti-mainstream fac-



tions could be almost certain to gain access to government positions if they stayed in the LDP.<sup>10</sup> It is true that in the early years of the party's existence the anti-mainstream factions tended to be under-represented in the distribution of governmental and party positions (Bouissou, 2001). However, all factions could reasonably expect to become part of the mainstream in the short term, because factional coalitions were re-shuffled every few years. Furthermore, by the 1980s the LDP has developed an almost perfect proportionality in the distribution of office positions between its factions (Kohno, 1997), partially in response to the increased credibility of split threats (Bouissou, 2001). Thus, at least in terms of office benefits, under the 1955 system fission was a non-viable option for LDP factions.

In order to understand why the LDP nevertheless split in this period, it is important to consider the policy preferences of its members. It is generally agreed that factions in the LDP had limited policy differences (Kato and Mershon, 2006, 79-80). However, frequent corruption scandals involving high-ranking LDP members increased the salience of the political reform issue, in particular the reform of electoral system, which was widely blamed for the inefficiencies of the Japanese political system. This issue divided the LDP and was a key reason for all three splits. For example, the New Liberal Club was created by politicians who believed that the LDP was unable to reform itself (Curtis, 1999, 66). Similarly, several case studies emphasise that most of the members of two splinter parties established in 1993 had strong policy preferences for political reform (Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995, 360; Curtis, 1999, 77; Reed and Scheiner, 2003). This evidence illustrates the theory of fission proposed in this project, which suggests that policy gains could at least partially offset office losses due to split.

Another set of explanations of the LDP splits in the literature emphasises various factors which reduced the expected office losses of splinter groups and the rump LDP. Disagreements over political reform was one of these factors. Two parties (the LDP

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<sup>10</sup>The factions in the party mainstream almost by definition played a crucial role in government and party.

and its splinter) with distinct positions on the political reform issue could cover a broader policy ground and therefore obtain a higher electoral support, which could be transformed in greater influence in the formation of government. This was demonstrated in the 1993 election, when the LDP and its two splinters actually obtained a higher number of seats than the united LDP in the previous election in 1990 (291 in 1993 vs. 275 in 1990). In the absence of a split the support of the LDP was likely to be significantly lower: for example, Reed and Scheiner (2003, 472) argue that “[w]ithout the defections, however, the most likely result would have been a narrow LDP majority” (the majority threshold was 256 seats). In particular, the members of the dissenting pro-reform faction were less likely to be re-elected, because their attempts to force the LDP leadership to adopt a new electoral law failed shortly before the election (Kohno, 1997, 149). This evidence exemplifies the theory of party fission proposed here, which suggested that greater intra-party policy disagreements should make fission more attractive due to higher expected electoral support.

Moreover, the fact that party splits occurred after major corruption scandals involving LDP officials suggests that new splinter parties are more likely to emerge when the electoral environment is conducive. This is in line with what the model of party fission suggests. While economic performance was used for testing this expectation in large-n analysis, corruption is also a very good issue for new parties to capitalise on.

Furthermore, there is also evidence suggesting that the majority factions in the LDP and splinter groups considered not only their expected electoral support, but also how this support would translate into the influence over government formation. In particular, it seems that these actors expected that splits would not reduce their chances to participate in government very significantly. For example, in 1993 leaders of the LDP seemed to believe that they would be able to form a coalition government after the forthcoming election despite two splits. In particular, they expected to form a government with the smaller splinter party Sakigake and its ally, a new party called



the New Party of Japan (Kohno, 1997, 149). This was indeed the strategy of the LDP after the election (Curtis, 1999, 110) and it had a chance of success despite its eventual failure (Kohno, 1997, 142). The larger splinter, the Japanese Renewal Party, could also be relatively optimistic about its participation in government, because it formed a pre-electoral coalition with all opposition parties except for the Japanese Communists (Kohno, 1997, 139). While this pre-electoral coalition was expected to fall short of parliamentary majority (as it in fact did), the alliance with Sakigake and the New Party could be the basis for coalition government (this is indeed what happened after the election). Finally, the Sakigake party could expect a role in government due to the pivotal role of its alliance with the New Party in government formation, although there is not enough evidence suggesting that this was indeed the case (for instance, Curtis (1999, 112) argues that the party expected to remain in opposition in the short term). Overall, however, it is reasonable to argue that both the LDP majority and its two splinter groups could expect to be part of the government after the election.

It is also important to note that some explanations of the LDP splits emphasise such individual-level factors as electoral marginality and seniority (Cox and Rosenbluth, 1995; Kato, 1998; Reed and Scheiner, 2003). These explanations fall outside the theory of fission proposed here, which does not consider splits as an outcome of the interaction between intra-party factions. At the same time these explanations emphasise the importance of combining faction- and individual-level analyses for explaining party splits.

Despite this caveat, the LDP case illustrates well the theory of fission tested in this project by showing that splits of very large parties are unlikely. Unity assures that factions in such parties will be able to participate in government. In contrast, fission reduces the probability that the rump party and in particular the splinter group would gain access to government. However, splits of such parties are still possible, especially if factions disagree on policy and expect for these policy disagreements to bring additional

votes. The electoral and party system environments that are conducive to new parties further increase the probability of fission. This study thus exemplifies the findings of the large-n analysis in the previous chapter, in particular with regard to the effect of party size on splits and demonstrates that intra-party policy disagreements, while of limited importance in statistical analysis, do affect the probability of party fission in at least some cases.



## Chapter 4

# Explaining party mergers: theory and statistical analysis

### 4.1 Introduction

Why do political parties merge? The party politics literature does not yet provide a systematic comparative study on this question, even if party mergers have important implications for the quality of democracy and public policy outcomes by affecting the development of party systems in both well-established and newer democracies. Probably the most important effect of party fusion is the reduction of party system fragmentation (Cox, 1997). Furthermore, fusion can provide the greater stability and institutionalisation of the party system in the longer term (Rose and Munro, 2003), although in the short term frequent mergers may lead to lower institutionalisation and stability (Mainwaring, 1999). Despite these important effects of party mergers, as well as other elite coordination strategies, the two most established approaches to the study of party systems do not sufficiently consider the role of political elites in shaping party systems. The institutional approach considers elite coordination as a causal mechanism between electoral and constitutional institutions and party systems (Cox, 1997), but largely ignores the independent causal effect of elite behaviour (Kreuzer, 2009). The sociological approach does not yet have a general theory of how political elites shape party systems through the manipulation of social cleavages. As a result, both approaches lack the

ability to explain party system change in the absence of institutional or social changes (Chhibber and Kollman, 2004).

The study of party mergers is also important empirically. This is particularly the case in new democracies, where frequent mergers significantly change party systems (Laver and Benoit, 2003) and even the social bases of competition (Zielinski, 2002) between elections. However, party fusion does occur in established democracies as well. In these countries some of the largest parties with government experience, such as the Christian Democratic Appeal in the Netherlands, the Conservative Party of Canada, the Socialist Party and the Union for a Popular Movement in France, the People's Party in Spain and the Democratic Party and the People of Freedom Party in Italy, as well as a number of smaller parties, are the result of the mergers that took place few years or decades ago and transformed party systems in these countries. Furthermore, mergers played an important role in the emergence of stable party systems in Western Europe (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, 112). Overall, the study of fusion provides important insights into the formation and change of party systems.

Despite the importance of party mergers, their study is limited to a number of case or small-n comparative studies (Mair, 1990; Grofman, Mikkel and Taagepera, 2000; Kaminski, 2001; Crewe and King, 1995; Belanger and Godbout, 2010; Lees, Hough and Keith, 2010; Rakner, Svasand and Khembo, 2007; Poguntke, 1998; Haegel, 2004; Coffé and Torenlid, 2008; Hopkin, 1999). These studies provide contextually rich accounts of these particular cases of fusion, but lack broader generalisability. Research on new party entry (Cox, 1997; Hug, 2001), legislative party switching (Heller and Mershon, 2008) and pre-electoral coalitions (Golder, 2006a) also provides some insights into the formation of party mergers. This chapter builds on these studies, but also contributes to the understanding of these alternative forms of elite coordination.

This study thus seeks to explain party mergers in the comparative perspective by drawing on an original dataset created by the careful examination of the party systems



in 24 established and new European democracies. The main theoretical argument of the chapter is that parties will merge if expected office gains outweigh policy losses and the commitment of the larger party to the merger agreement is sufficiently credible. Empirically, mergers are most likely when parties are not too small but not too large, their size is similar, they are young, have no significant ideological differences and previously cooperated in a pre-electoral coalition.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. The next three sections present the theory of party fusion, data and measurement issues and the results of statistical analysis. The final section concludes.

## 4.2 Theory

This theory of party fusion centres around the bargaining between two party leaders and in some respects builds on the theory of pre-electoral coalition formation proposed by Golder (2006a). The logic driving party fusion and pre-electoral coalitions is somewhat similar. For example, party leaders have to make concessions on policy, the distribution of election candidacies and executive positions. However, while parties in a pre-electoral coalition retain their independence, fusion requires the integration of two or more parties into a new organisation. Thus, the issues over which party leaders bargain are likely to be more complex. For instance, party leaders have to agree not only on the policy of the merged party and the distribution of office positions (e.g. election candidacies or ministerial positions), as is the case when pre-electoral coalitions are formed, but also on the name and statutes of the united party, the schedule of integration, as well as the distribution of intra-party office positions between the members of merging parties. Moreover, contrary to pre-electoral coalitions, the enforcement of merger agreements is also likely to be an important issue.

I assume that leaders have two types of goals (Strøm and Müller, 1999). First, they seek to maximise the share of executive power controlled by their parties (or factions

in a merged party), both in the current and next electoral periods. Second, leaders also seek to participate in parties with policies at their ideal policy points. Leaders compare the expected utility from fusion with what they would get without it and merge their parties if they expect that this will make them better-off.

In the case when fusion does not occur, leaders establish the policies of their parties at their ideal policy points and thus experience no utility loss due to policy compromises. Furthermore, leaders also expect to obtain some office benefits, which, by assumption, are equal to the product of the probability that the leader's party participates in government and the share of portfolios that it would be allocated in this government. I assume that the share of government portfolios controlled by a party is proportional to its seat share (cf. Warwick and Druckman 2006). The probability that a party participates in government in the present electoral period is higher if a party is a member of an incumbent government. More importantly, larger parties are more likely to be included in any future governments formed before or after the next general election. Being one of the largest parties in the system is particularly advantageous because not only are such parties more likely to participate in governments, but they also have high chances to become government formateurs and obtain the Prime Minister position (Glasgow, Golder and Golder, 2011; Warwick, 1996).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, parties that are dominant in the legislative party system have especially high chances to participate in government (Peleg, 1981; Van Deemen, 1989; Laver, 1998).<sup>2</sup> However, the relationship between the probability of entering government and party size is weaker for the parties that could only serve as junior government partners. This is because the logic of minimum winning coalitions with minimum seats (Riker, 1962) dictates that in some cases

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<sup>1</sup>While, as stated above, empirical evidence suggests that formateur parties do not gain disproportional shares of office benefits (but see Ansolabehere et al. 2005), Glasgow, Golder and Golder (2011, 936), referring to Laver and Schofield (1990), argue that "the PM party tends to be privileged when it comes to making policy, setting the agenda, and controlling office benefits".

<sup>2</sup>Dominance implies that there are at least two mutually exclusive losing coalitions, which could not form a winning coalition in the absence of the dominant party, but each of which would become a winning coalition if the dominant party joins it (Laver, 1998). The dominant party can play off these two coalitions against each other and in this way increases its chances to enter government.



formateur parties may seek to reduce office concessions that they have to make to their coalition partners by choosing smaller partners (Warwick, 1996; Mattila and Raunio, 2004; Isaksson, 2005).

How does fusion affect leaders' expected utility? The answer to this question first demands an understanding of the factional dynamics after fusion. It is reasonable to assume that old party identities will not be dissolved immediately after fusion and therefore two factions based on legacy parties will be formed in a merged party. For some time after the merger the expected utility of these factions and their leaders will depend on the conditions of a merger agreement, which stipulates the division of office benefits and the policy of the merged party. This agreement is usually adopted by the highest representative institution of the party (e.g. congress or convention) and therefore is unlikely to be substantially changed immediately after the merger. By the time a party's policy and the division of office benefits is reconsidered, old factional identities may have lost their importance as the basis for the main factional divide in the merged party.<sup>3</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that if this happens, the expected utility of faction leaders and members is close to that agreed at the time of merger. However, if old factions still exist by the next review of the party's policy and the redistribution of office benefits, the larger faction in a merged party (in most cases the successor of the larger merging party) may (but not necessarily does) renege on a merger agreement by using its numerical superiority in a fused party's decision making bodies. For example, the majority faction can shift the party's policy closer to its ideal policy point or reduce the share of executive, legislative or intra-party positions or election candidacies controlled by the minority faction (the successor of the smaller party).

These assumptions imply that a leaders' expected utility after the merger depends

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<sup>3</sup>Members of the merged party may change factions in order to maximise their career prospects and policy influence. In addition, new members without a previous affiliation with the legacy parties join. This integration process may lead to the emergence of different set of factions or the lack of clearly defined factions. It is likely that the speed of this integration process is correlated with the strength of party identities, as discussed below.

not only on what they agree to before it, but also on their office and policy benefits if a merger agreement is not upheld and the probability that this agreement is violated. Consider first leaders' expected utility if an agreement is respected. In this case it is likely that leaders would experience a utility loss due to policy compromises they have to make. Leaders may accept these compromises, however, if they expect that merger would bring them office gains. Whether these gains would be forthcoming depends on whether the merged party is more likely to enter government and obtain a higher share of portfolios in this government than its legacy parties. In the current legislative term fusion should not affect the share of government portfolios that leaders expect to obtain, because the share of legislative seats controlled by the merged party is equal to that of its component parties. In the next legislative term, the expected share of government positions increases if the merged party obtains more legislative seats as compared to what its component parties would have obtained. More importantly, the merged party would be more likely to enter governments in the present legislative term due to the increase in its seat share, especially if it also becomes one of the largest or even the dominant party in the system. In the next legislative term the increase in the probability of participation in government, as well as policy influence and the share of office positions, depends on the electoral performance of the fused party. The expected office gains are the highest when the expected seat share of the merged party is higher or equal to the expected seat shares of individual parties without merger. Fusion may also provide office gains if the expected size of the merged party is higher than the expected size of the larger merging party, especially if the chances of the merged party to become a government formateur increase substantially. Finally, there will be no office gains if the merged party gains the same or even lower seat share than at least one of the merging parties.

Leaders' expected utility also depends on the probability that a merger agreement will not be respected, as well as their office and policy benefits if this happens. As



mentioned above, an agreement would be upheld (or, more precisely, it loses its original purpose) if old party identities dissolve rapidly. However, if these identities persist, it is necessary to examine the incentives of the majority faction to defect on a merger agreement. The probability that the majority faction defects and the extent of this defection (i.e. the magnitude of the shift in the policy position of a merged party towards the ideal point of the majority faction and the degree to which office benefits are transferred from the minority to majority faction) depend on how credibly the minority faction can threaten the majority to split off or dissent. Since the majority faction should have incentives to sustain the unity of a merged party, the probability and extent of its defection on the minority faction decrease as the expected utility of the latter from fission or dissension increases. This implies that the difference between the expected utility of the smaller party in the absence of fusion (which determines its share of benefits in a merger agreement) and the expected utility of the minority faction from fission or dissension (which influences its share of benefits if the larger faction reneges on a merger agreement) determines the credibility of the larger party's commitments to a merger agreement. As this difference grows, these commitments become less credible and the expected utility of the smaller party from fusion decreases.

The theory thus implies that for party fusion to occur, office gains from it should outweigh policy losses and the commitment of the larger party to the merger agreement should be sufficiently credible. Several testable hypotheses follow from this expectation. First, it is clear that policy concessions will be more costly the more different the policies of the merging parties are. Thus, I expect that *mergers are more likely between ideologically close parties (Hypothesis 1)*.

Moreover, merger is more likely if office gains are sufficient to compensate the utility loss caused by policy compromises. As mentioned above, in the *present legislative term* fusion makes the participation of parties in governments formed before the next election more likely. This effect is particularly strong if the fused party becomes the dominant

party in the system while none of merging parties is able to achieve this position. This implication is also in line with the study of Laver and Benoit (2003), which finds that dominant parties are more likely to attract legislative party switchers. Thus, I expect that *fusion is more likely when the merged party becomes the dominant party in the system (Hypothesis 2)*.

Fusion provides office benefits in the *next legislative term* if the expected seat share of a merged party relative to its predecessor parties is high, especially if a merged party becomes one of the largest parties in the system with good chances to form a government. Fusion should provide the greatest gains in terms of seats when the merged party is relatively small but, in contrast to its component parties, sufficiently large to overcome institutional thresholds and become electorally viable.<sup>4</sup> However, as the size of the merged party increases beyond this viability threshold, expected seat gains are smaller, because each of the merging parties is more likely to be sufficiently large to gain seats on its own. An additional incentive to merge nevertheless arises as the expected size of a merged party approaches that of one of the largest parties in the system, because at this point a party's chances to be a government formateur increase substantially.<sup>5</sup> Finally, as the expected size of a merged party increases further, one or both parties could expect to become one of the largest parties in the system without fusion and would thus be less inclined to merge. In other words, fusion is most likely when the merged party is relatively small but likely to overcome electoral thresholds and when it is large enough to become a government formateur. Testing this theoretical implication is nevertheless challenging, because the size thresholds at which the party

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<sup>4</sup>The size at which institutional thresholds can be overcome depends on electoral system disproportionality. As discussed above, all but two countries (France and the UK) in the empirical sample of this study use proportional or mixed electoral systems, which means that in the context of this study this threshold of size is relatively low. Furthermore, relatively small parties can be viable even in France and the UK due to geographic strongholds and, in the French case, the two-round system that encourages party proliferation (Duverger, 1954).

<sup>5</sup>Another reason why being one of the largest parties could be beneficial is attracting the support of those strategic voters who seek to influence the identity of the government formateur (Abramson et al., 2010; Blais and Gschwend, 2011; Kedar, 2012).



becomes electorally viable or likely to form a government would differ across political systems and time periods. It is reasonable to expect, however, that party mergers leading to very small or very large parties would be unlikely. Thus, I hypothesise that *party merger is most likely when the expected size of a merged party is relatively large but not too large (Hypothesis 3)*. Furthermore, the empirical analysis will also explore the possibility that mergers leading to medium-sized parties are less likely than those leading to relatively small or relatively large parties.

While Hypothesis 3 indirectly incorporates the effect of electoral institutions on the probability of a merger, it is also possible that mergers are generally more likely under more disproportional electoral systems. For example, both small and medium-size parties (in terms of votes) would have incentives to merge under the majoritarian system in order to establish their viability while under the PR system only small parties would have to do so. Hence, I expect that *mergers are more likely under disproportional electoral systems (Hypothesis 4)*. Furthermore, the seat share of the merged party should also depend on the age of merging parties and the age of democracy. Older parties tend to have more established labels and more partisan voters. Merger is more electorally risky for them, because their partisan voters may not transfer their allegiances to a merged party. Thus, I expect that *older parties are less likely to merge (Hypothesis 5)*. Moreover, party mergers could be more likely in new democracies, where partisan preferences of voters and thus parties' viability are less established. Fusion establishes a focal point for voter coordination and thus could bring additional voters to a merged party, who shift from the merged party's smaller and less viable competitors. This implies that *mergers are more likely in younger democracies (Hypothesis 6)*. Finally, as already mentioned above, mergers between ideologically close parties should also be more likely, because the electorates of such parties are more compatible and therefore more likely to vote for a fused party.

The probability of fusion also depends on the credibility of a larger party's commit-

ment to a merger agreement. As mentioned above, the problem of credible commitments becomes irrelevant when old identities based on predecessor parties disappear. This should be more likely if merging parties are ideologically close and young, which provides additional theoretical rationale for Hypotheses 1 and 5. Another factor that influences how quickly old party identities dissolve is previous cooperation experience. Parties can cooperate in several ways (for example, government coalitions), but probably the closest form of cooperation is the participation in pre-electoral coalitions, especially if they involve the joint nomination of candidates. Members of pre-electoral coalitions have to coordinate their election campaigns, agree on common candidates and policy programmes, and usually govern together if they win elections. Extensive cooperation experience allows party leaders and members to find out about the preferences of and establish trust in each other, sometimes to the extent that the boundaries between parties become blurred due to the emergence of inter-party factions.<sup>6</sup> Thus, I expect that *party fusion is more likely if parties previously cooperated in a pre-electoral coalition (Hypothesis 7)*.

However, in many cases the quick dissolution of old party identities after fusion is unlikely. As a result, the merged party is composed of two factions with roots in the predecessor parties that previously competed against each other, which can undermine the commitment of the larger party to adhere to the merger agreement. The commitments of the larger party, however, should be more credible if the parties previously cooperated in elections. Even if such cooperation does not lead to the quick dissolution of old party identities, two factions in the merged party should still be more likely to trust each other.<sup>7</sup> This should particularly be the case if electoral cooperation was successful.

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<sup>6</sup>The emphasis on this variable is close to Mair's argument that parties merge when "external friendships...prove overriding" (Mair, 1990, 131). Indeed, electoral cooperation is probably one of the common ways to establish these friendships.

<sup>7</sup>The literature on the formation of government coalitions also makes a similar argument for explaining an empirical regularity showing that an incumbent government is much more likely to re-form than would another set of parties with the same characteristics (Back, 2003, 448).



As discussed above, the credibility of the larger party's commitments also depends on the expected utility of the smaller party if it re-establishes itself as a splinter group after fusion or dissents in a fused party. In the event of fission or dissension a smaller group would have to compromise less or not at all on its policy preferences, but it is likely that its office benefits would be significantly lower in comparison to those that it would receive in the absence of fusion. In particular, it would attract fewer voters in comparison to its predecessor party. For example, it is quite likely that a splinter group would not be able to use its original party label, would possess less electoral resources and would be considered as non-credible by voters due to frequent party switching of its members. Moreover, it would also have to fulfil legal requirements for the registration of a new party. In the case of dissension a minority group could be excluded from positions in government. One implication that follows from this reasoning is that asymmetry in the size of merging parties is likely to determine how much the balance of power between two groups will change after a merger. A large minority is more likely to establish a viable splinter party. Its dissension threat is also more credible. For example, if a fused party enters government, the majority faction could be forced to share government positions with a large minority in order to assure the latter's parliamentary support. This implies that *asymmetry in party size makes fusion less likely (Hypothesis 8)*. Furthermore, this argumentation also implies that fusing with another party and then splitting from this merged party with a new label would be more electorally damaging for older parties, which have well-established labels. This thus provides further rationale for Hypothesis 5.

Before proceeding to the next section, it is important to consider the extent to which this theory of fusion is applicable to all mergers. Several authors emphasise that not all mergers are the same. Janda (1980, 24) argues that a party undergoes a minor merger if its share of members in a fused party is above 75 percent and a major merger if its members provide between 50 and 75 percent of the total membership of a fused

party. Rose and Mackie (1988, 544) suggest that a merger “through the accession of a lesser party” leads to a marginal modification while a merger of the structural change type happens “if two parties join in a merger”. Kreuzer and Pettai (2009) propose four types of mergers on the basis of the size of merging parties. While the approaches based on the size of the merging parties’ membership or electorate are plausible, here I apply a different classification criterion based on name continuity. More specifically, I distinguish between takeover mergers, whereby a smaller party accedes to a larger party without the change in the latter’s name, and major mergers, after which the name of the fused party is different than any of its component parties. I argue that this criterion reflects more reliably the differences in parties’ strength than those based on their membership or electoral size. The change in a party’s name is usually one of the key contested questions in merger negotiations because it indicates the extent to which the fused party is just a continuation of the larger party. Thus, smaller parties should be keen on name change, but are unlikely to achieve this goal if they are in a weak bargaining position, as would be the case if they have limited electoral and organisational relevance.<sup>8</sup>

This theory of party fusion is less applicable to takeover mergers. The marginality of the smaller party implies that the main goal of its elites is to save their political careers in the short term while the incentives of the larger party may be to recruit several well-known politicians or other limited assets of the smaller party. The effect of party size may therefore be different from that hypothesised above. It is reasonable to assume that the larger merging party should be sufficiently large to be electorally viable, as otherwise

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<sup>8</sup>The merger between the Homeland Union (TS) and Christian Democrats (LKD) in Lithuania in 2008 provides a good example of the advantage of this criterion over the one based on the difference in electoral size. In the last general election preceding this merger the TS obtained 14.8 percent of vote and 17.7 percent of seats while the LKD gained only 1.4 percent of vote and no seats. However, unlike what one would expect on the basis of the electoral size criterion, the name of the merged party was the hyphenated combination of the names of both parties (with the name of the TS being first). This is because the LKD, despite its limited electoral appeal, was in a relatively strong bargaining position due to its quite strong organisation, several local strongholds, the possession of a well-known label and the strong determination of the TS to unite all centre-right parties.



the smaller party would have no incentives to be taken over. Beyond this expectation, however, it is hard to develop clear hypotheses on the effect of size on takeover mergers. Furthermore, the credibility of the larger party's commitment problems will also be less important because the elites of the smaller party should heavily discount future office and policy gains. Asymmetry, in particular, should have no effect on the probability of such merger because it should be high by definition. On the other hand, ideological differences and party age may still matter, because an old and well-established party may be unwilling to incorporate ideologically different marginal groups.

## 4.3 Data and measurement

### 4.3.1 Party mergers in Europe

The theory of party fusion is tested using a new dataset recording party mergers in 24 countries in the EU with the population of at least 1 million. Similarly to the data on party splits described in Chapter 2, this dataset considers almost all democratic electoral periods (280 in total) in these countries in the post-war period.<sup>9</sup> The dataset provides information about the identity of merging and merged parties, their electoral performance and a number of other independent variables as described below in greater detail. Furthermore, following the discussion in the theoretical section, the dataset also divides these mergers into takeover and major mergers on the basis of the continuity in the name of the merged party.

Collecting data on party mergers involving minor parties, most of which are also

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<sup>9</sup>The following time periods for each country was considered (the number of electoral periods provided in parentheses): Austria 1949-2008 (18), Belgium 1946-2010 (20), Bulgaria 1990-2009 (6), Czech Republic 1990-2010 (6), Denmark 1945-2007 (23), Estonia 1992-2007 (4), Finland 1945-2007 (17), France 1946-2007 (15), Germany 1949-2009 (16), Greece 1974-2009 (11), Hungary 1990-2010 (5), Ireland 1948-2007 (16), Italy 1946-2008 (16), Latvia 1993-2011 (6), Lithuania 1992-2008 (4), Netherlands 1946-2010 (19), Poland 1991-2007 (5), Portugal 1975-2009 (12), Romania 1990-2008 (5), Slovakia 1990-2010 (6), Slovenia 1990-2008 (5), Spain 1977-2008 (9), Sweden 1944-2010 (20) and United Kingdom 1945-2010 (16). However, as explained below, two electoral periods were removed from some analyses, because mergers that occurred in these periods involved a large number of small parties.

of little substantive importance, is challenging due to the lack of reliable data sources about these parties. For instance, 111 parties or pre-electoral coalitions participated in the 1991 election in Poland. Tracking organisational developments of this number of parties is close to an impossible task. Thus, the dataset records mergers only if at least two of the merging parties were supported by at least 1 percent of voters in the last legislative election before the merger.<sup>10</sup> The dataset also does not consider as merging parties those splinter groups that were established previously in the same electoral period and thus had no electoral record before they merged. In addition, mergers involving parties that themselves are the product of mergers that occurred earlier in the same electoral period were also excluded from analysis.

The distinction between major and takeover mergers, while important theoretically, also increases the precision of empirical analyses. In particular, major mergers are easier to record, because, in contrast to takeover mergers, they result in the change of party's name. Thus, the analysis of major mergers only should be somewhat more reliable than the analysis of all mergers.

In total, the dataset includes 84 mergers formed by 176 parties in 57 electoral periods (20.4 percent of the total number of periods in the sample). 71 or 84.5 percent of these merger parties were formed by two parties. While other mergers were formed by either three or four parties (9 and 2, respectively), the dataset also includes two very large mergers - the Union of Democratic Forces in Bulgaria formed by 10 parties in 1997 and the merger of 7 parties leading to the establishment of the Union of Democratic Centre in Spain in 1978.<sup>11</sup> Figure 4.1 presents the distribution of 84 merged parties across countries. The figure shows a relatively large variation, but at the same time on average post-communist democracies have more mergers than established democracies

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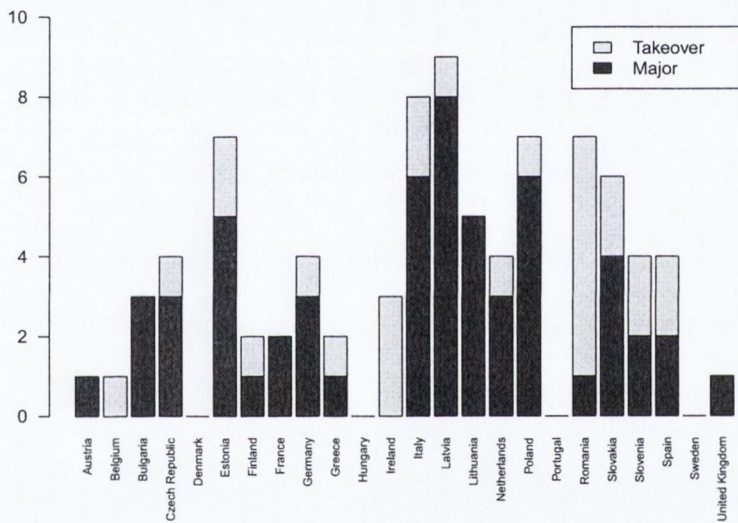
<sup>10</sup>In the cases where two or more parties participated in a pre-electoral coalition and their individual vote shares are not available, they were estimated as the product of the coalition's vote share and the share of seats of the party from the total share of seats of the coalition.

<sup>11</sup>In fact, each of these mergers involved more parties, but the estimated vote share of these other merging parties was below 1 percent.



of Europe. The contrast between the two regions becomes even more pronounced when taking into consideration that democracies in Central and Eastern Europe are younger than those in Western and Southern Europe. Overall, Figure 4.1 provides robust evidence to more impressionistic accounts in the literature (Mair, 1997; Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2011) suggesting that mergers are more prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe than in more established democracies.

Figure 4.1: Number of mergers



The data to be used in the statistical analysis is organised in a dyadic format and includes all possible pairs of political parties in a given electoral period regardless of whether they merged or not. The unit of analysis is a party-dyad-electoral-period and the dependent variable is dichotomous (1 - party merger between the parties took place in the given electoral period, 0 - no such merger took place). As an example of how data is structured, consider the 1987 election in United Kingdom, in which 5 parties obtained at least 1 percent of vote: Conservatives, Labour, Liberals, Social Democrats (the latter two in a pre-electoral coalition) and the Scottish Nationalist Party. For the 1987-1992 electoral period in UK the data includes 10 dyads. The dependent variable

takes the value of 1 for the dyad of Liberals and the Social Democratic Party, because these two parties merged in 1988, and 0 for the remaining 9 dyads.

There are in total 176 dyads which resulted in mergers. 147 dyads resulted from major mergers and 29 from takeover mergers. As the implications of the theory are more applicable to major mergers, I conduct separate analyses with two dichotomous dependent variables: all mergers and major mergers.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the analysis also considers the possibility that 66 dyads produced by two “mega-mergers” of the Union of Democratic Forces in Bulgaria and the Union of Democratic Centre in Spain could have significant impact on the results of empirical analysis. I therefore conduct separate analyses with and without the electoral periods in which these mergers occurred (Spain 1977-1979 and Bulgaria 1994-1997). The sample without these two periods includes 109 dyads that resulted in fusion (out of which 81 were major mergers), which is 67 dyads less than the full sample (one more dyad besides 66 resulting from two “mega-mergers” was removed, because one more (minor) merger took place in Spain in the period between 1977 and 1979).

#### **4.3.2 Independent variables**

One of the most important implications of the theoretical model is that ideologically similar parties are more likely to merge. The distance between parties on the left-right dimension, which usually encompasses most of the politicized issues within a political system, is commonly used for measuring policy differences between political parties cross-nationally. Unfortunately, the best source of such data, namely, the estimates of parties’ policy positions provided by the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006), does not include most of the parties in my sample due to their small size. In addition, this dataset, for the most part, provides a single estimate for pre-electoral coalitions, which does not allow measuring the policy positions of all

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<sup>12</sup>A low number of takeover mergers precludes a separate analysis of this type of fusion.



parties within the coalition. More specifically, the measure based on CMP estimates would be applicable only to 21 out of 176 dyads resulting in party fusion. For further 109 dyads (including 66 dyads results from two “mega-mergers” in Bulgaria and Spain) the estimated difference between parties’ left-right positions is 0, because they have the same estimate of their positions due to the fact that they formed a pre-electoral coalition in the election preceding fusion. Finally, 46 dyads would have no estimate, as one or both parties were not included in the CMP dataset. The measure based on CMP estimates is therefore clearly inadequate for this analysis.

Given these problems, an alternative measure based on party families is used for estimating ideological differences between political parties. Each party in the dataset has been categorized as belonging to one of 11 party families (agrarian, Christian democratic, communist, conservative, ecological, ethnic, liberal, regional, far right, social democratic or special issue). The coding of this variable has been to a large extent based on Doring and Manow (2010), who provide its categories (party families) and values for the majority of parties included in my dataset. For those parties that were not considered by Doring and Manow (2010) (mostly parties in Central and Eastern Europe) the party family code was given on the basis of party name and descriptions of its ideology provided in various handbooks on political parties, in particular Bugajski (2002).

Two dichotomous ideology variables, measuring different degrees of ideological closeness, have been constructed using this data on party families. The first variable takes the value of 1 if two parties belong to the same party family (with the exception of regional, ethnic and special issue parties, which may have significant ideological differences despite being of the same family). The second variable seeks to capture less strong but still important ideological similarities between the parties within left/centre-left and right/centre-right. It takes the value of 1 for the following combinations of party families: conservative-far right, conservative-Christian democratic,

conservative-liberal, Christian democratic-far right, Christian democratic-liberal and social democratic-communist (all of these applicable for all countries), ecological-communist, ecological-social democratic, agrarian-liberal and agrarian-conservative and agrarian-far right (all these only in EU-15 countries) and ecological-liberal, ecological-conservative, ecological-Christian democratic, agrarian-social democratic and agrarian-communist (only in post-communist democracies)<sup>13</sup>. Several slightly different versions of this variable have also been tried in statistical analysis, but the substantive results did not change.

For estimating parties' incentives to merge in order to achieve the dominance in the legislative party system I construct a dichotomous variable which takes the value of 1 if the merged party becomes dominant. The variable takes the value of 0 if one of the merging parties is already dominant. Following Laver (1998), the potential merged party is coded as dominant if it would become the largest party in the legislature and could form a majority coalition with either the second- or the third-largest legislative parties in the system, but the latter two could not form a majority coalition on their own.

The sum of the vote shares of the parties in the dyad in the last parliamentary election captures the expected size of the merged party. These shares are multiplied by 10 in order to assure the convergence of statistical models, which can be a problem due to high-degree polynomials used in some analyses. The substantive and statistical significance of model coefficients and model fit do not change when average vote shares of the parties in the last two parliamentary elections are used.

Lijphart's effective electoral threshold (Lijphart, 1994) is used for measuring electoral system disproportionality. This threshold is defined by the formula  $75/(\text{average}$

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<sup>13</sup>Unlike in EU-15 countries, green parties in Central and Eastern Europe have had pro-market and sometimes even mildly nationalist attitudes (Sikk and Andersen, 2009; Kopecek, 2009). In contrast, agrarian parties, which lean towards centre-right in most Western European countries (consider the Danish Venstre), are predominantly on the centre-left in post-communist countries. Good examples in this regard are the Polish Peasant Party, the People's Union in Estonia and the Lithuanian Peasant Popular Union.



district magnitude + 1). If the legal threshold that the party has to reach in order to gain seats is higher than this threshold, the effective threshold is equal to the value of the legal threshold. Thus, this measure captures both district magnitude and legal threshold, which are important dimensions of the electoral systems used by the countries in my sample. Carey and Hix (2011) provide the empirical values of this variable (with few updates for the most recent elections). Carey and Hix (2011) is also the sources of the values of the democratic age variable. Moreover, the age of the older party in the dyad is used for capturing the effects of party age, as it could be expected that all else equal the older party would be less likely to merge due to the risk of losing the support of its partisan voters. Both democratic age and party age are logged, as their effect should be marginally decreasing.

Moreover, a dichotomous variable measures whether the parties in the dyad participated in the same pre-electoral coalition in the last election by agreeing on joint candidate nominations. In contrast to Golder (2006a), my operationalisation of pre-electoral coalitions does not include the public commitment on behalf of coalition partners to govern together after the election. The intensity of electoral cooperation in such coalitions should be quite limited. Therefore, they would have a limited effect on coalition partners' ability to credibly commit to merger agreements. In contrast, pre-electoral coalitions that had joint candidate nominations for legislative elections involve a greater degree of cooperation, which should increase the chances of achieving credible merger agreements and the rapid integration of merging parties into a coherent organisation.

The asymmetry in parties' size is captured using the measure proposed by Golder (2006a). The first step in computing this measure is to calculate the ratio between the mean electoral support of the larger party in the dyad in the last two elections and the sum of the mean vote shares of both parties in the dyad, also in the last two elections. This ratio is theoretically bounded between 0.5 (in the case when both parties are of equal size) and 1 (this is the case when the size of the smaller party is 0). The second

Table 4.1: Descriptive statistics: party mergers

	Min	Median	Mean	Max	StDev	Expect
Merger	0.00	0.00	0.017	1.00		
Major merger	0.00	0.00	0.014	1.00		
Same party family	0.00	0.00	0.11	1.00		+
Close party family	0.00	0.00	0.24	1.00		+
Dominance	0.00	0.00	0.06	1.00		+
Party size	0.02	0.14	0.19	0.97	0.15	
Maximum age	0.0	25.0	38.4	175.00	38.5	-
Age of democracy	1.0	18.0	29.7	87.0	26.5	
Pre-electoral coalition	0.00	0.00	0.09	1.00	+	
Asymmetry	0.00	0.48	0.47	0.97	0.27	-

step involved subtracting 0.5 from the values of this ratio and multiplying this difference by 2. This establishes 0 and 1 as the theoretical bounds of the asymmetry variable. Table 4.1 provides the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analysis.

## 4.4 Analysis and Results

### 4.4.1 Main results

Many concerns related to the model choice discussed in Chapter 2 are applicable to this analysis as well, because the dependent variable is dichotomous and observations are grouped by countries, elections and party-dyads. In particular, the model needs to account for unobserved variables at the level of these grouping units. The fixed effects approach is less appropriate than random effects for the reasons very similar to those identified in Chapter 2. These include the difficulties of estimating the effect of substantively important covariates when a large number of fixed effects is included in the model, the limitations of fixed-effects models in making inferences about the population beyond the sample, the necessity to drop those electoral periods in which no mergers took place (almost 80 percent of all periods) and the impossibility of estimating the effects of those covariates that do not vary within elections. Due to these reasons



the analysis uses random-effects model with varying intercepts at the level of electoral periods (Greene, 2008; Gelman and Hill, 2007). Since party mergers are rare events, I also estimated rare event logit models with robust standard errors as a robustness check (King and Zeng, 2001). These alternative models (not presented here) provided substantively similar results.

As mentioned above, statistical analyses use two dependent variables (all mergers and major mergers) and two samples, one including two “mega-mergers” in Bulgaria and Spain and the other one excluding them. Table 4.2 presents the results of these analyses. The first and second model specifications use the full sample for modelling the probability of all mergers and major mergers. The other four model specifications use the reduced sample. In line with Hypothesis 3 the third and fourth specifications model the relationship between fusion and party size as quadratic. In contrast, the last two columns in the table show the results when the effect of size is modelled using a fourth-degree polynomial, which allows for a most precise test of theoretical implications with regard to party size. More precisely, this allows an examination of the extent to which mergers that would lead to medium-sized parties are less likely than those that would result in relatively small but viable or relatively large parties.

The results show strong support for the expectations about the importance of ideological similarity. Parties belonging to the same family are more likely to merge than parties that can be ascribed to “similar” families, but both coefficients are nevertheless statistically significant at the 0.001 level in all models. Table 4.3, which summarises the percentage change in the probability of all and major mergers for the change in the values of independent variables (or, in other words, first differences), indicates that parties belonging to “similar” families are more than three times more likely to merge than parties belonging to different families.<sup>14</sup> Parties belonging to the same family are

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<sup>14</sup>Zelig package in statistical environment R (Imai, King and Lau, 2007, 2008) was used for producing these estimates, as well as predicted probability plots below. The estimates are based on the analyses which use the sample that excludes two electoral periods with “mega-mergers”. The values of other independent variables are held constant at their means for continuous variables and medians or modes

more than 10 times more likely to merge as compared to the situation where the parties in the dyad belong to different families. The effect is even stronger when only major mergers are considered (5 and 12 times, respectively).

Table 4.2: Mixed-effects logit models of party mergers

	Full sample		Reduced sample			
	All	Major	All	Major	All	Major
(Intercept)	-5.450*** (0.581)	-6.386*** (0.735)	-5.663*** (0.543)	-6.705*** (0.686)	-6.045*** (0.806)	-9.465*** (1.274)
Close family	1.176*** (0.254)	1.334*** (0.301)	1.436*** (0.310)	1.694*** (0.390)	1.447*** (0.310)	1.752*** (0.393)
Same family	2.029*** (0.257)	1.961*** (0.313)	2.404*** (0.298)	2.483*** (0.381)	2.410*** (0.299)	2.534*** (0.386)
Dominance	0.874 (0.643)	2.565** (0.889)	0.884 (0.633)	2.452** (0.856)	0.870 (0.658)	2.425** (0.774)
Size	0.953* (0.445)	1.676** (0.650)	1.122* (0.462)	2.046** (0.669)	2.264 (1.983)	13.587** (4.159)
Size2	-0.279** (0.108)	-0.570** (0.195)	-0.316** (0.116)	-0.650** (0.201)	-1.192 (1.721)	-14.144** (4.687)
Size3					0.240 (0.568)	5.754** (2.024)
Size4					-0.021 (0.062)	-0.799** (0.293)
El. threshold	-4.710* (2.331)	-5.172 (2.863)	-3.572 (1.896)	-3.705 (2.222)	-3.591 (1.908)	-4.064 (2.258)
Ln (democracy age)	-0.125 (0.174)	-0.039 (0.222)	-0.051 (0.153)	0.013 (0.187)	-0.046 (0.154)	0.005 (0.188)
Ln (party age)	-0.504*** (0.121)	-0.515*** (0.151)	-0.414** (0.127)	-0.343* (0.156)	-0.423*** (0.128)	-0.357* (0.157)
PEC	3.504*** (0.236)	4.073*** (0.293)	2.641*** (0.256)	3.060*** (0.315)	2.658*** (0.258)	3.102*** (0.320)
Asymmetry	-0.243 (0.461)	-1.444* (0.567)	-0.546 (0.482)	-2.073*** (0.608)	-0.615 (0.490)	-2.261*** (0.613)
Election-level st. dev.	1.62	1.89	1.18	1.31	0.49	0.53
Log-likelihood	-509.933	-370.512	-445.697	-313.090	-445.431	-306.667
N	10446	10446	10188	10188	10188	10188

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Furthermore, the results show that major mergers are more likely if they provide for ordinal and categorical variables, except for the ideology variable, which is set not to its median of 0, but a more substantively interesting value of 2 (i.e. parties belong to the same family).



parties with the dominance status in the party system. The variable is significant at the 0.01 level in all specifications with major fusion as the dependent variable. However, the variable is insignificant in all models with all mergers as the dependent variable, which supports the expectation that the goal of dominance is not important for takeover mergers. The effect of this variable is also substantively important: major mergers that could provide parties with dominance are more than 13 times more likely than those that would not.

The results also support Hypothesis 3, which suggested that parties are most likely to merge when the expected size of the merged party is not too small and not too large. Both party size and its squared term are statistically significant in the first four model specifications. Drawing on these estimates, the first two plots in Figure 4.2 plot the predicted probability of party fusion for empirically observed values of party size. These plots demonstrate that the predicted probability of merger is the highest when the expected size of the merged party is around 18 percent while major mergers are most likely if the expected size of the party is around 16.5 percent. In contrast, the probability of fusion is very close to 0 as the expected size of the merged party approaches 50 percent. In the case of all mergers, Table 4.3 shows that the increase in the party size from 2 to 18 percent increases the probability of fusion by almost 140 percent, although this effect barely reaches the conventional levels of statistical significance. The decrease in the size from 18 to 50 percent decreases the probability of merger by 91 percent.

While these results support Hypothesis 3, as discussed in the theory section, this hypothesis itself is only a simplification of the theorised relationship between fusion and party size. The fifth and sixth columns in Table 4.2 show the results when the effect of party size is modelled using the fourth-degree polynomial, which provides a more challenging test of the theoretical expectations. Four terms of the party size variable become statistically insignificant in the model with all mergers as the dependent

Table 4.3: Substantive effect of independent variables on party fusion

Variable	% Change in probability	
	All mergers	Major mergers
Ideology	341.0	524.7
(distant to close family)	(129.4, 674.3)	(168.2, 1145.4)
Ideology	1037.1	1244.8
(distant to same family)	(503.1, 1866.1)	(496.2, 2610.8)
Dominance	192.7	1355.0
	(-26.1, 639.9)	(183.8, 4668.5)
Party size	138.6	
(2 to 18)	(6.5, 394.1)	
Party size	-91.0	
(18 to 50)	(-99.7, -50.7)	
Party size		1026.8
(2 to 9)		(159.3, 3087.2)
Party size		-42.7
(9 to 18)		(-75.7, 29.7)
Party size		112.1
(18 to 28)		(-41.9, 484)
Party size		-89.7
(28 to 40)		(-100,-84)
Party age	-84.8	-78.1
(min to max)	(-96.3, -56.3)	(-96.9, -13.3)
Pre-electoral coalition	1109.5	2057.7
	(649.6, 1738.1)	(1032.9, 3728.4)
Asymmetry	-34.3	-86.5
(min to max)	(-74.6, 47.8)	(-96.2, -63.9)

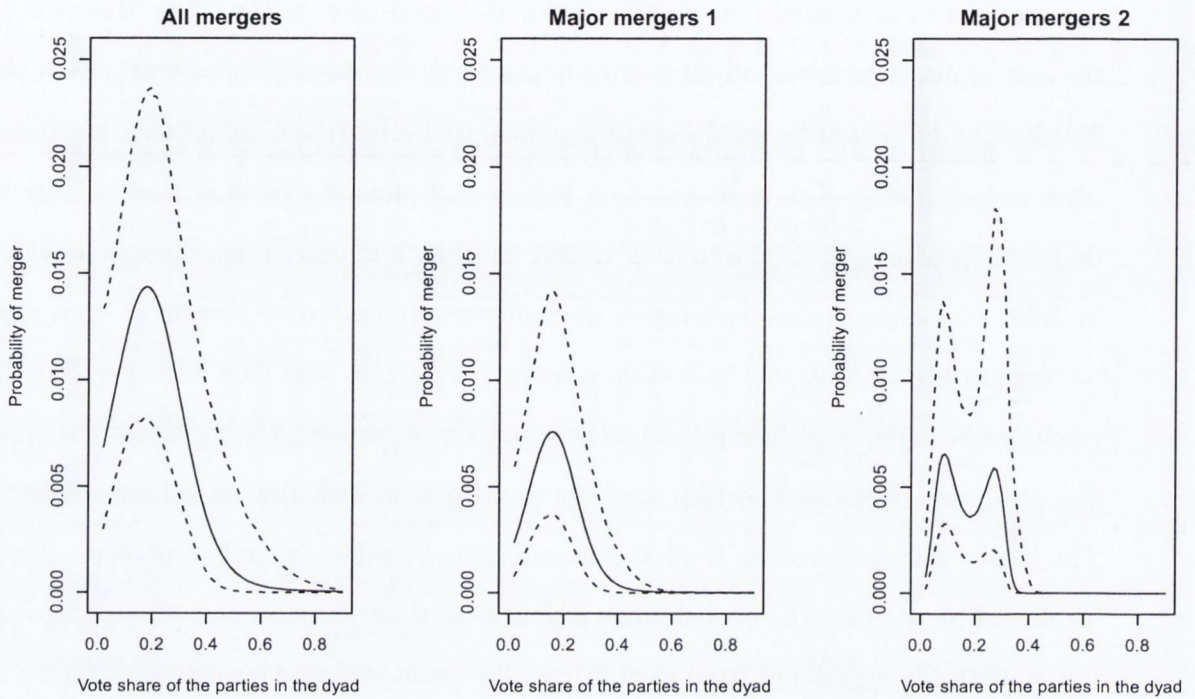
These first difference estimates are based on the models in Table 4.2 using the sub-sample that excludes electoral periods with two “mega-mergers”. For all mergers the specification that models the relationship between fusion and party size as quadratic is used (third model in Table 4.2). For major mergers the specification with the quartic functional form between fusion and size is used (the last model in 4.2). The values of other independent variables are held constant at their means for continuous variables and medians or modes for ordinal and categorical variables, except for the ideology variable, which is set not to its median of 0, but a more substantively interesting value of 2 (i.e. parties belong to the same family).



variable. Furthermore, the fit of this model is also not better than the one with the second-degree polynomial (the p-value of the likelihood ratio test is 0.44). However, in the case of major mergers, all four terms of the party size variable are significant at the 0.01 level and the fit of the model is also significantly better (the p-value of the likelihood ratio test is 0.002). The right panel on Figure 4.2 plots the predicted probability of major mergers as estimated from this model. The plot and percentage changes provided in Table 4.3 support the expectation that mergers leading to very small or very large parties are highly unlikely. In addition, however, the plot also demonstrates that the predicted probability of fusion has two maxima, one at around 9 percent and the other one at around 28 percent, which are very much in line with theoretical expectations. The local minimum between these two maxima is reached at around 18 percent. While Table 4.3 shows that the probabilities of fusion at these three values of party size are not statistically significant from each other, this result still provides strong support to the theoretical expectation that political elites use fusion either for establishing the electoral viability of their parties or making them large enough to become government formateurs. However, the insignificance of the party size variable terms in the model with all mergers further emphasises that the theory of party fusion used here is more applicable to major mergers than takeover mergers.

On the other hand, the results show no support to the existence of direct effects of electoral system on the probability of fusion. The sign of the electoral threshold variable is negative contrary to the expectations, although it only barely reaches statistical significance in one model specification. In order to check the robustness of this finding I also tried replacing the effective electoral threshold with alternative measures of electoral system disproportionality, such as the logarithm of district magnitude or the version of the effective electoral threshold proposed by Taagepera (2002). I also tested (results not reported here) whether the effect of electoral system is conditional on party system fragmentation (as proposed by Golder (2006a) in the case of pre-electoral

Figure 4.2: The effect of party size on the probability of merger



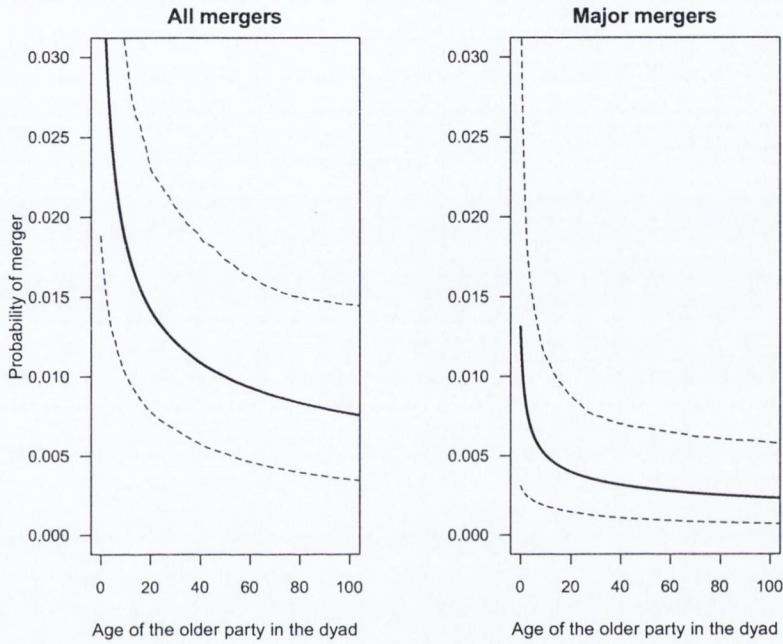
coalitions) by including the effective number of electoral parties and interacting this variable with the effective electoral threshold. None of these variables was statistically significant.

This result is consistent with the lack of the significant effect of electoral system disproportionality on the probability of party fission, as reported in Chapter 2. This suggests that the effect of electoral institutions is highly conditional on political elite preferences, particularly on the expected electoral performance of their parties. Another explanation for this result could be that institutional effects function at the district level and therefore are hard to identify at the national level. Furthermore, the absence of institutional effects also indirectly emphasises the importance of credible commitments for the success of party fusion. More specifically, disproportional electoral institutions may discourage smaller parties to merge, because their elites expect that their threat of fission after fusion would be less credible. Thus, these parties may consider sustaining



their independence as a smaller electoral risk than emerging as weak splinter groups after failed mergers.

Figure 4.3: The effect of party age on the probability of merger

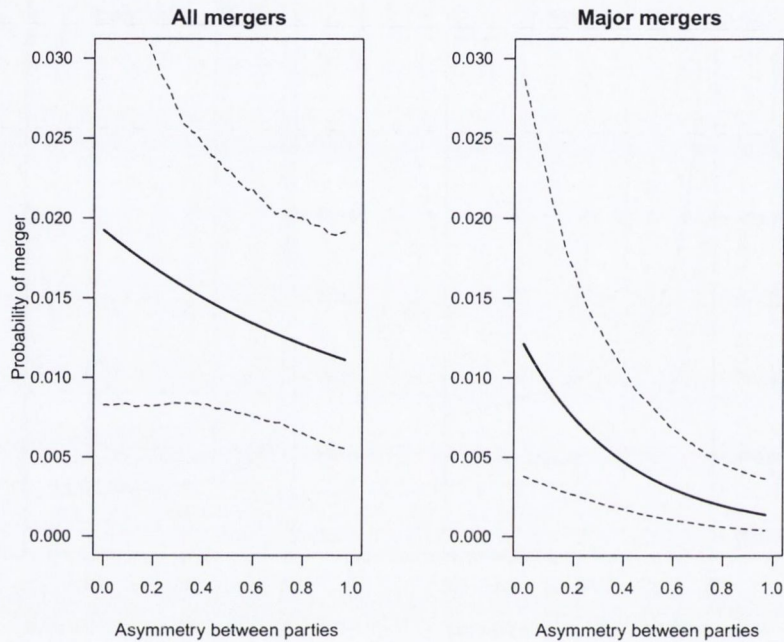


The party age variable is statistically significant in all four model specifications. The increase in the age of the older party in the dyad from the minimum to the maximum value decreases the probability that the dyad will result in fusion by more than 85 percent (see Table 4.3). Figure 4.3, which plots the predicted probability of fusion for the values of the party age variable, shows that young parties (10 years and younger) are particularly likely to merge as compared to older parties.<sup>15</sup> This result provides support to the theoretical expectations that fusion is an electorally risky strategy for the parties with more partisan voters, as well as that credible commitments should be harder to achieve in the merger of the parties with more established elite partisan identities. However, the results show no support to the hypothesis that mergers are more likely in

<sup>15</sup>For major mergers the model with four terms of party size was used for producing this predicted probability plot and the one examining the effect of asymmetry.

younger democracies. This result indicates that the extent to which individual parties are rooted in society are more important than the general availability of the electorate.

Figure 4.4: The effect of asymmetry on the probability of merger



Finally, the results also support the expectations about the importance of credible commitments. Previous cooperation in the form of a pre-electoral coalition turns out to be a very strong predictor of party merger. As shown in Table 4.3, the parties which were part of the same pre-electoral coalition in the last election are more than 12 times more likely to merge and in the case of major mergers only this difference increases to 20 times. Furthermore, the asymmetry variable is also a significant predictor of major mergers, but not of all mergers. This result is in line with the theoretical expectations. The problem of credible commitments is less important in the case of takeover mergers, because the smaller party should heavily discount future gains. Figure 4.4, which plots the predicted probability of fusion for the empirically observed values of this variable, and Table 4.3 show that the probability of fusion decreases by almost 87 percent when the values of the asymmetry variable change from the situation where both parties are



of equal size to the maximum asymmetry recorded in the sample (0.97).

#### 4.4.2 Robustness checks

These results largely hold when countries in Western and Southern Europe and Central and Eastern Europe are considered separately, as demonstrated in Tables 4.4 and 4.5, even if the significance of some variables drops below the 0.05 level in some specifications. A substantively interesting difference between the two regions concerns the effect of the party size variable. In contrast to newer democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, for established democracies the model with the quartic functional form of the relationship between major fusion and party size does not have a better fit than the model with the quadratic functional form. This result could be the outcome of more homogeneous electoral institutions in Central and Eastern Europe, as in all of these countries the main institutional obstacle to representation is 4 or 5 percent electoral threshold (Birch, 2003). In contrast, countries in Western and Southern Europe provide much greater variation in their electoral institutions. This means that the size at which the party becomes electorally viable varies less across the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, making it easier to identify the more complex effects of party size.

Furthermore, while party age variable remains significant for Western and Southern Europe, it loses its significance in the analysis of mergers in Central and Eastern Europe. This difference could be related to the lower variation in this variable in the latter region. The asymmetry variable also does not reach conventional levels of significance in the analysis of Central and Eastern European countries only, although it comes close in the last specification.

Golder (2006*a*) finds that pre-electoral coalitions are more likely to form when party system fragmentation and polarisation are high under disproportional electoral systems. Furthermore, she also demonstrates that the quadratic effect of party size on the probability of pre-electoral coalitions is conditional on the asymmetry in party size. Addi-

Table 4.4: Mixed-effects logit models of party mergers (Western and Southern Europe)

	Full sample		Reduced sample			
	All	Major	All	Major	All	Major
(Intercept)	-5.842*** (1.358)	-9.753** (3.409)	-5.965*** (1.319)	-10.581** (3.746)	-6.820*** (1.667)	-15.240** (4.809)
Close family	0.918 (0.491)	0.768 (0.624)	1.229* (0.567)	1.144 (0.699)	1.244* (0.570)	1.354 (0.721)
Same family	2.397*** (0.463)	2.202*** (0.624)	2.694*** (0.532)	2.676*** (0.696)	2.727*** (0.536)	2.968*** (0.743)
Dominance	0.805 (0.976)	3.518* (1.498)	0.741 (0.971)	3.329* (1.530)	0.880 (0.992)	3.575* (1.644)
Size	1.341 (0.693)	3.889** (1.463)	1.389 (0.737)	4.259** (1.542)	3.495 (2.872)	21.794* (10.098)
Size2	-0.356* (0.155)	-1.170* (0.457)	-0.363* (0.167)	-1.225** (0.467)	-1.636 (2.085)	-21.400 (11.848)
Size3					0.255 (0.583)	8.635 (5.403)
Size4					-0.014 (0.055)	-1.218 (0.827)
El. threshold	-5.394 (4.266)	-10.508 (9.772)	-3.876 (3.576)	-8.518 (8.437)	-3.939 (3.596)	-9.253 (9.447)
Ln (democracy age)	-0.242 (0.363)	0.133 (0.935)	-0.135 (0.330)	0.241 (1.005)	-0.126 (0.331)	0.262 (1.112)
Ln (party age)	-0.764*** (0.187)	-1.102*** (0.300)	-0.656** (0.213)	-0.766* (0.327)	-0.674** (0.213)	-0.867* (0.339)
PEC	4.284*** (0.514)	6.475*** (1.018)	3.334*** (0.559)	5.225*** (1.097)	3.354*** (0.566)	5.296*** (1.141)
Asymmetry	-0.812 (0.806)	-3.666** (1.272)	-1.178 (0.871)	-4.671** (1.458)	-1.296 (0.876)	-5.201*** (1.441)
Election-level st. dev.	2.93	5.68	2.36	4.93	2.37	5.49
Log-likelihood	-191.179	-114.456	-173.191	-103.495	-172.504	-101.060
N	6278	6278	6173	6173	6173	6173

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$



Table 4.5: Mixed-effects logit models of party mergers (Central and Eastern Europe)

	Full sample		Reduced sample			
	All	Major	All	Major	All	Major
(Intercept)	-6.228*** (0.758)	-7.128*** (0.918)	-6.105*** (0.638)	-7.054*** (0.809)	-8.417*** (1.196)	-10.280*** (1.461)
Close family	1.328*** (0.299)	1.625*** (0.357)	1.570*** (0.368)	2.093*** (0.504)	1.550*** (0.371)	2.101*** (0.504)
Same family	1.823*** (0.318)	2.008*** (0.379)	2.198*** (0.367)	2.666*** (0.503)	2.215*** (0.370)	2.702*** (0.504)
Dominance	1.339 (0.953)	2.334 (1.213)	1.482 (0.934)	2.295* (1.150)	1.509 (0.929)	1.991 (1.048)
Size	0.582 (0.612)	0.396 (0.755)	0.945 (0.608)	1.016 (0.756)	10.797** (3.776)	14.445** (4.571)
Size2	-0.230 (0.163)	-0.233 (0.215)	-0.310 (0.170)	-0.368 (0.226)	-12.457** (4.222)	-16.293** (5.167)
Size3					5.318** (1.790)	6.748** (2.190)
Size4					-0.747** (0.253)	-0.920** (0.308)
El. threshold	-6.123 (3.830)	-4.748 (4.468)	-4.648 (2.838)	-3.367 (3.289)	-4.766 (2.927)	-3.140 (3.240)
Ln (democracy age)	0.413 (0.288)	0.420 (0.340)	0.364 (0.210)	0.361 (0.249)	0.372 (0.215)	0.347 (0.241)
Ln (party age)	-0.141 (0.186)	0.081 (0.222)	-0.162 (0.173)	0.012 (0.204)	-0.149 (0.180)	0.041 (0.210)
PEC	3.204*** (0.274)	3.502*** (0.319)	2.329*** (0.297)	2.449*** (0.349)	2.406*** (0.302)	2.505*** (0.348)
Asymmetry	0.156 (0.583)	-0.533 (0.695)	-0.142 (0.591)	-1.069 (0.719)	-0.126 (0.608)	-1.205 (0.727)
Election-level st. dev.	1.02	1.20	0.46	0.59	0.49	0.53
Log-likelihood	-306.700	-234.295	-260.076	-190.033	-253.717	-183.516
N	4168	4168	4015	4015	4015	4015

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

tional analyses (not reported here) show, however, that these relationships do not hold in the case of party fusion, at least for the sample used here. The models with the interaction terms between party size and asymmetry, electoral system disproportionality and polarisation or the effective number of parties and electoral system disproportionality do not have a better fit than those without them. The coefficients of interaction terms are also not statistically significant.

The research has also explored whether the minimum number of MPs needed for establishing a parliamentary caucus has a significant effect on the probability of fusion. Membership in parliamentary caucuses could provide legislators with important advantages, such as speaking time in parliamentary debates, membership in parliamentary committees and financial and administrative support. However, this variable does not have a significant effect on the probability of fusion.

## 4.5 Conclusion

In democratic elections political parties seek to obtain office by making programmatic or other appeals to voters. However, just like voters, political elites have to coordinate in order to make votes count (Cox, 1997). This chapter draws on the logic of electoral coordination for explaining party fusion. The evidence presented here shows that under fairly proportional electoral systems political elites use mergers for establishing their organisations as viable competitors in party competition and/or conceivable candidates to form governments. However, while the logic of electoral coordination focuses on the benefits of fusion, this study demonstrates that it also involves significant costs, which explains why empirically mergers are quite rare. More specifically, in an established party system, where most of the parties have well-known labels and partisan following, fusion may be disapproved by parties' supporters and thus would not provide office gains. Furthermore, parties will also not merge if they are ideologically different. In the same vein, their voters would also be likely to denounce such mergers. Finally, but



not least importantly, the study demonstrates that difficulties in establishing credible agreements dilute potential office gains and increase the cost of ideological compromises.

These findings emphasise both the potential of endogenous party system change through elite coordination and the limits of such change. More specifically, the revealed effect of party size implies that under fairly proportional electoral systems and strong national governments existing levels of party system fragmentation are most likely to change if mergers could substantially increase parties' electoral viability or their chances to form a government. This is most likely to be the case under fragmented party systems with many small and medium-sized parties. This finding emphasises that under aforementioned institutional settings party systems tend to endogenously evolve through fusion towards the equilibrium of moderate fragmentation with some relatively large and relatively small parties. Furthermore, and as the sociological approach to party systems suggests, if parties reflect social divisions in the society and mergers can determine which of these divisions are politicised, then under proportional electoral systems elites are likely to politicise those cleavages that would allow them to sustain either relatively small but viable or relatively large parties. However, once parties have well-established roots in the society, elites' ability to reshape the structure of competition through mergers is significantly reduced. Furthermore, the commitment problems related to fusion further limits elites' power to change party systems through mergers.

The study also sheds light on the relationship between party mergers and pre-electoral coalitions. More specifically, the findings of this study suggest at least two reasons why parties may prefer pre-electoral coalitions over mergers. First, commitment problems inherent to mergers make pre-electoral coalitions a more attractive form of cooperation. At the same time, however, coalitions also help to overcome these commitment problems, thus increasing the probability of fusion. Second, older parties with well-established roots in society should prefer coalitions to mergers because the

former are less likely to be disapproved of by parties' core electorates. These two reasons complement institutional incentives to form coalitions, such as fusion candidates (Golder, 2006a) or the lack of higher thresholds for coalitions. The existence of these obstacles then raises the question why parties ever choose to merge instead of forming pre-electoral pacts. One could speculate that mergers are more efficient in terms of the use of campaign resources than pre-electoral coalitions. Furthermore, they also help parties to avoid transaction costs related to the bargaining over the distribution of common policy and office positions before each election.<sup>16</sup> Finally, but not least importantly, mergers may also allow parties to attract more voters through the process of re-branding. These trade-offs between mergers and pre-electoral coalitions could be explored by future research.

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<sup>16</sup>This was the view of a leader of the Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats (interview conducted on the 30th of August, 2011). In his view, consecutive coalitions with joint candidate nominations are particularly difficult to agree on, because parties' strength is harder to estimate if they presented a joint candidate slate in the previous election.



# Chapter 5

## Explaining party mergers: case studies

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 argues that parties will merge if expected office gains outweigh policy losses and the commitment of the larger party to the merger agreement is sufficiently credible. The large-n analysis of party mergers in 24 European democracies largely supports this argument. However, while the covariation between causes and effects is the main method of causal inference, the analysis of causal mechanisms implied by the theory can strengthen causal insight (Gerring, 2010). Case studies are generally better than large-n analyses in revealing causal mechanisms (Gerring, 2004). This chapter therefore aims to illustrate the causal mechanisms of the theory of party fusion by presenting five case studies. These studies focus on the formation of the Left Party in Germany in 2007, the United Socialist Party in Italy in 1966, the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan in 1955 and the Conservative Party of Canada in 2003, as well as the failure of centre-right parties in Poland to form a unified party in the period between 1996 and 2001.

The selected cases provide significant variation in key independent variables at the country and party level. More specifically, the analysis includes two young democracies with fluid party systems (Japan in the 1950s and Poland in the 1990s) and three countries with more established party systems. The variation in electoral system

disproportionality is also large and includes the majoritarian system of Canada, the “semi-proportional” system of single non-transferable vote (SNTV) used in Japan, the mixed electoral system in Germany, the limited PR system with a relatively high electoral threshold in Poland and the highly proportional PR system in Italy.<sup>1</sup> The parties studied here also vary greatly in size and asymmetry. In particular, the Left Party was formed by two small parties, the socialist parties in Italy and centre-right parties in Poland were small and medium-sized, and the mergers in Japan and Canada involved medium-sized and large parties. The age of parties also varies greatly. For example, well-established conservative party in Canada and much younger parties in Germany, Poland and Japan are included in the analyses below. Furthermore, in two cases parties formed pre-electoral coalitions. Finally, the cases also include two countries (Canada and Japan) that are not part of the sample used in the large-n analysis, which enables to explore the generalisability of the theory of party fusion to countries outside Europe.

## 5.2 Left Party in Germany

The Left Party in Germany was formed in 2007 through the fusion of the Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS), which was the successor of the communist party in Eastern Germany, and the splinter of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) called the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG), which was established in 2005 by the leftist opponents of the neo-liberal policies of the SDP. The parties committed to a merger in 2005 but could not complete it before the early election held in the same year due to lack of time (Patton, 2011, 125). Thus, PDS organisations at the state level accepted members of WASG on their electoral lists, which was the only legally viable option of electoral cooperation, because the electoral law in Germany forbids other forms of pre-electoral coalitions (Lees, Hough and Keith, 2010, 1306). The fact that this electoral coalition was forced by exogenous factors, however, allows for a better

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<sup>1</sup>Some of the countries changed their electoral systems since the period of analysis.



examination of its effects on the probability of fusion.

Expected office gains were one of the main reasons for the coalition and subsequent merger. The size of both parties was small, but not negligible. Thus, cooperation provided a good opportunity to increase the chances of obtaining significant representation in the Bundestag and possibly the participation in government coalitions at the federal level.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, in the federal election in 2002 the PDS polled 4 percent of the vote and obtained only 2 seats (in single member districts) in the lower house while the WASG obtained 2.2 percent of the vote in the North-Rhine Westphalia state election in May 2005. Thus, both parties, especially the WASG, may not have crossed the 5 percent electoral threshold if they ran independently, but had much better chances to do so in cooperation. This has also been demonstrated by the results of the 2005 election, in which the pre-electoral coalition of the two parties received 8.7 percent of the vote. Additional synergy from the merger was provided by the fact that the support for the PDS was very much concentrated in eastern Germany, while the WASG was much stronger in western states. However, a potential risk to this office-seeking strategy was that some members of the PDS were concerned about the loss of their well-established party brand, which could have potentially led to the loss of voter support (Lees, Hough and Keith, 2010, 1306).

The different regional support also determined important ideological differences, which were a key obstacle to the fusion. While both parties occupied a similar ideological niche, the PDS was an old left party focused on employment, economy and job security, while the WASG emerged as a diverse leftist protest movement (Coffe and Plassa, 2010). The WASG viewed the PDS as an Eastern party and also criticised it for forming state-level government coalitions with the SPD in eastern Germany which implemented neo-liberal policies. In contrast, the majority of the PDS elites considered

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<sup>2</sup>Due to their extreme left ideology, many former WASG members have actually been against participation in government. However, former PDS members were much more favourable to this possibility.

the WASG too radical (Olsen, 2007). The division between the East and West factions, largely based on the identities of predecessor parties, remained very much prominent in the merged party (Patton, 2011).

Another important obstacle for the merger was the difference in party size. The WASG was significantly weaker in electoral terms. This difference was further exacerbated by the fact that its support was dispersed across populous western states, which prevented it from reaching the 5 percent threshold and gaining legislative representation in state-level elections until 2007. In contrast, the PDS was an important party in the legislatures of five eastern states and Berlin. Furthermore, the WASG also had 5 times less members than the PDS at the time of the merger (Patton, 2011, 135). Due to these disparities, especially in the early stages of cooperation, “[m]any in the WASG feared that their organisation would be simply swallowed up by the PDS” (Olsen, 2007, 210). In order to alleviate these fears, the PDS agreed to a dual leadership of the merged party (with one leader representing each of the merging parties) and an equal division of positions on the executive board and party conference in the transitional period of several years (Lees, Hough and Keith, 2010).

However, it is questionable whether these institutional guarantees alone were sufficient to convince WASG members that they would not be dominated in the merged party. In fact, WASG members may have also expected for the growth of the western wing of the party after the fusion, both in organisational and electoral terms. Indeed, the membership of WASG increased twice in the period between its foundation and the merger (Olsen, 2007, 208-210). This tendency was prominent after the merger as well, because in only four years between 2007 and 2011 the share of members in the eastern states (including Berlin) declined from 71 percent to 62.4 percent. This occurred mainly because the members of the PDS were very old, but also due to the fact that a greater number of new members joined the Left Party in the west than in the east.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The computations are based on the data on the website of the Left Party, <http://www.die-linke.de/partei/fakten/mitgliederzahlen/mitgliederzahlen20072010/>



While there is no definite evidence to support this, it is reasonable to argue that WASG members could expect this organisational growth to be related to electoral gains as well. Indeed, while in 2005 4.9 percentage points of the Left Party's electoral support were obtained in the east and 3.8 in the west, in the 2009 election these shares were 5.2 and 5.9 percentage points, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the fusion was also facilitated by the success of cooperation in the 2005 election. This cooperation was instrumental in building trust between the two parties. For instance, although there was no way in which the WASG could make the PDS regional organisations to accept its candidates, all PDS organisations did so, even though not always in electable positions (Heunemann, 2006, 86). Furthermore, the PDS showed its commitment to the merger by changing its name to "The Left Party.PDS" before the 2005 election (Lees, Hough and Keith, 2010). The electoral cooperation in 2005 also provided the WASG with parliamentary representation at the federal level (12 out of 54 members of the Bundestag elected by the coalition were delegated by the WASG), which allowed it to bargain with the PDS on more equal terms.

This case study illustrates several causal mechanisms of the theory of fusion. The two parties managed to overcome ideological disagreements and the problem of credible commitments in return for expected office gains. More specifically, as the two parties were small (but not negligible), they merged primarily in order to increase their seat share. Significant elements in the merged party also expected that this electoral success will be translated into the possibility to participate in government coalitions led by the Social Democratic Party. As the theory of fusion would predict, one potential risk (which did not materialise) to expected office gains was whether the change in the well-established label of the PDS would not repel the support of its partisan voters. The case study also demonstrates that ideological disagreements were a major obstacle for the fusion. Furthermore, the WASG was also concerned about the credibility of the

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<sup>4</sup>Computed on the basis of the election results provided on the website of the Federal Returning Officer, <http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/>

commitments of the PDS. This concern was caused, as suggested by the theory, by the fact that the PDS was larger than the WASG. These fears were not unfounded, because the old identities of the two legacy parties remained to a large extent the main divide in the Left party until the present. However, actual and expected changes in the balance of power between the two groups to the benefit of the WASG, as well as successful pre-electoral cooperation, nevertheless mitigated this commitment problem and enabled the parties to merge.

### **5.3 United Socialist Party in Italy**

The United Socialist Party (PSU) in Italy was formed in 1966 as a result of the merger between the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), led by Pietro Nenni, and the Italian Social Democratic Party (PSDI) with Giuseppe Saragat as its leader. The PSDI resulted from earlier splits of the anti-communist elements in the PSI opposed to the latter's alliance with the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in the 1940s and early 1950s. The goal of the fusion was to establish a strong moderate socialist party, which could challenge the PCI for the dominance of the left and allow the formation of the government without the dominant centrist party - the Christian Democracy (DC) (Rizzi, 1974). This goal was challenging but feasible, as the combined electoral support of the PSI and PSDI (the vote share of these parties in the 1963 general election was 13.8 and 6.1 percent, respectively) was relatively close to that of the PCI (25.3 percent in 1963). While there were few incentives to merge due to the mechanical or strategic effects of the electoral system, as both parties were electorally viable under the preferential vote PR system used at that time, it is possible that the merged party could have attracted some strategic voters who saw it as the centre of a government alternative to the DC.

The decrease in ideological differences between the two parties throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s was a key factor leading to the fusion. The PSI rejected an alliance with the PCI in 1956 and moved to support the centrist governments, which



were led by the DC and included the PSDI. After the 1963 election the PSI itself became a member of the government, which however led to the split of a minority pro-communist faction in 1964. By the time of the fusion, the ideological positions of the PSDI and the majority faction in the PSI were close; for example, they supported progressive reforms and accepted the existence of mixed economy. However, opinions in the PSI with regard to the breach of relations with the PCI differed (Rizzi, 1974, 152-153).

Nenni and Saragat, who since the 1940s were the most prominent leaders of the Socialist movement, initiated the fusion. Since Saragat was elected as President in 1964, Nenni became the leader of the unified party. However, a tacit agreement between the two leaders was that Saragat would take over the leadership role after his presidential term would expire in 1971 (Rizzi, 1974, 161). However, the differences in the size of two parties were an important obstacle for the fusion. In particular, the membership and electoral support (in the last regional election before the fusion) of the PSDI were respectively only 26.5 and 36.3 percent of that of the two parties together. The fusion was only possible after it was agreed that the positions in the party executive would be shared equally between the two parties in the transitional period of two years “in order to assure the respective leading groups (particularly those of the PSDI) against possible overthrow” (Rizzi, 1974, 154). It is notable that the integration of two party organisations in this period was minimal, which could be an indication that the PSDI faction was weary to fully commit to this merger before it was certain of a strong position in the merged party. At the same time the ideological similarity between the PSDI and the majority faction in the PSI could be a reason why the PSDI expected for a successful integration, as a result of which it would play an important role in the merged party. Indeed, the alliance between the two groups (the PSDI faction and the majority in the PSI) dominated the decision-making in the merged party during the transitional period between 1966 and 1968 (Rizzi, 1974). Another reason why the PSDI

was less concerned about its marginalisation could have been the split of the PSI in 1964, which decreased the asymmetry of the size of the two parties.

However, the hopes of the PSDI were dashed in the party congress in 1968. Following the expiration of the parity principle, the PSDI faction was allocated only 17.3 percent of the positions in the party executive (significantly less than its vote or member share preceding the merger). Furthermore, Nenni's supporters in the former PSI split, which further weakened the influence of the PSDI faction. In particular, Saragat's chances to become the president of the party decreased significantly and the control of local party organs was being taken over by the leftist opponents of the PSDI faction, which threatened the clientelistic linkages of the members of the PSDI faction (Rizzi, 1974). In order to avoid an electoral marginalisation, the PSDI faction split off in 1969.

The case of the Italian Socialists exemplifies in several ways the theory of party fusion proposed here. Expected office gains were a key reason for the merger, as both Socialist parties expected to establish a large party that could serve as a government formateur alternative to the DC. The fusion also followed the decline in ideological disagreements. However, despite this ideological closeness, the two groups in the merged party failed to achieve a genuine integration in terms of losing old party identities. One reason for this failure could have been the absence of a pre-electoral coalition. Rizzi (1974, 163) makes a similar argument by stating that "perhaps a 'confederation' between the parties might have worked better, by allowing more time for the solution of organizational problems". The failure to integrate two organisations after the initial period of two years and the asymmetry in the size of two parties were the main causes why the factions based on the former PSI sought to marginalise the PSDI faction by significantly reducing the latter's representation in the party executive and regional party bodies. The PSDI faction, however, was able to re-establish itself as a viable party, although its electoral support in the 1972 general election (5.1 percent) was almost 20 percent lower than in 1963 when the last general election prior to the fusion



took place. This electoral decline supports the assumption that a party that merges into a larger party and then splits off from it is likely to experience an electoral cost. This cost, however, was limited, because the membership organisations of two merging parties were only minimally integrated in the fused party and the PSDI faction could use its original party label after the split.

#### **5.4 Liberal Democratic Party in Japan**

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was established in 1955 by two conservative parties (the Democratic Party and the Liberal Party). The Democratic Party, itself formed just one year earlier from the merger of various splinter groups, held the plurality of seats in the Japanese parliament and formed a minority government under Ichiro Hatoyama after the 1955 election, but it needed the support of the Liberals, who had around one quarter of seats in the lower house, to pass legislation. The Liberal Party sought to overcome its isolation in opposition (Colton, 1956). Both conservative parties were also concerned about the merger of two Socialist parties in October 1955. The legislative strength of the merged Socialist party was close to that of the Democrats and larger than that of the Liberals. Furthermore, the Socialists had realistic chances of winning a plurality of seats in the next election and thus depriving both conservative parties from power by gaining the right to become a government formateur (Colton, 1956). Thus, expected office gains, both in the current term (by establishing a strong dominant party) and in the following term (by preventing the Socialists from obtaining the plurality of seats) were key reasons for the merger.

While the two parties had policy disagreements (for example, on foreign policy issues), commitment problems were a major obstacle in the unification process. The Democratic Party preferred a coalition government between the two parties, but the Liberals demanded for a merger as a way to guarantee that the Democrats would not defect once important legislative acts were passed (Kohno, 1997, 83). The Democrats

were thus forced to accept the merger, which occurred in November 1955. According to the merger agreement, in the spring of 1956, Hatoyama was to be replaced as Prime Minister by the leader of the Liberals. However, while Hatoyama re-shuffled his cabinet after the merger in order to include former Liberals, he was also planning to run for the party's presidency (and thus to extend his term as Prime Minister) despite the earlier promise not to do so (Kohno, 1997, 89). The outcome of the election was nevertheless not clear, because both factions had an almost equal number of legislators (who were to play a key role in the selection of the party leader) across the two chambers (Kohno, 1997, 74). Thus, while the Liberals knew that the Democrats could defect, the similar size of the parties could be the reason why the promise of the Democrats was more credible.<sup>5</sup>

While the leadership competition might have split the party, it was prevented by the death of the leader of former Liberals in January 1956. Both factions thus accepted the transitional leadership of Hatoyama until late 1956. At the time of the next competition, the division between former Liberals and Democrats was already rather blurred and the following leader was elected with the support of the coalition which included members of both parties (Kohno, 1997, 89-90).

In line with the theory of party fusion, the conservative parties created the LDP in order to increase their chances of obtaining governmental office in the next legislative term. Without the merger, their participation in government was uncertain due to the electoral rise of the unified Socialist party. Moreover, the merged LDP immediately became the dominant party in the legislature (and remained such for decades), which supports the prediction that parties merge in order to achieve legislative dominance. Furthermore, the main obstacle to the merger was the credibility of the Democrats' commitment to allow the leader of the Liberals to become the head of the merged party. The Liberals expected that the Democrats would defect on this promise by

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<sup>5</sup>Kohno (1997) also emphasises that some Democrats, especially the second-rank leaders, would not have wanted to destroy their long-term relationship with the Liberals for a short-term gain.



running their own candidate in the leadership election, but the expected utility loss due to this defection was decreased by the fact that both parties had an almost equal number of electors in the leadership competition. Also, in line with the theory of party fusion, the commitment problems were also soothed by the fact that both parties were the result of numerous splits and mergers, and thus their elites lacked well defined identities (Calder, 1988). Indeed, the identities of the two parties had very limited importance in the leadership election at the end of 1956 or only one year after the merger (Kohno, 1997).

## **5.5 Conservative Party of Canada**

The Conservative Party of Canada was established in 2003 as a result of the merger between the Progressive Conservative Party (PC) and the Canadian Alliance (CA). The main goal of the merger was to establish a strong conservative party which could challenge the dominance of the Liberal Party. Although the combined electoral support of the conservative parties was close to that of the Liberals (in the 2000 election the vote shares of the Liberal Party, the CA and the PC were respectively 40.9, 25.5 and 12.2 percent), the Liberals were still able to win many more seats because of the split in the conservative camp (Belanger and Godbout, 2010). The merger was an immediate success in this sense, because, even if the merged party lost 8 percentage points of vote in the 2004 election as compared to its predecessor parties, it managed to increase its seat share by almost 7 percentage points and firmly established itself as one of the two major parties at the national level. The party won the 2006 election and formed a minority government.

Ideological disagreements were an important obstacle for the fusion. The CA was more socially conservative and argued against the official bilingualism policy in the country to the extent that it was considered as a rather extreme party. Another reason for the hostility between the two parties was the origin of the CA (previously the Reform

Party of Canada) as a party largely created by disaffected previous supporters of the PC in western Canadian states (Belanger and Godbout, 2010).

However, the key disagreement in the merger negotiations in 2003 was not ideology, but the rules for electing the leader of the party (leadership competition was expected to take place and indeed occurred in early 2004). The Canadian Alliance preferred a one-member, one-vote system, presumably because it had more members and would thus have been able to dominate the race.<sup>6</sup> However, the leader of the PC considered such a system unfair and pointed out that his party is “not going to be swamped”.<sup>7</sup> The Canadian Alliance was thus forced to accept the method proposed by the PC, according to which every electoral district would have 100 votes in the leadership selection. This method favoured the PC, because its members were more widespread across many districts in central Canada and to some extent Quebec while the membership of the Canadian Alliance was concentrated in the western part of the country. In the same vein the merger agreement specified that each district would send an equal number of delegates to party conventions (Belanger and Godbout, 2010, 58).

While Stephen Harper, the leader of the Canadian Alliance, won the leadership contest of the merged party in 2004 even under the rules preferred by the PC (partially because many potentially strong PC candidates, including its leader Peter MacKay, withdrew from the race), the method of leadership selection and representation in party conventions remained a divisive issue in the merged party, largely reflecting the cleavage between the members of two predecessor parties. In every convention of the merged party between 2005 and 2011 some former members of the CA, in particular MP Scott Reid (who represented the CA in the merger negotiations), proposed changing this procedure by giving a greater say to district organisations with a larger number of members.

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<sup>6</sup>In early 2003, the membership of the Canadian Alliance was 86 thousand while the PC had 45 thousand members (The Globe and Mail, 16 October 2003), but they increased to 92 and 60 thousand before the parties consulted their memberships on the fusion question (Vancouver Sun, 15 November 2003, and Calgary Herald, 20 November 2003).

<sup>7</sup>National Post, 24 September 2003.



Scott Reid and his supporters argued that according to the merger agreement the principle of the equal representation of all districts was to be used for the first selection of the party leadership only. However, these proposals met a vehement resistance by former PC members. For example, in the 2005 convention MacKay threatened the party's unity if these changes were adopted, although he stopped short from explicitly arguing for a split.<sup>8</sup> Probably due to the divisiveness of this issue Harper did not support the proposals either, leading to their sound defeat in all party conventions.

As suggested by my theory of party fusion, two Conservative parties in Canada accepted policy compromises expecting office benefits in future elections. In particular, due to the majoritarian electoral system used in Canada only large parties can be electorally competitive nationwide and expect to form a government. The merger allowed the two parties to do just that. However, the PC seems to have expected that the merged party would remain divided on the basis of old identities due to ideological and historical differences between the two parties, as well as the lack of previous cooperation experience (the parties never formed a nationwide electoral coalition). Fearing that as a minority it would be marginalised in the merged party, the PC demanded and obtained the over-representation of its members in the selection of leadership and convention delegates of the merged party. However, former CA members could and indeed tried to reverse these concessions. What made them more credible, however, was that the asymmetry in the size of the two parties was quite limited. Thus, even being a minority, the PC could threaten (and did threaten, for example, in the 2005 convention) the CA faction to dissent or even defect, thus preventing the latter from achieving governmental office. This evidence exemplifies well the theory of fusion, which suggests that low asymmetry in merging parties' size assures the credibility of merger agreements and thus makes fusion more likely.

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<sup>8</sup>National Post, 19 March 2005; The Canadian Press, 24 May 2011; Ottawa Citizen, 12 June 2011.

## 5.6 Solidarity Electoral Action in Poland

The Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) was a permanent coalition among more than 30 political organisations. It was formed in June 1996, won in the parliamentary election in September 1997 as a pre-electoral coalition and became a senior partner in the coalition government with the liberal Freedom Union (Szczerbiak, 2004).<sup>9</sup> The AWS brought together most of the small parties of the Polish centre-right after their fragmentation into several blocs led to their defeat in the 1993 parliamentary and 1995 presidential elections. The dominant organisation in the AWS coalition, however, was not a party, but rather the Solidarity trade union led by Marian Krzaklewski, which initiated the coalition (Kaminski, 2001). The electoral appeal of the alliance largely built on the well-established label and abundant organisational resources of the trade union. As a result, the trade union dominated the candidate selection process and tried to place its members on most of the best places on candidate lists. Furthermore, it also pushed for the unification of all diverse centre-right forces into a single party already before the 1997 election. However, the proposal for unification was rejected by medium-sized parties in the AWS, which, according to Szczerbiak (2004, 69), “feared losing their identity and influence within the new, larger grouping that would inevitably be dominated by former Solidarity trade union leaders”. This is because not only did all parties have a much lower electoral appeal than the Solidarity trade union, but they also were organisational dwarfs having only between less than 1 000 and 15 000 members (Szczerbiak, 2001, 169), while the trade union had around 1.3 million members in the mid-1990s (Kubicek, 2000, 188). The trade union was forced to back down after 10 parties formed a sub-coalition and demanded for the maintenance of the existing organisational structure, as well as more favourable placements of their candidates on AWS lists.<sup>10</sup> The alliance, however,

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<sup>9</sup>The coalition initially consisted of 22 organisations, but others joined (or left) it before and after the election. Moreover, many small organisations merged into several larger parties after the election in 1997, as explained below.

<sup>10</sup>“Cracks in AWS Coalition”, Polish News Bulletin, 16 June, 1997.



sustained its unity and won the plurality of seats in the 1997 election (201 in the lower house against 164 won by the alliance led by the communist successor party).

In response to its failure to unify all political parties in the alliance, in the second half of 1997 Solidarity sponsored the foundation of the Christian Democratic party called the AWS Social Movement (RS-AWS), which was supposed to eventually replace the trade union in the alliance (however, this did not happen until the 2001 election and both organisations played an important role in the AWS coalition). This party was joined by the trade unionists elected on the AWS list and incorporated a number of miniscule parties in the alliance, such as New Poland, Movement for the Republic - Patriotic Camp, National Right, Catholic Families Association, National League, Polish Peasant Party - People's Agreement and others (Paszkievicz, 2004, 139), as well as independent deputies elected on the lists of the alliance. In total, this new party gathered more than 100 lower house deputies elected on AWS lists (Paszkievicz, 2004, 141). Most of the other AWS deputies affiliated with three medium-sized parties refused to join RS-AWS: namely, the Christian National Union (ZChN), the Conservative People's Party (SKL) and the Polish Agreement of Christian Democrats (PPChD) (the latter was formed in 1999 from several smaller AWS parties). Thus, by 1999 the AWS alliance consisted of five main groupings: the trade union itself, its political arm RS-AWS and three other parties. There were quite significant ideological differences between these parties, as RS-AWS and PPChD were predominantly Christian Democratic, ZChN was Catholic national and SKL was liberal conservative. RS-AWS and the Solidarity trade union, however, held the majority of votes in the executive of the alliance. Therefore, Krzaklewski was able to dominate the decision-making in the alliance and government through his influence on Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek, who also was a member of RS-AWS.<sup>11</sup>

The loose confederal structure turned out to be inappropriate for the effective func-

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<sup>11</sup>"Poland politics - Soul-searching tears ruling party apart", Economist Intelligence Unit, 18 December 2000.



tioning of the government, as it undermined the leadership of Buzek and led to clientelistic practices in order to appease diverse groups in the AWS (Szczerbiak, 2004, 71). The paralysis of the government and internal squabbling within the AWS led to the decline in the public support of the AWS coalition from 28 percent in January 1999 to 16 percent in January 2000 and 13 percent in January 2001.<sup>12</sup> At the same time the popularity of the centre-left SLD has been increasing and reached 41 percent in January 2001. The prospect of losing power after the next election led the leaders of RS-AWS including Buzek to call for a stronger integration of AWS parties<sup>13</sup>. However, parties could not agree on whether to form a party federation before fusion and in particular on the division of positions in the executive of the new organisation. The late compromise reached in December 2000 proposed the foundation of party federation before the September 2001 election and the merger of the parties six months after the election. Furthermore, RS-AWS grudgingly agreed that three other parties (ZChN, SKL and PPChD) would hold 51 percent of seats in the executive of the federation, thus giving up the majority that it held in the executive of the alliance (together with the Solidarity trade union) until then.<sup>14</sup> This alleviated the fears of the smaller parties that they would be dominated in the new organisation. The agreement, however, fell apart in 2001 with massive defections from all AWS parties, as well as the liberal Freedom Union, in 2001, leading to the foundation of several new parties, including the Civic Platform (PO) and Law and Justice (PiS). As the SKL joined the bloc of the PO, the rump RS-AWS, ZChN and PPChD still could not agree on the formation of a unified party. As a result, with 5.6 percent of the vote they failed to reach the 7 percent electoral threshold for coalitions. They could, however, have obtained seats if they participated in the elections on the list of a single party, as they would have

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<sup>12</sup>Based on the data provided by the Public Opinion Research Centre PBOS. Szczerbiak (2004, 69) cites the general survey conducted in June 2001 showing that respondents considered internal difficulties of the AWS as the most important reason for the decline in its support.

<sup>13</sup>"Buzek says AWS Needs a New Model", Polish News Bulletin, 26 July 1999.

<sup>14</sup>"Solidarity Election Action reaches agreement to form party", BBC Monitoring European - Political, December 27, 2000.



only had to reach the 5 percent threshold. Following this defeat, three parties were marginalised and never again played an important role in Polish politics.

The development of the AWS coalition, while highly complex, illustrates how ideological disagreements and in particular the lack of credibility of commitments on behalf of a larger party may prevent party mergers despite potential office gains. Centre-right parties in Poland had strong incentives to cooperate for the 1997 election in order to avoid the wastage of votes that occurred in the previous elections. Furthermore, an additional incentive to unify was created by the possibility to become the largest party in the system. This was important, because if the centre-left SLD remained the largest party after the election, it could have potentially formed a coalition government with the liberal Freedom Union, especially given that the president of Poland at that time was a former leader of the SLD. While the AWS alliance won the election in 1997, attempts to form a single party failed both before and after the election. The reasons for this failure were the ideological disagreements between parties, but in particular the concern of the relatively small parties in the alliance about being dominated by a significantly larger grouping of trade unionists in the merged party. The reluctance of the RS-AWS to give up its majority in the executive of the merged party until late 2000 only further fuelled the fear of smaller parties to be dominated. However, in line with the theory of party fusion, a number of smaller groups with few MPs each and little-known labels merged into the RS-AWS, thus suggesting that ideological disagreements or the credibility of commitments are less important obstacles to takeover mergers.

In addition, the case study also exemplifies the theoretical proposition suggesting that the probability of merger decreases as potential office gains become less certain. More specifically, due to the decline in the support of the AWS by late 2000 (caused to large extent by its internal disagreements) and the surge of the leftist SLD the chances of the AWS entering government after the 2001 election decreased substantially. Centre-right parties thus had fewer incentives to merge into one large party, because such a

party was still likely to end up in opposition. As a result, centre-right parties preferred to splinter into several smaller groups with narrower ideological profiles (Szczerbiak, 2004, 71).

## 5.7 Conclusion

Five case studies above illustrate well the theory of party fusion presented in the previous chapter. All case studies show that merging parties expected to obtain additional office benefits from the increase in their size. They expected that this increase would allow them either to overcome electoral thresholds more easily (the Left Party) or to increase their chances of becoming government formateurs (the Liberal Democrats in Japan and the Socialist parties in Italy) or to achieve both goals (the Conservative parties in Canada and the AWS coalition in Poland). The case of the AWS also illustrates that the decrease in the expected chances of entering the government after the next election also reduced parties' incentives to merge. Moreover, the case of the Left Party highlights that one of the obstacles to this office-seeking strategy is the potential vote losses due to change in the party's label. Furthermore, the case of the LDP is also consistent with the expectation that the incentives for fusion are created by the possibility to become the dominant party in the system.

All case studies also provided examples of how policy disagreements can be an important obstacle to party fusion. In all cases parties had to compromise on their policy stances. Furthermore, in the case of the centre-left parties in Italy ideological re-approachment between the two parties made fusion more likely.

Moreover, the case studies are also consistent with the assumptions and implications concerning the importance of the commitment problem. In particular, the studies exemplify the difficulties of integrating previously competing parties into a single coherent organisation. Only in the case of the LDP the identities of the predecessor parties



seemed to have largely lost their role shortly after the merger.<sup>15</sup> As suggested by the theory, this was largely because the merging parties were very young themselves and were created through the extensive amalgamation and fragmentation of various conservative groups. In contrast, the Left Party, the Conservative Party of Canada and the United Socialist Party of Italy were (or have been) unable to overcome this division, even if the former was preceded by a pre-electoral coalition of the predecessor parties.

The case studies also illustrate the importance of the larger party renegeing on previous agreements and/or taking a disproportionate share of benefits after the merger. There is evidence that in all five cases smaller parties were concerned about this risk. Further evidence to support this argument is provided by the fact that in some cases (e.g. the Left Party, the United Socialist Party or the Conservative Party of Canada) the larger party made significant concessions with regard to the division of influence in the merged party. In addition, in some cases defections were attempted or implemented, as demonstrated most significantly by the case of the Conservative Party of Canada and the Unified Socialist Party in Italy.

The case studies also illustrate how the asymmetry in the merging parties' size influenced the credibility of merger agreements. In the case of the AWS this asymmetry was a key reason for the absence of fusion. The case of the Socialists in Italy demonstrates that this asymmetry allowed the larger group to attempt to marginalise its smaller partner. In the other three cases the asymmetry in merging parties' size was somewhat or significantly lower, which increased the credibility of merger agreements. The success of electoral cooperation in the case of the Left Party could be another reason why the smaller merging party was more certain about the credibility of the commitments of its larger partner. In contrast, such cooperation was lacking in the case of the Italian Socialists, which was one of the reasons for the failure of that merger.

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<sup>15</sup>The case study of Poland did not explore whether this was also the case with those insignificant parties that merged into the Solidarity Electoral Action - Social Movement. It is reasonable to expect that it was, as there is little evidence that the members of these parties remained organised in separate factions after the mergers.

Finally, the case study of the AWS also exemplifies the argument in the previous chapter suggesting that takeover mergers are quite different from the mergers of more equal parties. More specifically, in contrast to medium-sized parties in the coalition, small parties eagerly merged into the largest grouping of the coalition, thus illustrating the argument that the asymmetry in party size is less relevant for such mergers.



## Chapter 6

# Party organisation and persistence in Lithuania

### 6.1 Introduction

Stabilisation of the party system is an important challenge for many new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe and other world regions. Fluid party systems, in which large swings in the electoral support of existing parties and the emergence of successful new parties are frequent, can undermine electoral accountability and political representation (Birch, 2003; Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007). The expansive literature on the subject has demonstrated that system-level variables, such as institutions, social cleavages, economic conditions and historical legacies, have important effects on electoral volatility and new party success. However, the precise mechanism by which party-specific factors shape the stability at the system level is less well understood. An important strand in the literature suggests that party organisation is substantially less important for electoral success than sophisticated and expensive mass media campaigns (Mair, 1997; Van Biezen, 2003). However, party-voter linkages based on mass media communication are less stable than those based on membership organisations. Hence, if true, the argument that party organisation matters much less than mass media campaigns would provide an important explanation for party system instability in many post-communist democracies.

The main motivation of the present research is to provide a rigorous empirical test of this argument, which has so far been missing in the literature. This study finds that the effects of party membership organisation and campaign spending (used as a proxy for the intensity of media campaigns) on party system stability (measured by the stability of parties' electoral support and new party success) are significant and of similar size. Thus, it suggests strong evidence against the aforementioned argument. In this way the research contributes to the theory of party system stabilisation by showing that party finance matters for electoral competition in new democracies, but not as much as has been assumed before. Money matters but party organisation can largely offset differences in wealth. More specifically, the system in which main parties have relatively developed party organisations should be quite stable even if some existing or new parties have larger financial resources and thus better access to mass media than others. These findings imply that the stabilisation of party systems in post-communist democracies is not that different from the establishment of stable party systems in advanced democracies. Even if parties in post-communist democracies are not able to capture the electorate through mass membership organisations to the same extent that parties in established democracies did, these organisations still matter a great deal.

The findings of this chapter extend in several ways an important study by Tavits (2012), who also shows that party membership organisation has a strong effect on parties' electoral support and thus party system stabilisation, in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Poland. First, as already mentioned, it provides the comparison of the substantive effects of membership organisation and campaign spending. In contrast, the findings of Tavits (2012) show that party organisation makes a difference, but they have little to say about the relative impact of organisational strength compared with campaign spending. Second, the study corroborates the hypothesis that party membership organisation has a significant effect on election outcomes by providing evidence from yet another post-communist democracy. Third, it proposes an innovative



measure of membership organisation, which is based on the number of individuals that parties delegate to serve as members of electoral commissions and election observers. This measure has the potential to be applied to other countries in the region. Finally, the finding that campaign spending has a significant effect on electoral performance is also important on its own, because there is very little systematic research on the relationship between these two variables in post-communist democracies (as compared to other world regions).

The research is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature and presents my hypotheses. Section 3 discusses data and measurement issues. Finally, the results of the analysis are presented followed by the discussion and conclusions.

## **6.2 Explaining electoral stability of established parties and new party success**

The literature on electoral politics in post-communist and other new democracies has customarily used systemic variables for explaining the stability in parties' electoral support and new party success. In particular, electoral volatility has been demonstrated to be lower under restrictive electoral institutions and parliamentarism, where there is strong economic performance, well-developed social cleavages or substantial public funding (Birch, 2003; Birnir, 2005; Booth and Robbins, 2010; Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007; Roberts and Wibbels, 1999; Tavits, 2005). New parties have been found to be most successful in times of economic crisis or when all main existing parties have already had government experience (Tavits, 2008*b*; Pop-Eleches, 2010).

However, the evidence of how party-specific factors affect the stability in established parties' electoral support and new party electoral success is less systematic.<sup>1</sup> Many authors argue that membership organisation has little or no electoral value for

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<sup>1</sup>Here and below I define "established" parties as the parties which run in at least one parliamentary election in the past. "New" parties are parties which have not run in a parliamentary election before.

parties in post-communist democracies (Van Biezen, 2003, 206-208; Chan, 2001, 615; Kopecký, 1995, 521; Mair, 1997, 186; Olson, 1998, 445; Toole, 2003, 113; Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007, 166-167). Sophisticated and expensive mass media campaigns are said to provide a significantly more effective tool for communicating with the electorate and driving party turnout.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, new democracies are somewhat similar to advanced democracies in which a significant decline in the size and importance of party membership and the increase in the importance of the communication based on mass media took place after the 1960s. This change was a consequence of the change in the dominant party type from mass party (Duverger, 1954) to catch-all (Kirchheimer, 1966), electoral-professional (Panebianco, 1988) and cartel (Katz and Mair, 1995) party. However, an important difference between new and established democracies concerns timing (Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007, 166-167). Parties in advanced democracies built large membership organisations and subsequently became entrenched in society to the extent that they became part of social identity before the emergence of television and full enfranchisement of the electorate. Thus, even after these two events, membership remained electorally important to these parties. In contrast, in new democracies, parties emerged after the advent of television and under the presence of fully enfranchised electorates. As a result, they had no incentives to build strong membership organisations, instead preferring to use more effective and readily available mass media tools for their communications with voters.

If new democracies are indeed characterised by inconsequential membership organisations, then tenuous voter-party linkages based almost exclusively on mass media could provide an important explanation for party system instability. The effectiveness and resources available for communication through the mass media would normally vary across elections, which would undermine the stability in parties' electoral support.

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<sup>2</sup>This literature makes no distinction between new and already existing parties in terms of how membership organisation and mass media campaigns impact on electoral performance. Thus, I assume that these two independent variables affect the two dependent variables of this study in the same way.



Similarly, new parties with effective campaigns should easily achieve electoral success.

However, empirical evidence showing that media campaigns are significantly more important than party organisation has been lacking. With regard to the effects of membership organisation, some case studies have noted little correlation between parties' electoral support and organisational strength (Enyedi and Tóka, 2007, 156; Fink-Hafner, 2006, 208; Rybár and Deegan-Krause, 2008*b*; Sikk, 2006, 139; Spirova, 2005). Other case studies suggest that party organisations do matter (Golosov, 1998; Kostelecý, 2002, 155; Szczerbiak, 2001, 189-192).<sup>3</sup> More importantly, a recent study by Tavits 2012 provides a systematic empirical analysis showing that party organisation has substantial effects on party performance in four post-communist democracies.

Additional evidence relevant to this debate is obtained by examining the extent to which causal mechanisms through which membership organisation should affect electoral outcomes are present. Scarrow (1996) argues that, among other things, members can mobilize support to the party through everyday contacts and canvassing work during election campaigns. These mechanisms seem to be at work in Lithuania (and other post-communist democracies), suggesting that the strength of party organisation should impact on parties' electoral support. For instance, everyday contacts provide an important source of information about elections. According to the survey conducted following the 2008 election in Lithuania (Kavaliauskaitė, Ramonaitė and Žiliukaitė, 2011), 72 percent of respondents indicated that they talked with friends and family about the election at the time of electoral campaign. Also, 24 percent of respondents indicated that they were contacted by party representatives by phone, on the street or at home, suggesting that parties also conducted large-scale campaigns based on the voluntary work of their members.

Also, there have been a few empirical tests explicitly linking electoral performance

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<sup>3</sup>Low levels of party membership, the lack of membership recruitment campaigns and the practice of fielding independent candidates in parties' lists may also suggest that membership does not matter for parties' electoral support (Van Biezen, 2003, 207). However, some parties attempted to actively recruit members (Haughton, 2000, 759).



and media-based campaigns of political parties in Central and Eastern Europe (Popescu and Tóka 2002 and Schmitt-Beck and Farrell 2002 provide some case study evidence). Since such campaigns demand large financial resources, one promising way to test this theoretical relationship is by examining the effect of campaign spending on parties' electoral support and the stability of this support. Such campaign spending, measured either at the level of single member district in the case of majoritarian electoral rules (e.g. Jacobson 1978; Johnston and Pattie 2002; Palda and Palda 1998) or at the level of candidate in the case of PR system (Benoit and Marsh, 2008; Maddens et al., 2006; Samuels, 2001), has been demonstrated to have substantial effects on election outcomes. Nevertheless, the literature on post-communist countries lacks systematic studies of the effect of campaign spending. In the study of Tavits (2012), party-level finance variables had an inconsistent effect on parties' electoral support, probably because they were measured at the party level.

To conclude, while the effect of expensive media campaigns on electoral outcomes in post-communist democracies is theoretically plausible, it is largely untested empirically. There is more research on the effects of party organisation, but its findings are rather mixed. Also, no study has attempted to test the effect of both variables systematically and simultaneously. Thus, the empirical support for the abovementioned argument suggesting that in post-communist democracies expensive mass media campaigns matter significantly more for parties' electoral performance than membership organisations must be considered tentative at best. In order to fill this important gap in the literature, the present research tests the following two observable implications of this argument<sup>4</sup>:

H1: *Strong membership organisations increase the electoral stability of established parties and electoral support of new parties.*

H2: *High campaign spending increases the electoral stability of established parties*

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<sup>4</sup>The argument could be considered as plausible if weak or no support to H1 and strong support to H2 is found.



*and electoral support of new parties.*

## **6.3 Data and Measurement**

### **6.3.1 The Lithuanian case**

The Lithuanian party system provides a useful case for testing these theoretical propositions for at least two reasons. First, it uses a parallel mixed-member electoral system (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001), in which 71 legislators are elected in single-member districts (FPTP rule was applied in 2000 and two-round system in 2004 and 2008) and the remaining 70 MPs are elected in a single multi-member district with a 5% threshold. Hence, while the results of analysis are pertinent to other post-communist countries using mixed electoral system, the findings with regard to the PR tier are also generalizable to the countries using a PR system. Second, the Lithuanian polity provides high variation in the dependent variables (stability in established parties' support and new party success). For example, Mainwaring and Zoco (2007, 160) show that electoral volatility in Lithuania has been the fifth highest among 47 democracies in their sample. Also, new parties gained significant shares of votes and legislative seats in all elections considered in this study.

### **6.3.2 Measurement of the dependent variables**

The study has two key dependent variables: the stability in established parties' electoral support and the electoral success of new parties. The first variable is operationalized as the change in the vote shares of political parties in the PR and majoritarian tiers of the electoral system in 71 single-member districts in parliamentary elections in 2000, 2004 and 2008. The second variable measures the electoral performance of new parties in the two tiers.

In addition, I also estimate two models with the change in the vote shares of all

parties in both tiers as dependent variables. The purpose of these models is to better account for possible clustering in districts, especially for the effect of the success of new parties on vote shares of established parties (and vice versa). All models, except for those with new party success as a dependent variable, control for vote shares of parties in the previous election.<sup>5</sup> Bochslers (2010) and the website of the Central Electoral Commission provided the data sources for these variables.

In total, the model with the vote share of established parties in the majoritarian tier includes 22 parties. Since some parties presented their candidates only in the majoritarian tier in the previous election, the model with the electoral support in the PR tier as the dependent variable includes only 20 parties. Finally, the vote shares of 11 new parties are modelled. The dataset includes all parties which participated in three elections in the 2000s, but some parties were excluded from analysis due to the lack of data on their campaign spending. For both established and new parties the electoral support at the district level varied between 0.3 and 67.8 percent (mean 10.6, median 7.8 and standard deviation 9.6) in the majoritarian tier and between 0.005 and 66.0 percent (mean 6.5, mean 2.6 and standard deviation 8.6) in the PR tier.

Using the change in the vote share of parties as a measure of party system stability may seem problematic, because instability can occur not only when established parties lose votes, but also when they gain votes. This is, however, less applicable to the Lithuanian case in the period under consideration due to the high propensity of voters to support new parties. This means that the main source of electoral instability, at least in the elections of 2004 and 2008, was the redistribution of votes from established parties to new parties. This can be seen more clearly by comparing how much support losing established parties lost with how much support winning established parties gained.

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<sup>5</sup>The inclusion of this variable is necessary, because the dependent variable measures the absolute rather than relative change in vote shares. For example, the party with 2 percent support in the last election by definition can not experience 10 percent decline in its support. Using the vote share of the party in the election as the dependent variable and controlling for the previous vote share gives identical estimates of the coefficients of all main independent variables when only established parties are considered and similar estimates when all parties are included.



These two measures should be equal if no new parties entered and none of the established parties exited electoral competition. In the Lithuanian case, however, the values of these aggregate measures were 40.0 and 29.9 percent in 2000, 48.8 and 10.5 percent in 2004 and 27.6 and 6.4 percent in 2008. Thus, only in the 2000 election some established parties gained many votes (even if still less than other established parties lost). The difference between these two measures was mainly due to the emergence of new parties that attracted sizeable support, because only some very minor parties withdrew from electoral competition in this period.

The skewed distribution of the variables measuring the change in the electoral support of established parties in both SMD and PR tiers reflects these tendencies at the country level. As seen in Table 6.2, which presents the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analysis, the mean and median values of these variables are negative. Moreover, the values of the variable measuring the change in the SMD tier were negative for 70 percent of observations while for the PR tier 60 percent of observations had negative values on this variable. Furthermore, even when established parties gained votes, these gains were rather modest. Their support increased by 5 or more percentage points in only 15 percent of observed party-district cases in the SMD tier and 12 percent of cases in the PR tier. Only 7 percent of observations in the case of the majoritarian tier and 5 percent of observations in the PR tier recorded the increase in the support of established parties by more than 10 percentage points. In contrast, electoral losses of established parties were much larger. They lost 5 or more percentage points of support in 40 percent of cases in the SMD tier and 31 percent of cases in the PR tier and 10 or more percentage points in 27 percent of observations in the SMD tier and 20 percent of observations in the PR tier. Thus, the relatively low number of cases when established parties gained votes and the limited extent of these gains suggests that the change in the electoral support of established parties is a good proxy for measuring the stability in their support.



### 6.3.3 Measurement of party membership organisation

The first independent variable, the strength of a party's membership organisation, is measured as the ratio between the number of individuals delegated by the party to serve as members of electoral commissions and election observers and the size of the electorate in the district. As the strength of the effect of membership organisation is likely to be decreasing, the natural logarithm of this variable is used. Table 6.1 provides the number of delegates per party.

This variable is constructed by using the data on members of electoral commissions and election observers, which is available on the website of the Central Electoral Commission of Lithuania. Electoral legislation in Lithuania allows parties which won seats in the PR tier in the last parliamentary election or obtained seats in the council of the municipality which is part of the single member district to delegate two individuals to the district electoral commission and two more individuals to the commissions of each of the electoral wards within the electoral district (the average number of wards in a district is 29). Furthermore, all parties have the right to delegate two observers to each of the electoral commissions at the electoral ward level.

For example, consider the Social Democrats running in the 46th electoral district in the 2008 election. The number of voters in this district was 36 100. The district consisted of 52 electoral wards, thus allowing the party to delegate two representatives to the district electoral commission, 104 members of ward electoral commissions and 104 observers, or 210 individuals in total. The Social Democrats chose to delegate 126 individuals or 0.35 percent of the total number of voters in the district. Overall, the values of the natural logarithm of this variable vary between 0 and 0.60 with the mean of 0.08.

Why is this measure of party membership organisation valid? First, it captures the idea of active party membership. Serving as a member of an electoral commission or election observer is a relatively costly activity and the levels of remuneration provided by



the state are fairly low.<sup>6</sup> Also, although there is no way to know reliably whether parties provide additional pay to their delegates, they do not officially report such expenses in the reports submitted to the Central Electoral Commission. These low levels of remuneration suggest that only those members and supporters of the local party who are at least moderately involved in the party's affairs (party activists) would agree to do this kind of work. Also, since all parties face the same requirements for delegating their supporters, the data for different parties is directly comparable. Therefore, this measure at least partially tackles problems of comparability usually associated with membership figures reported by the parties themselves.

Second, the fear of electoral fraud is the reason why political parties should delegate as many individuals as they can (within established legal limits), thus revealing the strength of their membership organisations.<sup>7</sup> The so-called early voting, which takes place a few days before the election day and during which voters with mobility difficulties are visited by several election observers and members of the ward electoral commission, may provide good opportunities for influencing vote choice. Notably, it was the object of frequent complaints by election observers to the Central Electoral Commission. The share of voters using this type of voting (combined with the share of voters who voted by post) was quite substantial: 3.1 percent in 2000, 7.6 percent in 2004 and 8.7 percent in 2008. The involvement of a party's delegates in the organisation of early voting also allows it to collect information about violations of electoral legislation by its competitors.

Moreover, some important irregularities in vote counting also occur on election day. For example, in the second round of the 2008 election a Social Democratic candidate

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<sup>6</sup>In the 2008 parliamentary elections the tariff for one day work for a member of an electoral commission at the ward level was slightly more than 11 euros while the average monthly salary after taxes in 2008 was almost 500 euros.

<sup>7</sup>Although one may argue that parties could delegate people for whom even existing financial remuneration from the state is substantial (such as pensioners or students), it is unlikely that these delegates would have no connection at all with the delegating parties, as such delegates could not be relied upon to defend the party's interests when faced with electoral fraud.

Table 6.1: Number of delegates per party

Election	Party and election	No of delegates
2000	Party Young Lithuania	318
2000	Lithuanian Centre Union	3522
2000	Algirdas Brazauskas coalition	6815
2000	Lithuanian Popular Union	0
2000	Lithuanian Liberal Union	2713
2000	Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party	2820
2000	Polish Electoral Action of Lithuania	36
2000	Lithuanian Liberty Union	355
2000	Social Democracy 2000	0
2000	Lithuanian Nationalist Union	33
2000	Lithuanian Peasant Union	1510
2000	New Union (Social Liberals)	4465
2000	Homeland Union	5556
2000	Union of Moderate Conservatives	0
2004	Labour Party	5988
2004	Christian Conservative Social Union	237
2004	Liberal and Centre Union	4529
2004	Lithuanian Christian Democracy	2093
2004	Polish Electoral Action of Lithuania	778
2004	Lithuanian Liberty Union	267
2004	Algirdas Brazauskas and Arturas Paulauskas coalition	5438
2004	Lithuanian Social Democratic Union	39
2004	Lithuanian Peasant and New Democracy Union	3064
2004	Homeland Union	4962
2004	Liberal Democratic Party	4088
2004	Party Lithuanian Way	0
2004	National Centre Party	0
2008	Labour Party	4556
2008	Lithuanian Centre Party	121
2008	Liberal and Centre Union	3532
2008	Polish Electoral Action of Lithuania	1130
2008	Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	5422
2008	Lithuanian Social Democratic Union	97
2008	Lithuanian Peasant Popular Union	3632
2008	New Union (Social Liberals)	2457
2008	Homeland Union	5064
2008	"Order and Justice"	5109
2008	Party Frontas	201
2008	Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania	1264
2008	Civic Democracy Party	224
2008	Nation Resurrection Party	533



came first in one of the single member districts in Vilnius city by a margin of 32 voters. However, following a recount, her Conservative opponent was declared the winner by 56 votes after substantial counting errors were discovered in two electoral wards.

Third, qualitative evidence also indicates that delegates are party activists. For instance, a representative of the Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats claimed that almost all of the party's delegates are members of the party.<sup>8</sup> A representative of the Liberal Movement also suggested that most of party's delegates are party members and that when there are more candidates than delegate positions, the main selection criteria are party affiliation and competence.<sup>9</sup> The leader of the local chapter of the Social Democratic Party in Klaipeda city indicated that in the 2008 parliamentary election 133 members and supporters of the party and its youth organisation served as members of the electoral commissions and as observers.<sup>10</sup> This represents 67.1 percent of the total number of party's delegates (198) in the city, as recorded by the Central Electoral Commission.

Fourth, abundant anecdotal evidence also shows that parties had stronger membership organisation in localities where one would expect them to have it on the basis of party-specific information. For example, the Lithuanian Liberty Union, which was founded in the early 1990s mainly by the Kaunas city branch of the Lithuanian Liberty League, had the most delegates in SMDs in Kaunas city. Also, both the Labour Party and its splinter Civic Democracy Party presented the most delegates in the Kedainiai municipality, which was the home of their founding leaders Viktor Uspaskich and Viktoras Muntianas.

Finally, the validity of this measure is also supported by a high correlation (0.79) between the number of delegates and the number of members as reported by the par-

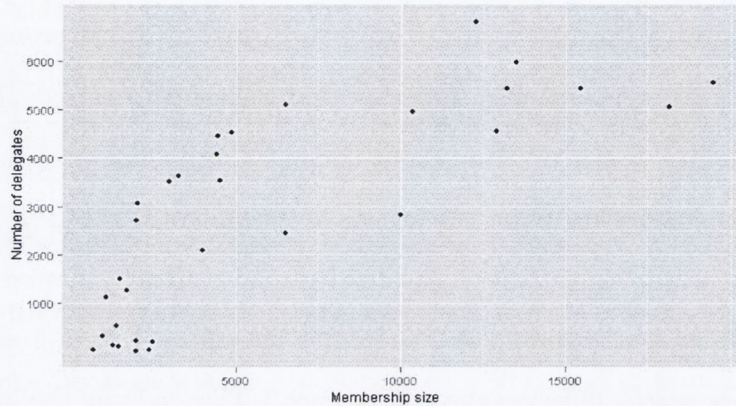
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<sup>8</sup>A phone interview on April 5, 2012.

<sup>9</sup>An email communication with a representative of the party, 13 March, 2012.

<sup>10</sup>A report by Sigitas Dobilinskas, February 7, 2009. <http://www.lsdpklaipeda.lt/ataskaitos/skyriaus-tarybos-ataskaita-2009-02-07/>.

Figure 6.1: Number of delegates and membership size



ties.<sup>11</sup> Figure 6.1 presents a scatterplot showing the relationship between these two variables. The relationship is somewhat curvilinear, as the parties with membership above 10 thousand have similar numbers of delegates due to the legal limits on their number. Thus, the results of the analysis may be affected by the variation in the number of wards. In order to account for this possibility, alternative analyses using the logged ratio between the number of delegates and its legal maximum in the district were conducted (not reported here), but substantive and statistical significance of main independent variables did not change substantially.

#### 6.3.4 Measurement of campaign spending

The effect of campaign spending on parties' electoral performance is measured using the official data provided by the Central Electoral Commission of Lithuania. The legislation on political finance demands that all parties participating in an election report their campaign expenses. Moreover, SMD candidates proposed by political parties can, and usually do, register as 'independent participants in the electoral campaign'. In that case they also have to submit detailed reports on their spending (otherwise, party of

<sup>11</sup>The sources for the number of party members Žvaliauskas (2007), Smith-Sivertsen (2004) and the data from the Ministry of Justice. The comparison involved 32 data points.



the candidate includes candidate's spending in its report).

Given the two-level structure of political campaign finance, two campaign spending variables are constructed. The first measure captures the amount of spending at the SMD level. It sums the spending by SMD candidates and the spending of parties as estimated by the location of service providers on the basis of parties' spending reports. In order to make the values of this variable comparable across elections and districts, they are divided by the GDP per capita in the election year and electorate size in the district and multiplied by the factor of 10,000.<sup>12</sup> In order to account for the possibility of decreasing marginal returns the natural logarithm of this variable was included in all analyses. The second campaign spending variable measures the spending at the national level (e.g. payments to national newspapers or TV stations). National spending is also divided by the GDP per capita in election year.

The transparency of political finance has been an important political issue in Lithuania despite strict legal regulations. This suggests that these variables may not capture the precise amount of total spending by parties and candidates. However, Lithuania is not an exception in this regard. Scarrow (2007, 206) notes that official accounts are never fully reliable, but they are still "far from worthless". Moreover, as suggested by Cox and Thies (2000, 44), it is fairly safe to conclude that official spending reports closely reflect the patterns of campaign expenditure if theoretically expected associations between expenditure and other variables exist. This is indeed the case in Lithuania, as, for example, campaign expenditure at the SMD level is positively correlated with the wealth and income of the candidate, the spending in the districts of candidates who are placed high on the lists of their parties is higher, stronger competition within the district (measured by the total number of candidates) increases spending, and total spending in the district is associated with higher electoral turnout. Moreover, the cases of reported expenditure being close to the legal limit, which according to Cox and Thies

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<sup>12</sup>Due to rapid economic growth in Lithuania throughout most of the 2000s, advertising prices or labour costs also increased substantially.



(2000, 45) is an indication of lying by candidates, are quite rare.<sup>13</sup> The share of parties' SMD candidates who reported that their spending was above 90% of the legal limit was only 4% in 2004 and 9% in 2008. Among the parties only the Labour Party in 2004 and the Social Democrats and Homeland Union in 2008 spent amounts which were close to the limit.

An important finding in the literature on campaign spending is that incumbent spending is less effective than challenger spending (Jacobson, 1978). In order to account for this possibility, the interaction effect between the campaign spending variable and the dichotomous variable indicating that the incumbent candidate defending his single member district seat is included in the model with established parties' vote share in SMDs.

### 6.3.5 Control variables

A number of other factors should impact on the electoral performance of established and new parties. Some of these factors, such as institutional context or social cleavages and divisions, are held constant. However, all analyses consider the effect of economic performance by using the level of unemployment in the district as a proxy. Under high unemployment new and established opposition parties should gain and established government parties should lose votes. Therefore, in the models explaining the stability of the support of established parties the level of unemployment is interacted with the dichotomous variable indicating membership in government. The government membership variable should also have a negative effect on parties' support independent of economic performance.

Turnout change should increase electoral volatility and new party success (c.f. Bartolini and Mair 1990). Furthermore, candidate quality variables (local councillorship

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<sup>13</sup>There were no spending limits in the election in 2000 while in the other two elections the limit for a political party was 1.5 Litas (0.44 Euro) per registered voter or around 4 million Litas (1.16 million Euros) in total. A SMD candidate could spend up to 2 Litas (0.58 Euros) per registered voter in a district.



Table 6.2: Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analysis

Variable	Min	Mean	Median	Max	SD	N
Change in the vote share of established parties (SMD)	-63.00	-4.32	-2.69	46.85	11.50	994
Change in the vote share of established parties (PR)	-56.36	-3.49	-0.14	27.61	10.38	1699
Vote share of new parties (SMD)	0.39	9.66	6.43	66.81	8.70	503
Vote share of new parties (PR)	0.08	8.63	3.46	55.46	9.95	711
Change in the vote share of all parties (SMD)	-63.00	-2.89	0.00	46.85		1497
Change in the vote share of all parties (PR)	-56.36	-2.46	0.00	27.61	8.85	2410
Delegates	0.00	0.08	0.02	0.84	0.10	3266
District campaign spending	0.00	0.12	0.03	1.52	0.20	2694
National campaign spending	0.00	32.23	12.19	189.05	43.72	3266
Government	0.00	0.17	0.00	0.00		3266
Unemployment	1.52	6.95	6.40	19.74	4.03	3266
Incumbent MP	0.00	0.07	0.00	1.00		1889
Turnout change	-19.71	-1.39	1.46	14.82	8.52	3266
Leader	0.00	0.005	0.00	1.00		1889
Councillor	0.00	0.30	0.00	0.00		1889
No of candidates	3.00	9.72	10.00	15.00	2.20	3266
SMD candidate	0.00	0.572	1.00	1.00		3266
Previous vote (SMD)	0.0076	14.56	10.77	73.30	12.53	1382
Previous vote (PR)	0.005	9.85	4.89	75.67	12.36	2001
No of electoral wards	8.00	28.61	30.00	57.00	13.64	3266

and logged wealth and income of the candidate) and the logged number of candidates running in a district are included as predictors of parties' vote share in SMDs. For the models with parties' electoral support in the PR a dummy variable indicating that the party had a candidate in that district is included in order to account for contamination effects (Herron and Nishikawa, 2001) between the two tiers of electoral system. Finally, as mentioned above, the models of established parties' support include vote shares of the parties in the last parliamentary election.<sup>14</sup> Table 6.2 provides the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analysis.

<sup>14</sup>Data from the Department of Statistics and labour exchange offices were used for measuring the unemployment variable. The data for most of other control variables comes from the website of the Central Electoral Commission.

## 6.4 Analysis and Results

### 6.4.1 Model

As the dependent variables are continuous, the analysis uses OLS models. In order to account for clustering of observations in districts, robust standard errors clustered at the SMD level are used. Party-specific factors are controlled for by including party dummy variables.<sup>15</sup> Also, dummy variables for elections have been included in all models in order to account for any election-specific effects. Table 6.3 presents six model specifications, two for each of the following dependent variables: stability of established parties' electoral support, new party success and the stability of all parties' support.

### 6.4.2 Membership organisation and campaign spending

Before presenting the results of statistical analysis, it is useful to examine the scatterplots between the electoral support of parties and the two key independent variables. Figure 6.2 demonstrates a clear correlation between these variables, which indicates the support to the two hypotheses.

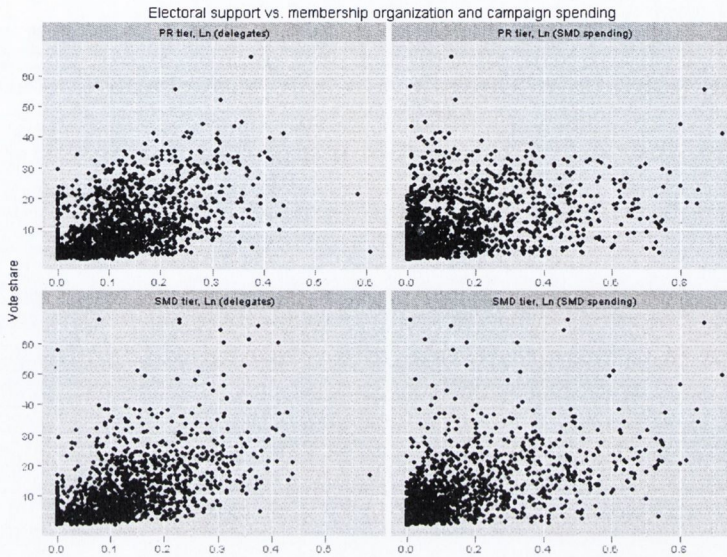
With regard to statistical analysis, all six models in Table 6.3 show that the effect of membership organisation on the dependent variables is positive and statistically significant at the 0.001 level. These findings therefore strongly support Hypothesis 1. The coefficients of the variable measuring spending at the SMD level are positive and statistically significant at the 0.001 level in five out of six models (the variable has no significant effect on new party success in the PR tier). National-level spending has a positive effect on new parties' success, negative effect on the stability of established parties' support in the PR tier and insignificant effects in the other three models.

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<sup>15</sup>Party dummy variables were excluded from the models with new party success as the dependent variable, because their inclusion would lead to perfect colinearity as one of the independent variables is national spending, which is measured at the party level.



Figure 6.2: Scatterplots of electoral support vs party organisation and campaign spending



However, these inconsistent findings are not surprising given the small number of parties in the analysis and thus little variation in this variable. As mentioned above, Tavits (2012) also finds similar results using the party-level finance variable. Hence, overall the results provide quite strong support for Hypothesis 2.

Table 6.4 presents evidence on the substantive significance of these variables. The table shows first differences in the expected values of the dependent variables when the values of the three aforementioned independent variables change from the 10th to the 90th percentile of the observed distribution (which includes both established and new parties) while keeping all other predictor variables constant at their means (for continuous variables) or modes (for categorical variables).<sup>16</sup> Column 3 of the table shows that the effects of membership organisation and district-level campaign spending on the stability of the electoral support of established parties and new party success in the majoritarian tier are of very similar size (5 - 5.5 percent). However, column 4 of the

<sup>16</sup>The 'observed distribution' refers to the values of these variables for all parties which run in the PR tier. The 10th and 90th percentile values are 0 and 0.22 for the membership organisation variable, 0 and 0.34 for the spending at the SMD level and 0.6 and 107 for the national spending variable.

table indicates that in the PR tier the effect of membership organisation (4.1 percent for established parties and 7.9 percent for new parties) is stronger than the impact of district-level spending (2.4 percent for established parties and an insignificant effect for new parties). Unfortunately, it is hard to interpret meaningfully the substantive effect of national-level spending given inconsistent signs of the coefficients of this variable across models.

Overall these findings provide strong support against the main argument tested in this chapter, as they suggest that, in comparison to the spending on mass media campaigns, membership organisation matters at least as much, if not more, for parties' electoral performance and party system stability. The effect of the strength of membership organisation is also roughly similar across the two tiers, thus increasing the generalizability of this effect to different institutional settings. Moreover, this finding indicates that strong party organisation is effective in bringing votes and stabilizing the party system even under the high institutional complexity created by mixed electoral rules. In contrast, high district-level spending is effective in bringing votes in the SMD tier, but much less so in the PR tier. This variation posits an additional challenge to the parties which seek electoral success through the use of expensive mass media campaigns.

### **6.4.3 Robustness of the findings**

The main challenge to the robustness of these findings is the possibility of endogeneity. Although a number of studies (Janda and Colman, 1998; Tavits, 2012; Moon, 2006) have used campaign spending and organisational strength for predicting vote shares without applying statistical techniques to account for endogeneity, parties may strategically build their organisations and spend more in those districts where they expect to perform well.

These endogeneity concerns are attenuated by several factors. First, given that the



Table 6.3: OLS analysis of the stability in parties' electoral support

	Model 1 Established (SMD)	Model 2 Established (PR)	Model 3 New (SMD)	Model 4 New (PR)	Model 5 All (SMD)	Model 6 All (PR)
<b>(Intercept)</b>	11.526*** (3.185)	-1.244 (2.633)	6.151 (5.063)	2.505* (1.016)	4.330 (2.534)	-3.607* (1.421)
Ln (delegates)	24.201*** (3.314)	18.262*** (2.412)	23.637*** (6.846)	35.237*** (4.756)	15.443*** (2.497)	12.198*** (2.022)
National spending	0.042** (0.012)	0.007 (0.010)	0.061*** (0.006)	0.103*** (0.005)	-0.000 (0.006)	0.008 (0.005)
Ln (SMD spending)	16.436*** (1.606)	7.120*** (1.244)	16.462*** (3.507)	2.242 (2.056)	10.580*** (1.457)	4.735*** (0.916)
Incumbent*	0.985				-0.045	
Ln (SMD spending)	(6.339)				(5.302)	
<b>Controls</b>						
Incumbent MP	9.407*** (2.051)				7.058*** (1.754)	
Government	8.784*** (1.618)	6.486*** (0.611)			-5.956*** (0.975)	-5.434*** (0.665)
Unemployment	0.049 (0.093)	-0.035 (0.033)	0.123 (0.094)	0.120 (0.075)	0.016 (0.060)	-0.027 (0.021)
Government* unemployment	0.364* (0.170)	0.423*** (0.128)			-0.260 (0.134)	-0.382*** (0.111)
Turnout change	0.036 (0.076)	0.021 (0.032)	0.152* (0.077)	0.065 (0.054)	-0.006 (0.046)	0.003 (0.021)
Leader	4.249 (2.729)		14.756** (5.556)		2.561 (2.312)	
Councillor	1.372** (0.401)		0.818 (0.616)		1.016** (0.327)	
Ln (no of candidates)	6.369*** (1.327)		2.568 (2.224)		-4.282*** (1.011)	
SMD candidate		1.715*** (0.286)		2.820*** (0.454)		1.186*** (0.254)
Previous vote	-0.770*** (0.050)	-0.732*** (0.092)			-0.673*** (0.043)	-0.656** (0.053)
Adjusted R-squared	0.711	0.858	0.676	0.784	0.648	0.842
N	994	1699	503	711	1497	2410

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

OLS models with robust standard errors clustered at the district level in parentheses. Change in vote share is the dependent variable in Models 1-2 and 5-6 and vote share is the dependent variable in Models 3-4. Election dummy variables included in all models and party dummy variables included in Models 1-2 and 5-6. Most parties presented candidates only in some SMDs, for which reason the number of observations in the models with the electoral support in the majoritarian tier is lower.



whole country is a single multi-member district, every vote counts and parties should have strong incentives to build organisations and spend as much as they can in all SMDs. Second, and related to that, parties have very incomplete information about their expected electoral support and chances of winning a seat in each SMD. The races in SMDs in Lithuania are generally very competitive, as the median difference between the vote shares of candidates placed first and second was 7.1 in 2000, 7.7 in 2004 and 10.3 in 2008. Furthermore, the median effective number of electoral parties in the majoritarian tier was 5.98 in 2000, 4.97 in 2004 and 6.33 in 2008. High levels of electoral volatility and new party success further increase the unpredictability of the outcomes in single member districts. There is also very little evidence suggesting that parties conduct representative surveys at the district level (for example, the reported expenses on survey research in their reports are low). Given this extremely high uncertainty, as well as strong incentives to perform well in each SMD due to the existence of the PR tier, parties should generally have little incentive to make strategic choices about organisational expansion or campaign spending. This should particularly be the case for major parties, which should be competitive in all districts. In order to check this intuition, two alternative analyses (not presented in the chapter) for the parties with (1) at least 5 percent of nationwide vote and (2) at least 10 percent of vote have been conducted. The substantive and statistical significance of the variables measuring the strength of membership organisation and district-level spending was maintained within these subsets.<sup>17</sup>

Additional evidence against the endogeneity of the membership organisation variable is provided by the high stability of the values of this variable across elections. The correlation coefficient between this variable and its lag is 0.77. This level of correlation

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<sup>17</sup>High marginality of SMD contests also addresses an endogeneity concern specific to the campaign spending literature. This literature suggests that incumbents spend more in the presence of strong challengers, hence producing no or even a negative correlation between incumbent vote shares and campaign spending. However, incumbent spending in marginal districts is as effective as challenger spending (Erikson and Palfrey, 2000; Moon, 2006), because in such districts incumbents should spend as much as they can.



is high given the fact that all parties which reached the 5% threshold in the PR tier in at least one of the three elections have experienced splits or mergers or participated in pre-electoral coalitions with other parties. Furthermore, alternative analyses (not reported) using the lagged membership organisation variable show that it is a statistically significant predictor of parties' electoral performance at the 0.05 level of significance for vote shares in the majoritarian tier (only when both established and new parties are included in analysis) and at the 0.001 level of significance for the vote shares in the PR component. Two additional checks were also performed. First, the definition of the established party has been changed to the party which run in at least two previous elections as opposed to one. Second, as already mentioned above, the membership organisation variable was operationalized by the ratio between the number of delegates and its legal maximum. These transformations did not affect statistical and substantive significance of the findings.

#### 6.4.4 Controls

Models 1 and 5 indicate strong positive effects of incumbency, but there is no difference between the effectiveness of campaign spending by incumbents and challengers, as one would expect given high competitiveness of district contests. Membership in government has a strong negative effect on parties' electoral support, especially when unemployment levels are high. Party leaders and local councillors seem to gain some extra electoral support in comparison to other candidates and a greater number of candidates reduces the electoral support of the party in the SMD tier. As expected, a higher number of candidates reduces the electoral support of new parties in SMD races, but the presence of a SMD candidate increases support in the PR tier. Turnout change has little effect on the dependent variables. Finally, the coefficients of the previous vote share variable are negative and relatively close to -1, indicating high instability in the established parties' electoral support.

Table 6.4: Effect of membership organisation and campaign spending

Variable	Parties	SMD vote	PR vote
<b>Membership organisation</b>	Established	<b>5.42</b> (4.03; 6.86)	<b>4.10</b> (2.97; 5.12)
<b>Local campaign spending</b>	Established	<b>5.57</b> (4.51; 6.65)	<b>2.41</b> (1.59; 3.24)
<b>National campaign spending</b>	Established	<b>-4.46</b> (-7.00; -2.00)	<b>-0.77</b> (-3.09; 1.39)
<b>Membership organisation</b>	New	<b>5.28</b> (2.42; 8.23)	<b>7.91</b> (5.69; 9.80)
<b>Local campaign spending</b>	New	<b>5.64</b> (3.24; 7.82)	<b>0.61</b> (-0.47; 1.65)
<b>National campaign spending</b>	New	<b>6.52</b> (5.22; 7.80)	<b>8.94</b> (8.05; 9.90)

The table reports first differences in the expected values of the dependent variables (with 95% confidence intervals) when the values of three independent variables change from the 10th to the 90th percentile of the observed distribution (which includes both established and new parties) while keeping all other predictor variables constant at their means (for continuous variables) or modes (for categorical variables). Models 1-4 were used for getting these estimates.

## 6.5 Conclusion

The main motivation of this study was to test a theoretical argument suggesting that in post-communist democracies membership organisation matters significantly less for parties' electoral support and party system stability than mass media campaigns requiring extensive financial resources. The rigorous analysis of three parliamentary elections in Lithuania challenges this hypothesis. Instead, the evidence presented above suggests that campaign spending does indeed matter a great deal but party membership organisation appears to be an equally important component of electoral success. While it is highly unlikely that new democracies would experience the emergence of parties with mass membership reminiscent of those in many Western democracies in the 1950s or 1960s, even a membership of only a few percent of the electorate may make a big difference. Hence, explaining the variation in the stability of party systems in Central and Eastern Europe necessitates the consideration of organisational factors, which have



thus far been largely ignored in large-n studies on the subject.

The importance of party membership for party system stability in post-communist Europe also calls for more research on explaining the inter- and intra-country variation in the strength of party organisations in the region. This research contributes to this endeavour by proposing an innovative measure of party membership organisation. This measure estimates organisational strength by the number of agents the parties delegate to represent them as members of electoral commissions and election observers. This measure is applicable to other countries in the region, because in almost all of these countries parties play an important role in the selection of the personnel responsible for the conduct of elections. For instance, the electoral law in Romania stipulates that members of the electoral commissions of the polling stations are drawn from representatives of parties running in the constituency. Similarly, in Poland each ward electoral commission has to include 6-10 representatives of political parties.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the study contributes to the extant literature on the effectiveness of incumbent and challenger spending by demonstrating that there are no significant differences between the two under the mixed electoral system in place in Lithuania. This finding supports those accounts in the literature which suggest that spending by incumbents and challengers should be equally effective in marginal districts.

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<sup>18</sup>Electoral laws provided by the project Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe.





# Chapter 7

## Conclusions

This dissertation has examined the causes of party splits and mergers and, to a smaller extent, the implications of party membership organisation on parties' electoral stability. The thesis developed and empirically tested a theoretical argument that party splits and mergers imply a trade-off between political elites' office and policy goals. More specifically, the thesis argued that parties split when political elites expect office gains or when expected office losses are lower than policy gains. Similarly, parties merge when expected office gains are higher than policy losses and when merging parties are able to credibly commit to a merger agreement. These theoretical arguments have been tested using statistical analyses of the new dataset recording splits and mergers of the parties with at least 1 percent of vote, as well as a number of qualitative case studies.

The findings of these studies point to party size as one of the crucial factors of fission and fusion. However, the effect of size is not linear due to the existence of thresholds at which the party can obtain legislative seats and become one of the largest parties in the system. Political elites' office utility increases substantially if their parties reach these thresholds and drops considerably if they fall below them. Under multi-party systems, becoming electorally viable assures legislative representation and makes it possible to participate in government as a junior coalition partner. Becoming one of the largest parties in the system substantially increases the chances of participating in government as a formateur. As a result, political elites are willing to accept ideological costs through party fusion or inter-factional compromises that help avoid a split. This implies that

medium-sized parties are most likely to split provided that both factions can establish small but viable parties. Mergers are most likely if they lead to relatively small or relatively large parties. Furthermore, mergers are also more likely if they provide the fused party with the dominance status.

The findings also demonstrate that older parties are less likely to split or merge. They have well-established party labels and strong partisan supporters, which impede elites' ability to reshuffle party supply. However, conducive sociological and political contexts such as economic recession or fragmented party system that can provide allies, increase the probability of fission because splinter groups have more opportunities to establish their electoral viability.

The statistical analyses suggest very strong support to ideological divisions as an obstacle to fusion, but quite weak support to their importance for inducing fission. However, the case studies on both fusion and fission show that they do matter. Finally, credible commitment problems can prevent mergers, especially if merging parties are of unequal size and they have not previously cooperated in a pre-electoral coalition.

This project improves our understanding of electoral coordination, which has so far mostly focused on voters. In particular, it has long been suggested that voters desert electorally non-viable parties both under majoritarian and restrictive PR systems (Duverger, 1954; Cox, 1997). An emerging literature shows that under the PR system voters also consider potential government formation outcomes, including the choice of government formateur (Kedar, 2012). This research project complements these studies by showing that under proportional electoral institutions elites will also coordinate into parties that are electorally viable and/or have chances to form government.

Furthermore, the findings of this thesis emphasise that existing institutional and sociological explanations of party systems should be complemented by the research on how political elites shape party systems. The institutional approach does not provide clear predictions on the number of parties under proportional electoral institutions and



parliamentary government, suggesting that it would be determined by existing sociological divisions in the society. However, not all sociological cleavages are translated into political bases of competition (Sartori, 1969) and political elites can play a crucial role in politicising some cleavages over others through splits and mergers. This project implies that if political elites can use splits and mergers for constructing the space of competition, they would do it in such a way to ensure that the social bases of their parties are sufficiently substantial to sustain either large parties that could form government or small but viable parties that could participate in government as junior partners. This implication is particularly important in the context of new democracies and could explain the level of party system fragmentation, but also increasingly so in established democracies where the decline of traditional cleavages should open more opportunities for political entrepreneurs to reshape party systems.

This research also allows for predictions of when electoral changes will lead to large-scale elite re-coordination in established party systems. This should happen when the electoral support for one of the largest parties in the system drops to the extent that its chances to become a government formateur decreases significantly. This decline could induce the elites in the party to seek for alliances with other parties. For example, Catholic and Protestant parties in the Netherlands reconstructed the party system and political bases of competition through merger in the 1970s. However, elites in the declining party may also split it into small but viable parties, as the case of the Christian Democracy party in Italy in the early 1990s demonstrates.

Furthermore, these findings also help to explain the variation in party system instability in Central and Eastern Europe. In particular, party systems achieved more stability and institutionalisation in countries where some parties (usually one on the centre-right and the other one on the centre-left) increased their electoral strength, either due to historical factors or better organisational efforts, to the extent that they could monopolise the role of potential government formateurs. This was the case in



the Czech Republic, where the Social Democrats and Civic Democrats have been two largest parties since the late 1990s, or Hungary, where Socialists and Fidesz were dominant from the late 1990s until the late 2000s. These parties then remained relatively stable, which allowed for stable partisanship bonds between voters and parties to form and party systems to stabilise. In contrast, in countries where potential government formateur parties were not clear (for example, Latvia) or such parties experienced a significant electoral decline (for example, centre-right in Lithuania in 2000 and Poland in 2001 and centre-left in Hungary in 2010 and Poland in 2005), party instability resulting in splits and mergers has been high, thus significantly increasing party system instability. The literature has already suggested that the emergence of one large party on each side of the main dimension of competition stabilises new party systems (Sitter and Bakke, 2005), but this research project provides the theory explaining when such parties will emerge and tests it systematically.

This implication is also closely related to the findings of Chapter 6, which demonstrated that the effect of party membership organisation on parties' electoral support is at least as strong as that of campaign spending. This suggests that party organisation plays a crucial role in party system stabilisation. By fostering stable partisanship bonds between voters and parties, membership organisations assure the loyalty of both voters and elites to existing party organisations. For instance, in the case of the Czech Republic strong membership organisation allowed the Civic Democrats to stabilise their electoral support (Hanley, 2008), which also assured the party's relative organisational stability. This emphasises the importance of studying the reasons why political elites in Central and Eastern Europe (and other new democracies) for the most part did not tend to build strong party organisations. Tavits (2011) suggests that party elites may avoid building strong local organisations, because the latter empower MPs to disobey the party line in parliamentary voting. Further research should explore other potential explanations.



Two other directions for future research on elite coordination can be mentioned. First, it is important to design theories that would consider several forms of coordination together. Different types of coordination do not occur in isolation from each other. This idea is most prominent in the research on legislative party switching, as some authors suggest that it should occur in cascades whereby early cases of switching provoke more switching later (Aldrich and Bianco, 1992; Laver and Benoit, 2003; Heller and Mershon, 2005). This research project suggests that this may be applicable to all forms of elite volatility. For example, it has shown that the ability of the smaller party to split off from the merged party is an important indirect factor of party fusion. Furthermore, parties that previously cooperated in pre-electoral coalitions are more likely to merge. The existence of potential allies for electoral alliances or mergers also affects the probability of some splits. Future research could examine the relationship between these and other coordination forms (e.g. legislative party switching) more closely in order to obtain a better understanding of elite coordination.

Second, it is also important to examine how elite coordination affects voter behaviour. This research project assumed that splits and mergers would increase party system instability in the short term and that splits would increase while mergers would decrease party system fragmentation. These assumptions, however, are testable empirically. In theory it is possible for splits and mergers to have no effect on party system stability, which would be the case if after a split all supporters of the party vote for one of its successor parties and all supporters of merging parties transfer their allegiances to the merged party. Furthermore, counter-intuitively, splits could also decrease party system fragmentation, especially if all supporters of the party desert splinter parties and instead support another existing party. In the same vein mergers could increase party system size if some supporters of merging parties defect to third parties. These possibilities demand for a systematic examination of the effects of elite behaviour on party systems.





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