IN DEFENCE OF SARTORI

Party System Change, Voter Preference Distributions and Other Competitive Incentives

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ABSTRACT

In a recent re-evaluation of developments in European party systems, Paul Pennings has criticized Sartori for inaccurately predicting trends in party competition in his original typology, particularly as evidenced by indicators such as ideological polarization, electoral volatility and systemic stability. In this article I argue that many of these criticisms are unfounded as, firstly, they misinterpret Sartori's assumptions and predictions; and secondly, they employ invalid indicators to measure such party system traits. Furthermore, whilst the polarized pluralist type in particular needs clarification in many respects, focusing on voter preference distributions reveals that the fundamental arguments about the direction of competition are correct. I conclude that if a better understanding of contemporary party systems is to be reached, greater attention needs to be given to electoral demand and its interaction with party supply whilst retaining the principal features of Sartori's model.

KEY WORDS ▪ party competition ▪ party systems ▪ volatility ▪ voting

Recent work on party systems, building principally on the Sartori and Lijphart models, has attempted to provide evaluations of these respective approaches, critique their perceived failings and offer more satisfactory reconceptualizations either to correct theoretical flaws or to update perspectives which are less appropriate to contemporary system developments (von Beyme, 1985; Ware, 1996; Mair, 1997; Pennings, 1998; Donovan and Broughton, 1999). The work by Pennings epitomizes such developments, providing a comparison of three existing typologies – Sartori, von Beyme and Lijphart – and is the most comprehensive in testing their assertions using a number of empirical indicators. He finds that, considering such indicators as volatility, polarization, convergence and duration of government, the

Lijphart typology generally outperforms that of Sartori, correctly predicting as it does changes in party system format over a period from the 1950s to the 1980s, and that many of the latter's predictions and assumptions are flawed. His resolution is to combine the better aspects of both typologies into a single framework.

In this article, I concentrate principally on his arguments concerning polarization and volatility and argue that some of the theoretical and methodological steps employed towards reaching this conclusion are themselves flawed, and many of the problems presented as characteristic of the Sartori typology are fallacious and thus do not allow the conclusions that are eventually drawn. Instead, I argue, the problems with Pennings' arguments themselves illustrate that greater attention needs to be devoted to the concept of 'direction of competition', and in particular how this interacts with voter-preference distributions, if one is to use the Sartori typology successfully to look at contemporary party system dynamics and change.

Sartori v. Pennings: Theory and Empirical Testing

For the sake of clarity, let me first briefly state the principal relevant elements of Sartori and Pennings' arguments, before moving on to look at the problems inherent in the latter's critique of the former.[1] Although his text considers party systems under all regime types, from the totalitarian one-party state to the diametrically opposed atomized multipartism, Sartori's model's main theoretical advance over previous party system models lies in its separation between two types of multiparty system in democratic regimes, namely the moderate and polarized pluralist party system types. Unconvinced by Duverger's simple dichotomy between two-party and multiparty systems (1954), and influenced by Almond's separation of homogenized and fragmented political cultures, though unhappy with the latter's further differentiation between 'functional' and 'malfunctional' multipartism (1970), he introduces not only the number of parties within a system, but also the distance between poles of parties in the system, and the interaction between such poles, whether centrifugal or centripetal (Sartori, 1982: 291–2).

Sartori's initial classification employs the method of counting relevant parties which prove themselves non-superfluous over time through their exhibiting either coalition or blackmail potential – that is, the ability to influence electoral competition either by their inclusion in a viable governing coalition or by their ability to threaten another party or parties with electoral losses if this / these former do(es) not follow the latter's ideological direction (Sartori, 1976: 122–3). Within competitive systems, such counting then distinguishes between low fragmentation two-party systems; medium fragmentation-limited pluralist systems with between three and five parties; and highly fragmented extreme pluralist systems with five parties or more.[2] In addition to these, a final competitive system is noted, namely the

predominant party system, where a single party is consistently supported by a winning majority of voters (and hence has an absolute majority of seats), and thus is able to monopolize power (1976: 196). The predominant system is awkward in that it is a type which does not find an equivalent class in the manner of the other three competitive systems. This is a complex argument, and, being important in the context of this article, I shall return to it in the following section.

Having defined the three main competitive classes according to the number of relevant parties in the system, Sartori then goes on to define the corresponding typology, noting the properties and mechanics of the systems (1976: 129). The crucial distinction as regards the competitive mechanics of the system – as noted, perhaps the principal conceptual improvement over other party system typologies – distinguishes between systems with centripetal dynamics and systems with centrifugal dynamics. In essence, the two-party and moderate multiparty types betray predominantly centripetal patterns, and the polarized pluralist type manifests the centrifugal equivalent. As a result, the former types tend to display low ideological distance, bipolar mechanics and a convergence towards the centre of the ideological spectrum, the major distinguishing trait being the presence of either single-party or coalition governments (1976: 178–9).

Conversely, the latter displays high ideological distance, with extremist anti-system parties forming bilateral oppositions to the governing parties which occupy the centre space in an effort to retain an electoral majority (1976: 132–40). Competitively, the two-party and moderate pluralist systems normally see the centre as the principal competitive space, with greater incentive to win centre-located hinge voters, whereas the polarized pluralist system sees competition lying to the left and right of the governing centre, the incentive being for the coalition to prevent defection to the anti-system parties, and the moderate voters being highly stable at the ideologically 'safe' centre (1976: 349–50).

The starting-point for Pennings' critique is his contention that the study of party systems in a contemporary context needs to adopt a multifaceted approach to cope successfully with the three focal points of this paradigm, namely vote-, office- and policy-related functions (1998: 80). Selecting the typologies of Lijphart, von Beyme and Sartori, he then proceeds to operationalize their principal hypotheses, and test these using empirical data, consequently allowing the isolation of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each typology.[3] The key element which he extracts from Sartori as a foundation to the empirical testing is a unidimensional typology built around the covariation of the number of parties and ideological distance 'in which the predominant type is the opposite of the polarised type' (1998: 81).

With this continuum providing four types – predominant; two-party; moderate multiparty; polarized plural – Pennings then turns to the empirical testing, employing a number of indicators to test the validity of the

typologies in mapping party system change (1998: 85). In particular, he concentrates on volatility, duration and colour of governments, and policy variables such as convergence and polarization in four discrete time-periods: 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

The volatility measure used is total or aggregate electoral volatility as defined by Bartolini and Mair (1990: 312):

$$\text{Aggregate Electoral Volatility} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \frac{(P_{it} - P_{i(t+1)})}{2}$$

where n is the number of parties in the system and Pi is the electoral support for party i at times t and $t+1$. The main hypothesis Pennings attributes to Sartori is that '[i]n the case of total volatility (TOTVOL [the variable label]), Sartori's typology would presumably predict a relatively high volatility in the more polarised systems, as these systems are inherently unstable' (1998: 85). Looking at total volatility across the four time periods, however, Pennings finds that predominant systems have become more volatile, polarized systems have become less so, and two-party and moderate multiparty systems have remained roughly constant. 'In sum, Sartori's predictions were not confirmed for the 1970s and 1980s' (1998: 85).

He then moves to looking at the relative electoral strengths of left, centre and right parties, and subsequently ideological convergence as measured using party manifesto data (1998: 86). The former area is only touched upon briefly and, in my view, uncontentiously in the analysis, and I would not see it as relevant to the argument in question. The latter area, conversely, is methodologically complex, involving factor analysis of manifesto codings and based upon four variables, namely the range of the party system, the degree of centre space occupation, the magnitude of the space occupied by left parties, and the magnitude of the space occupied by right parties (1998: 86). The methodological assumptions and problems of manifesto data analysis are legion, and I simply do not have the space to consider these here. I would simply note that Pennings links convergence and polarization as concepts manifesting similar evolutions which are apparently contrary to Sartori's predictions, and hence many of the arguments concerning convergence can be addressed via the relatively simple operationalization of polarization.

As regards convergence, the principal criticism had been that the predominant party system resembles the polarized system in its level of convergence, and as the two polar types, this similarity is unsustainable (1998: 86–7). A similar argument is used in the case of polarization. The formula used to calculate polarization is the following:

$$\text{Left–Right polarization} = \sum_{i=1}^{N} fi(x_i - \bar{x})^2,$$

where N is the number of parties in a system, fi is the percentage of the vote won by each party, x_i is the left–right score assigned to each party, and $\bar{x}$ is

the system mean of left–right scores (Sigelman and Yough, 1978). Using this formula, the polarized systems have the lowest level of polarization across time, the predominant systems generally have the highest level of polarization, and both the two-party systems and the moderate multiparty systems have seen polarization increase since the 1960s. For Pennings, this both refutes Sartori's notion that fragmented systems are more polarized than homogeneous ones, and also the mechanical hypothesis that two-party systems and moderate multiparty systems manifest centripetal competitive tendencies, moving the parties/blocs closer to the centre.

Finally, Pennings moves to testing Sartori's model against empirical data concerning longevity and reasons for termination of governments, and finds the predictions satisfactory (1998: 87–8). Again, I would regard the analysis here as essentially uncontentious and not directly relevant to my own arguments regarding party system change and competitive effects. It is to these which I shall now turn in considering Pennings' analysis.

Classes and Types: The Awkwardness of Predominance

The first problem in Pennings' analysis is his use of the predominant party system as one end of a continuum upon which it is diametrically opposed to polarized pluralism. Such a continuum might seem reasonable bearing in mind that Sartori states quite clearly that the predominant party system is a type. However, the crucial corollary to note is that it is not a *class* (1976: 199).[4] Simply counting the number of relevant parties as the criterion for the party system classification is not sufficient to identify a predominant party system – in this case the focus is on the predominant party with more than 50 percent of seats in the long term, and then upon the other relevant parties in the system. One needs to engage in this case in 'intelligent' counting (1976: 124). In other words, the crucial criterion for identifying the predominant party system is not so much the number of parties, but the dispersion of power amongst them. Using the dispersion of power amongst parties as a property of the different party systems defined by intelligent counting, one can indeed construct a continuum of the kind Pennings uses which, taking into account the competitive systems, stretches from the predominant type to the polarized pluralist type.[5] On this basis, then, to include the predominant party type would be correct.

However, one *cannot* construct such a continuum when considering ideological distance as a property of the different types of system. Indeed, in the simplified model where fragmentation and ideological distance are portrayed as orthogonal axes (1976: 292), the predominant type is notable by its absence – precisely because ideological distance is not a property which can be linked to the level of fragmentation within the predominant system. Although the methodological notions of types and classes are rigorous and perhaps not always intuitive, Sartori cannot be accused of obscuring this

argument. In relation to the predominant party system type, he states, 'I have made quite clear all along that the *class* corresponds to the *type* only under the condition that the number of parties (fragmentation) varies in accord with a left–right spread of opinion (ideological distance); [. . .]' (1976: 287)

He continues, '[A] strongly predominant party results from low competitiveness; and if the competitiveness is low, it follows that the variable "ideological distance" does not carry much weight in the electoral arena' (1976: 293). Thus, to include the predominant party system as one end of a continuum mapping covariation of ideological distance and the number of parties is simply contrary to Sartori's model. Consequently, this inclusion of the predominant party system type is misleading, in that there is no hypothetical pattern to be tested, particularly in the case of the polarization variable. Similarly, it adds to the confusion when looking at the question of volatility. With this methodological proviso in mind, let me move now to these two variable properties of the different party system types identified by Pennings.

Volatility as Party System Trait?

Trends in volatility seem an odd choice by which to judge Sartori's typology. Undoubtedly, the notion of volatility is implicit in the key variable of competition, but nowhere does Sartori make any prediction as to the extent or level of volatility:[6] competitive space exists in the different party-system formats, and thus parties will compete for voters situated in these spaces. As I shall consider later, it is certainly true that he predicts a flow of voters from the centre to the extremes in the polarized pluralist systems, but this is not a prediction of low volatility amongst the other system types, nor indeed of high volatility in all polarized pluralist systems. Conversely, a predominant party system and its low competitiveness imply low volatility, but this does not mean that other systems will have higher volatility. Indeed, at the extreme, no system can be typified as manifesting high volatility because this is precisely a necessary (though not sufficient) condition of a change in party system type.[7] Overall, the effect of this competition, i.e. the relative success of each party winning over a proportion of its competitors' electorate, is not touched upon by Sartori.

The main problems with Pennings' analysis concern the two continuum extremes, namely the predominant and polarized pluralist systems. Looking at the predominant systems, the level of total volatility roughly doubles between the 1960s and 1970s, and then decreases slightly in the 1980s (1998: 85, figure). The first point to note is the disparity hidden within: looking at the volatility figures presented by Bartolini and Mair, two very different trends exist for the two countries included under the predominant label, namely Norway and Sweden.[8]

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As Table 1 demonstrates, Sweden's changes in volatility are less exacerbated than Norway's. Norway's level almost triples between the last election of the 1960s and the first election of the 1970s. Of far more importance, then, would be to explain the disparity in volatility change, *if* this were indeed linked to Sartori's typology-linked predictions – and therein lies an initial example of the confusion of including the predominant party system type.

Sartori in fact predicts quite the opposite from what Pennings suggests: 'Competition is so real that Norway, Sweden, and Ireland may well be at the end of their performance as predominant systems' (1976: 200). Indeed, he finally allocates Ireland to the moderate pluralist type. His prescription for the remaining two countries earlier on is more revealing still:

> This [social welfare predominance] is seemingly reaching its point of exhaustion. If so, the predicament facing Norway and Sweden is either to pursue the predominant formula on centrifugal grounds (i.e., leaning more and more on the extreme left) at the cost of re-entering a path of polarization, or to revert to a bipolar system of alternative coalitions which would help reinstate centripetal competition.
>
> (1976: 177)

In other words, Sartori anticipates the very real possibility that due to a shifting social and political context the two predominant systems will soon switch to a 'normal' type, with discernible ideological distance and fragmentation properties, and which corresponds to their *class*, which by definition can never have been predominant and indeed may well remain constant, there having been no necessary change in fragmentation. Thus the criticism that the predominant system acts differently to expectations during the 1970s and 1980s would be a non-starter, even if volatility were a party system property, precisely because the systems were no longer predominant.[9]

Turning to the polarized systems, the assertions about volatility fit badly with Sartori's own model, although as I shall note, Sartori perhaps does himself no favours by being too influenced by certain historical examples of polarized pluralism in predicting the likely effects of this system. Let us recall Pennings' principal hypothesis: Sartori's typology would presumably predict a relatively high volatility in the more polarized systems, as these systems

Table 1. Total volatility in Norway and Sweden

	1961	1965	1969	1973	1977	1981	1985	
Norway	3.6	6.8	5.4	15.9	14.7	11.2	4.9	

	1960	1964	1968	1970	1973	1976	1979	1982	1985
Sweden	3.7	2.6	5.7	7.2	8.5	3.0	6.5	7.9	8.4

Source: Bartolini and Mair, 1990: Appendix 2.

are inherently unstable. This risks being a non sequitur which partially mis-interprets Sartori's definition of polarized systems being unstable. My basic assertion is that, in terms of a long-term trend, there is no reason *a priori* that polarized systems should have higher volatility than any of the other competitive system types. On these grounds, defending Sartori directly is less easy: 'The characteristic trend of the system is the enfeeblement of the center, a persistent loss of vote*s* to one of the extreme ends (or even to both). Perhaps the center-fleeing hemorrhage can be stopped; still the centrifugal strains appear to counteract successfully any decisive reversal of this trend' (1976: 136). Furthermore, looking at the three polarized systems – Fourth Republic France, Italy and Finland – there is no evidence of consistently high volatility, which seems to fit in with Pennings' line of argumentation (Table 2).

However, using the concept of core parties within party systems – 'influential' parties in a system, with governing potential, and hence for polarized pluralism regular influential coalition partners (Smith, 1989: 161)[10] – there *is* evidence for the weakening of the Centre. In France, the decline is rapid and disastrous – two stable elections, followed by the 1951 earthquake, and subsequent shifts of 1956 in the Extreme Right from the Gaullists to the Poujadists. Two years later, the collapse of the regime through a governing Centre unable to provide a strong lead in the Algerian crisis occurs.[11]

Italy settles into a pattern of stable volatility which sees a gradual loss of votes from the Centre, and in particular from Christian Democracy initially

Table 2. Total volatility and core party share of vote in polarized pluralist systems

	1945–8	1951	1954	1958	1962	1966	1970	1972	1975	1979	1983
Finland	6.3	3.8	3.1	6.3	5.6	8.4	14.6	4.1	7.2	5.8	10.3
Core share	1945: 59.5 1948: 62.1	63.0	65.2	58.9	55.2	60.9	52.1	52.8	51.8	49.5	49.2

	1945–6	1946	1951	1956
France IV	5.4	6.0	20.0	20.2
Core share	60.9	54.8	36.2	41.5

	1945–8	1953	1958	1963	1968	1972	1976	1979	1983
Italy	23.0	14.1	5.2	8.5	7.8	5.3	9.1	5.3	8.3
Core share	48.5	40.1	42.3	38.3	39.1	38.7	38.7	38.3	32.9

Core   Finland   Agrarian Centre; Swedish People's Party; Social Democrats; Liberals
       France   Socialists; Radicals + allies; Christian Democrats
       Italy   Christian Democracy

Source: Bartolini and Mair, 1990: Appendix 2; Stevens, 1992: 25; Hine, 1993: 71–6, 345–6; Arter, 1999: 63, 113, 236.

towards the Communists and subsequently to parties caused by the post-'68 fragmentation (Hine, 1993: 77). Liberals and Socialists separately enter into alternate coalitions with the Christian Democrats until 1981 when the governing vote share is reinforced by involving both smaller satellite parties in the *pentapartito* (1993: 346). Lastly, Finland experiences two large electoral losses for the core in 1958 and 1970, when it loses 6.3 percent and 8.8 percent of the vote and follows the Italian style of centre reinforcement, bringing five parties into the coalition for the first time since 1945.

Thus, whilst a trend may not be visible in aggregate volatility figures, the weakening of the Centre may well occur, but in bursts within, rather than a steady flow across, the decades. Moreover, in the Italian and Finnish cases, the centrifugal 'oil-slick' effect of Centre-reinforcement is clearly visible, as the core parties bring in additional coalition partners to shore up their electoral score. In the case of Weimar Germany or of Chile, the changes are more continuous, and indeed one might assume that systems where volatility is so high may well be more prone to collapse, as France demonstrated so abruptly.[12] But 'centre weakening' does not entail 'high volatility', nor, as I shall demonstrate later, does either entail 'system collapse'. A steady flow would not manifest itself as steadily increasing volatility over time.

Furthermore, one can quite satisfactorily turn the 'polarization = high volatility' on its head. Employing Bartolini and Mair's separation of volatility into inter-block and intra-block volatility, *ceteris paribus* one would in fact expect inter-block volatility to be *lower* in the polarized pluralism system than in two-party or moderate pluralist systems, due to the Centre being excluded from competition. In his reaction to Sartori's model, Ware more generally reminds us: 'The key to understanding it is that for Sartori the crucial feature of any party system is not *how competitive* a party system is but the *direction* of party competition' (Ware, 1996: 170).[13] The competitiveness is irrelevant to party system type or class, being simply one of a number of intervening variables between the direction of competition and the evolution of the system. However, at the disaggregated level, inter-block volatility should be lower in the polarized system, due to the 'safe' central electorate.

Looking at Bartolini and Mair's figures of volatility for Fifth Republic France between 1967 and 1981 – a system moving towards the moderate pluralist type across time – block volatility rises beyond that of the Fourth Republic in absolute terms, and in terms of percentage of total volatility is almost consistently higher than for the Fourth Republic (Table 3).[14]

The only possible competing explanation would be for there to be a large number of long-distance exchanges – voters 'leap-frogging' in Downsian terms – between the more extreme pools of competition, a process counter-intuitive to the single dimension used by Sartori.[15] Moreover, the notion of stretching ideological space typical of a polarized pluralist system would work against this: as space increases, so the likelihood of long ideological jumps must be reduced, *ceteris paribus*.

Table 3. Total and block volatility in the French Fourth and Fifth Republics

	IV Republic			
	1945–6	*1946*	*1951*	*1956*
Total	5.4	6.0	20.0	20.2
Block	2.5	0.7	5.0	0.3
Block (%)	46.3	11.7	25.0	1.5

	V Republic						
	1958	*1962*	*1967*	*1968*	*1973*	*1978*	*1981*
Total	26.7	19.2	4.0	11.4	10.9	6.7	13.5
Block	5.2	0.5	0.8	2.3	4.5	3.8	6.3
Block (%)	19.5	2.6	20.0	20.2	41.3	56.7	46.6

Source: Bartolini and Mair, 1990: Appendix 2.

An instructive example in this respect is the French Third Republic. Volatility is much higher here over a long period of time – one of the methodological problems with its post-war successor being its relatively short lifespan – and indeed block volatility fluctuates quite widely (see Table 4). In 1936, low overall volatility contrasts with a very high proportion of block volatility. Looking at the disaggregated figures, the Communist Party seems to have benefited from a high proportion of defectors from the Centre-Right (governing) parties – apparently a case of a very large ideological leap.

Table 4. Total and bloc volatility in French Third Republic;
shifts in individual party scores (1932–6)

	1902–6	*1910*	*1914*	*1919*	*1924*	*1928*	*1932*	*1936*
Total	31.1	30.5	14.3	12.9	18.7	15.7	12.0	9.2
Block (%)	6.1	17.0	2.8	55.8	32.6	26.8	4.1	66.3

	1936
Communists	+7.0
Socialists/Socialist Party	−0.6
Radical Socialist Party	−4.8
Socialist Republicans	+2.2
Conservatives	
Liberal Popular Action	
Left Republicans	
Independent Radicals	−3.1
Republican Union	
Popular Democratic party	
Others	−0.7

Source: Bartolini and Mair, 1990: Appendix 2.

Yet in the context of 1936 France, such leap-frogging seems ludicrous: with battle lines being drawn ideologically between the bourgeois governing parties, the radical Left wing of the Popular Front and the fascist and Extreme Right authoritarian leagues (non-partisan and thus unrepresented here), the idea of a move from Centre-Right to Extreme Left seems unsustainable. More sustainable is a move from the Radical Socialists and Socialists to the Communists, subsequent to Stalin's ordering the French Communist Party to pursue Left unity, and lower levels of change from the increasingly impotent governing Centre towards the moderate alternative presented by the Socialist Left, which was less enchanted than Stalin by Left unity with its extreme neighbour. In competitive terms, there are two areas of competition involved: between Extreme Left and Moderate Left; and between Moderate Left and the Centre(-Right) – the latter at least partially explaining the leap in block volatility in 1936 evident in Table 4.

As Bartolini and Mair state of the three polarized systems,

> Thus, whilst in all three countries [France, Finland and Italy] the competitive drives are predicted to be centrifugal, in practice they are only *sufficiently pronounced* to effect an enfeeblement of the centre – and thus threaten the collapse of the system – when the preconditions of large-scale electoral availability exist in the first place [my italics].
>
> (1990: 299–300)

But, as the French Third Republic shows, even disaggregating volatility into inter-block and intra-block risks hiding important trends which would support the centrifugal hypothesis – and it is precisely those individual trends which also need to be taken into account to isolate the 'preconditions of large-scale electoral availability'.

Predicting Volatility: Policy Distance, Voter Distributions and Availability

Pennings' finding that polarized systems do not display high volatility in the 1970s and 1980s is thus no surprise. On what basis, then, *can* we predict whether there will be high volatility, or at least a large number of voters within the area(s) of competition? Mair notes that the three systems with the highest volatility for the period 1945–65 were France, West Germany and Italy, which – allowing for France's regime change – include two moderate pluralist and two polarized pluralist systems (1997: 166–7). Ersson and Lane's analysis of macro-level and micro-level changes concludes that volatility is up in all systems in the 1980s (1998: 33). Donovan and Broughton concur, and note that this is still occurring within definable systemic bounds: 'Neither electoral defreezing nor party system deconsolidation seem to equate to party system (let alone political system) degeneration' (1999: 262–3). Apparently, then, party system type is not playing a role, whichever typology one is using.

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These authors' findings are absolutely no surprise either: to return to Bartolini and Mair, policy space alone cannot be used to predict the level of volatility. In addition, one must know the state of affairs as regards institutional incentives for vote-change and socio-organizational bonds and the primacy of each, or conversely the balance between the two. Thus, polarized pluralism – or indeed any competitive party system format – simply cannot be seen as a system which tends to high volatility without considering at least the institutional incentives and levels of socio-organizational bonds (Bartolini and Mair, 1990: 292–7). But, beyond this, volatility in the presence of high policy distance – a characteristic of polarized systems – is consistently lower than that for medium distance systems, and only slightly higher than for low policy distance systems, when institutional incentives and socio-organizational bonds are in a state of balance (1990: 297, table).

But Sartori has noted this, and in two separate arguments emphasizes both the electoral demand and party supply sides. As regards policy distance and its effect on vote transfers, he clearly states, 'Each voter moves, or is willing to move, along the spectrum, only up to a point of no-transfer' (1976: 343). In other words, the crucial element which needs to be included in any prediction of volatility is individual voter preferences, and their distribution relative to party supply. In the traditional Downsian model, convergence is the hypothesized norm for a two-party system, and indeed *ceteris paribus* this is what Sartori predicts for two-party and moderate multiparty systems. But there are four conditions which are needed to fulfil the notion of other things being equal in the two-party case, and by extension the moderate pluralist system: (i) undecided voters must be centrally located, i.e. moderates; (ii) the party system must not be a predominant system; (iii) the two parties [or coalitions] must be competing in the same ideological space; and (iv) one party [or coalition] must be able to win a plurality (1976: 346).

For my purposes, the first two provisos are the most important. The principal area of competition in converging two-party and moderate multiparty systems being centrally located, the distribution of voter preferences must by definition place the bulk of those open to change or available in the centre. If the distribution of voter preferences is skewed, then either a predominant system will result (if two-party) or the other party must converge on this non-central position, in keeping with the rational model. If the distribution is bimodal or polymodal, then convergence is unnecessary and indeed the opposite of what one would predict. Parties instead would remain separated, located under their preference peaks and amending their position so as to try to win the plurality. And as Sartori himself notes about this possibility in two-party systems,

> In short, [Downsian] two partism 'works' when the spread of opinion is small and its distribution single-peaked [. . .] Hence whenever a two-party format does not perform as required by the Downs model, we

> should expect the parties to become more than two and another type of
> party system.[16]

<div align="right">(1976: 191–2)</div>

Sartori's second emphasis is on proactive elite responses to such distributions. Essentially, party systems display trends and dynamics, but it is for elites to decide on how best to exploit these. In addressing this, he draws a distinction between polarization as a static concept, implying distance between two or more poles, and as a dynamic concept, implying a widening distance between two or more poles (Sartori, 1982: 304). In response to those who have criticized his concept of polarization as predicting the downfall of the Italian system, he notes that no such prediction is possible on the basis of the model, because the centrifugal dynamics – and indeed the centripetal dynamics inherent in moderate pluralism – are not interminable (1982: 308). Such dynamics only persist whilst party actors perceive gains to be received from such an electoral strategy. At a certain point, the competitive dynamics within a system reach a Downsian point of equilibrium, at which point polarization is maintained but without any increase in ideological distance (1982: 309).

Hence anti-system parties will only engage in the type of extremist outbidding which engenders centrifugal tendencies whilst it is perceived as politically beneficial. In all cases of polarized pluralism, political advantage has been perceived in engaging in centrifugal competition. Similarly, following Downsian logic, centripetal competition does not lead to the collision of parties in the centre due to the competitive disadvantage of resembling one's opponent too closely. Furthermore, political advantage may not always be electoral. For instance, the Italian Communists felt it politically advantageous to *reduce* the ideological space between themselves and the governing Centre in the late 1970s – a potential compromise and access to the 'control room' was worth losing an extreme tranche of their 30 percent of the electorate (Sartori, 1982: 307). In this case the *trend* is negated, and indeed reversed, through elite action – but this in no way negates the typology.

Indeed, it is an absolute necessity that such a typology can see trends reversed, otherwise there is no possibility of shift between different types. A Communist Party converging on the Centre through the elite's desire to participate may, if carried through to its logical extreme, result in ideological convergence, a reduction in fragmentation through greater competitive possibilities in Left/Right bloc terms, rather than in Centre-occupation, and thus the appearance of a moderate pluralist system. Similarly, Centre convergence over time can lead to the entry of new actors to represent preference distributions distant from the space of political competition. Two-party systems can consequently see the emergence of new relevant actors, and hence a shift to the moderate plural type.

The implications of and conditions for such shifts are beyond the scope of this piece, but one important point needs to be made: in the case of the

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two two-party systems – Austria and the U.K. – there has indeed been over time an increase in the number of relevant parties. Similarly, in the moderate pluralist systems, there has also been a proliferation of relevant parties, for example in France and in Germany.[17] Whether this has engendered a move towards polarized pluralism is doubtful, particularly in the case of Germany.[18] Sartori covers himself for the future on the point of increased numbers engendering a shift from moderate to polarized pluralism, stating that it is certainly not inconceivable that the numbers rule should be reformulated at a later date, according to the number of exceptions (1976: 287–90). Perhaps the numerical criterion, particularly in classifying limited and extreme pluralist systems, has lost some of its importance and thus is in urgent need of revisiting.

Overall, however, the area of competition exists in the Sartori typology come what may; but of equal importance in the electoral outcome is the competitiveness of the system – which will rely precisely upon the institutional incentives for volatility, the socio-organizational bonds, and finally as additionally defined by the distribution of voter preferences and party strategies to exploit these. None of these is directly determined by party system type.

Party System Polarization: Right Theory, Wrong Measurement

Let us recall Pennings' premise: predominant systems are the most polarized; polarized systems the least so; two-party and moderate multiparty systems have become increasingly polarized since the 1960s, and, taken together, these facts point to a refutation of Sartori's theories concerning fragmentation and policy distance. Before moving onto the methodological problems with system polarization, it again needs to be reiterated that the predominant party system can only be described as a polar opposite to the polarized system in terms of its power-dispersion type, but in terms of ideological distance – the trait implied by polarization and convergence – this type is not relevant, and predominance cannot be included in the typology based on fragmentation and ideological distance covarying.

Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly true that for the polarized system to exhibit lower levels of polarization across time would be worrying for the Sartori typology. The first methodological criticism that may be levelled at the results concerning polarization is that the Sigelman and Yough formula that is used is not a satisfactory indicator. Taking two systems in equilibrium – one two-party, the other polarized pluralism, both plotted on a 100-point abscissa as shown in Figure 1 – the formula yields a score of 400 for the two-party system, 345 for the polarized pluralist system.[19]

Considering these for the moment as static situations, it is not clear whether the characterization of the former as more polarized than the latter
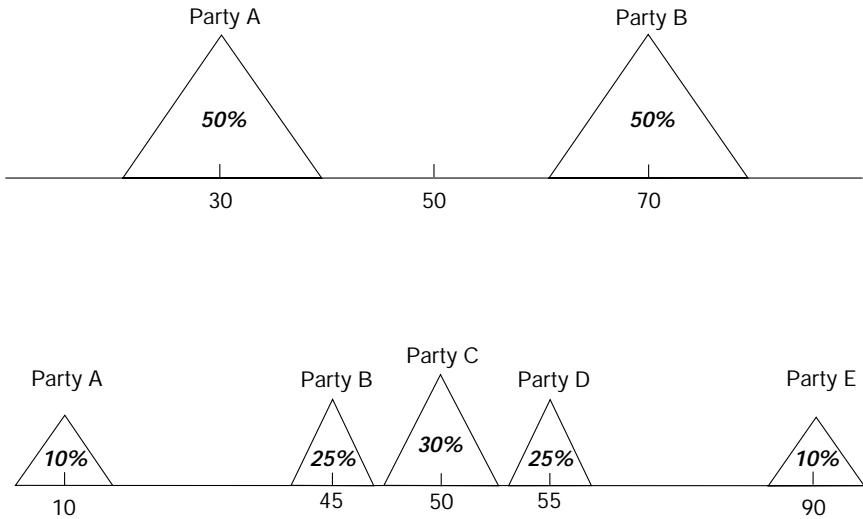
Figure 1. Hypothetical balanced two-party and polarized pluralist systems

is satisfactory. Clearly in the two-party system, preferences are clustered around two poles in a highly cohesive manner. However, (i) the ideological spread of the parties is lower; (ii) the latter system is multipolar – three poles, rather than two. Undoubtedly, the bulk of preferences gather around the centre pole, yet it is perfectly reasonable to hypothesize that the two extreme parties, despite only sharing 20 percent of the vote, may still be relevant through blackmail potential.

Much the same argument applies to the convergence measurement, a strong centre ground seeming likely to display less ideological distance than a two-party system as displayed in Figure 1, when in fact the actual distance is higher for the polarized system (Pennings, 1998: 87). One would precisely expect convergence of ideology amongst the Centre parties in systems where the level of competitiveness between the Centre and anti-system parties is low. Again, in systems such as Weimar Germany or Chile, there will be high divergence in policy terms, but as with the other centrifugal dynamics, one would expect much less divergence in systems which are electorally stable or indeed stagnant.[20]

Of course, the static situation is only part of the story. Sartori's prediction is that *ceteris paribus* the polarized system will see a transfer of votes from the centre pole to the extreme poles over time, and it is obvious, that in the situation described by Figure 1, should a transfer of, for instance, just 5 percent of the vote from the two outer parties of the centre pole transfer to their respective extreme neighbours, then the polarization score would jump beyond that of the two-party system. Conversely, the two-party system would conventionally be expected to converge, and thus see its polarization score lower. However, this is not seen in the polarization graph mapping

changes between the 1950s and 1980s. Theoretically, however, the role of voter distributions again has to be taken into consideration – if the hinge voters are not centrally located, then even in a two-party system one would not expect ideological convergence on the part of the parties.

Furthermore, four additional provisos need to be considered. Firstly, as with any index combining two or more variables, it is impossible to discern whether shifts in the Sigelman and Yough polarization index are due to changes in voting weights or in ideological distance – and such a differentiation may be crucial if one is to interpret systemic dynamics correctly. Secondly, the transfer of votes is not the only aspect which is needed in the dynamic system: *ideological stretching* is also implied. But the elasticity of space cannot be measured using a simple Left–Right placement scale: the area is bounded by the extremes of the scale which may in fact be stretching over time in a single nation. To compare the ideological spaces across countries is thus potentially fallacious, as the scores used to map each country's space will have been rationalized and 'fitted' to the scale as necessary. A simple example: a Communist Party will almost always have been placed at position 1 or 2 on a 10-point scale, whether its stance is anti-system and Stalinist, or quasi-integrated and Eurocommunist. How to operationalize elasticity of space is of course a good question, and one to which there is no ready answer.[21]

Thus – and the third proviso – elasticity of space can be left to one side, and instead emphasis placed upon measuring the direction of competition. It is clear that in the cases displayed in Figure 1, the competitive areas are in different places: unless there is a radical bimodal distribution of preferences, the Centre provides the most fecund potential electoral pool in the two-party system, whilst in the polarized system, the areas to the Left and Right provide their counterparts, with the centre-ground 'out of competition'.

The fourth and final proviso is connected with this implication, namely that in the polarized system competition is reduced if the normal distribution of preferences is assumed: governing centre parties have relatively less incentive to fight amongst themselves for each other's voters, being concerned with at least retaining a majority if not expanding it at the expense of their anti-system wings. Similarly, in the two-party system a bimodal distribution will result in less competition and fewer rational policy alterations than a normal distribution. As such, I return to my initial point, namely that the levels of competition, volatility, etc., cannot be hypothesized *a priori*. A system with a weakened centre and strong anti-system parties is manifesting its polarized format; but not all polarized formats should be expected to manifest a decline in the centre over time, such as to engender collapse. Such a dynamic will only occur if the preference structures are suitable.

Conclusion

If there is a criticism to be made of Sartori, therefore, it should not be that the predictions of his typology are wrong, but that rather he himself fails to emphasize sufficiently the role of variable competitive dynamics within each type – although this is rectified in later work. In particular, any prediction that polarized systems will tend to a weakening centre, and stretching ideological space which leads eventually to the collapse of the system, will not always bear out in reality. Instead, it should be specified that the centrifugal direction of competition in a polarized system will lead to ideological stretching, a weakened centre and systemic instability *where high competitiveness exists*. Similarly in the moderate systems, the overriding dynamic is centripetal, socio-organizational structure and voter distributions permitting. As voter distributions and elite strategies interact with the typical properties of the different competitive formats, so the direction and, crucially, the *intensity* of competition will vary.

It is fitting that the competitive mechanics are left until the final chapter of Sartori's book, inasmuch as it is evident that future developments need to use the individual preference structures and party strategies therein as a starting-point. If, then, the party system typology is to be reformulated, a combination of the Lijphart and Sartori versions would of course lead to a broader theory.[22] Yet the most fundamental lesson to be drawn is the emphasis that should be given to the role of individual voter preferences and competitivity within the different systems. In returning to Ersson and Lane's conclusion that volatility is up in *all* European systems, the reduction in socio-organizational bonds is undoubtedly the principal factor in this trend, and if the role of party agency is assuming greater primacy as some authors argue (e.g. Katz and Mair, 1994) the role of competitive space as defined by the interaction between party arrays and voter distributions becomes even more crucial in studying the dynamics of party systems. Whatever their basis, the fundamental types and direction of competition identified by Sartori in these systems are destined to persist.

Notes

I thank Stefano Bartolini, Martin Bull and two anonymous referees for their very helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

1 There are a number of sources for Sartori's typology in both English and Italian, but I shall rely principally on the most consolidated of the English texts, namely *Parties and Party Systems* (1976), and segments of *Teoria dei partiti e caso italiano* (1982), in which Sartori himself addresses earlier criticisms of his work, but which unfortunately is not available in English.

2 Atomised pluralism, where no single party's entry or exit affects the competitive

dynamics of the system, is regarded as a 'fluid' system unlikely to stabilize in the long term, except as a variant of extreme pluralism (Sartori, 1976: 284).

3 The von Beyme typology receives relatively short shrift, being simply a partial reformulation of the Sartori model.

4 He also notes that this clarification is 'perhaps redundant but not entirely super-fluous' (Sartori, 1976: 199). Such a distinction is in fact crucial if some of Pennings' misinterpretations are to be avoided.

5 And indeed, Sartori does so (1976: 128, figure).

6 In fact, there is absolutely no mention of the word 'volatility' in Sartori's text.

7 The one system where volatility might be expected to be higher on this basis is the atomized multiparty system.

8 Pennings states that he is not concerned with individual polity developments (1998: 84). However, looking at the predominant category, which comprises only two cases, if the disparity within the category is so high – as in the case of Norway and Sweden – surely the analyst is beholden to separate these out. I would note that Sartori is not guilty of such misleading aggregation because at no point does he predict such trends upon which to judge the category.

9 The error is repeated in the consideration of government durability – 'The supposedly stable predominant systems witnessed less durable governments in the 1970s and 1980s' (1998: 87). But the systems were stable and the governments durable *because* of the Norwegian Labour and Swedish Social Democrat parties' predominance: once they ceased to be predominant, the assured stability disappeared too. Stability, as a by-product of low competitiveness, would only be predicted while ever the predominant type endured.

10 In this case, core parties have been defined as regular governmental coalition partners, with a threshold of 40 percent governmental participation. The number of governments in the periods covered was Finland (38), France (22) and Italy (44).

11 The apparent recovery of the Centre in 1956 occurs when members of the anti-system peripheral Gaullist party remained in the governing coalition after the election.

12 But only in the case of Chile does Sartori see the centrifugal competitive dynamic as leading directly to the downfall of the system. In the case of Fourth Republic France and Weimar Germany, the crises are perceived as exogenous to the party system (1982: 306). Undoubtedly, however, the systemic trait is destabilizing, in that in both cases the weakened Centre governing parties were unable to respond to their respective crises.

13 It is unfortunate that in this critique Ware equates competitiveness with the number of parties: a segmented system with 10 parties and highly entrenched cleavage divisions is uncompetitive; a two-party system with a high level of floating voters, or alternatively as Mair notes a highly balanced stable electorate with a small number of crucial floating voters (1997: 157), is competitive.

14 1958 and 1962 display particularly high volatility figures because of the regime change, party realignment and the new electoral system. Bartolini has referred to the Fifth Republic party system until the early 1980s as a hybrid system – moderate dynamics with high ideological distance (1984). By the mid-1980s, this had certainly normalized to a position of low ideological distance, although the growth of the FN in the late 1980s and early 1990s suggests the reappearance of high ideological distance.

15 Such changes have been noted – for instance in the case of Left-wing defections to Extreme Right parties (Evans, 2000, 2001) – but there are specific conditions necessary to these long-distance vote-changes which have nothing to do with party system format *per se*.

16 Or indeed to collapse. In the simplified model, including ideological distance and party fragmentation, Sartori notes that the empty upper right corner (high ideological distance, low fragmentation) represents 'breakdown' (1976: 292). Thus, Ware is wrong to say, for example, that '[T]he case of inter-war Austria [. . .] does pose serious problems for the Sartori framework. Austrian two-partism was associated with a style of bitter, divisive politics that eventually brought about the collapse of the regime – precisely what is not supposed to happen in two-party systems, according to Sartori' (1996: 174). On the contrary, this is precisely what is meant to happen in a two-party format which does not follow the Downsian pattern.

17 Undoubtedly, reunification has been responsible for part of this proliferation, with the entry of the PDS. However, the success of the Greens is more closely linked to the evolution of voter preferences in terms of issue-relevance.

18 The author is currently working on the effects of party multiplication on the French party system since the 1980s.

19 Percentage of vote share is introduced as a coefficient bounded by 0 and 1.

20 At the most simple level, one would not expect to find systems with high levels of divergence or polarization in the study, precisely because they will have disappeared.

21 Indeed, it is not only elasticity of space which is a problem. At the comparative level, Smith's suggestion that ideological distance between parties be used as a systemic property implies an identical problem at this static level. Sani and Sartori measure ideological distance in terms of basic left–right distance of parties, and indeed find that the polarized systems occupy a broader ideological space than the moderate systems. However, this is only for a single time period and so it is not possible to compare these findings with Pennings' (Sani and Sartori, 1978).

22 Its value in introducing the idea of consensus across fragmentation to Sartori is doubtful, bearing in mind the length of time devoted to segmented societies in his original work – another criticism which I only have sufficient space to note (Pennings, 1998: 95).

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