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Electoral Volatility and Party Decline in Western Democracies: 1970-1995

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An ongoing debate in political science research focuses on the degree to which democratic party systems are stable. One set of authors argues that political cleavages in party systems endure, and thus party systems themselves show few significant signs of increased instability (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995; Mair, 1993, 1997). Another group of authors argues that since the 1970s, political cleavages have weakened and system stability has decreased (Pedersen, 1983; Maguire, 1983; Dalton et al., 1984; Crewe and Denver, 1985; Franklin et al., 1992; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000).

This research attempts to resolve this debate. We suggest that part of the uncertainty surrounding the direction and magnitude of stability trends results from the contrasting methodologies researchers have employed. We solve this difficulty by replicating the data and methods that Rose and Urwin employed in their 1970 study of electoral volatility, a work which has served for many as a baseline for measuring changes in system stability. Using the same methodology, we compare their results from the period 1945-1970 with new results for the 1970-1995 period for the same countries. This extends the analyses far beyond other recent studies of partisan stability and by using identical measures of electoral change we can ensure that any resultant trends are not due to measurement artifacts.

Previous Research on Electoral Change

The traditional approach to studying political system stability is best identified with Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) study of party systems and voter alignments. They tracked the origins of party systems back to the cleavages spawned by the national and industrial revolutions. Lipset and Rokkan argue that once these cleavages became integrated into the party systems of the early 20th century, this produced a stable system of party competition and voter choice. In their oft-cited conclusion, Lipset and Rokkan claimed that the "party systems of the 1960s reflect, with but few significant exceptions, the alignments of the 1920s" (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967: 50).

Lipset and Rokkan's early assessments were substantiated by other electoral scholars. In 1970, Rose and Urwin published a seminal work on the stability of party systems. Their study, the first to employ aggregate level data to test system stability, supported the frozen cleavages theory, finding that individual party volatility and system stability had changed little in the post-World War II era. Rose and Urwin's findings were supported by subsequent research that moved away from individual party strength and toward party bloc strength (Bartolini and Mair, 1990; Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995). Bartolini and Mair, for example, used other measures of stability and argued that trends in party volatility only seemed to increase when compared to the 1950s. When the trend is extended backward, they found that recent spikes in party volatility are more in tune with those observed between the World Wars. Bartolini and Mair also found that the strength of political cleavages is heavily biased toward stability over the same period, a finding that supports Lipset and Rokkan's original thesis.

By the end of the 1970s, however some scholars noticed an apparent shift in the stability of voter alignments that underlie the Lipset-Rokkan thesis (Pedersen, 1983; Maguire, 1983; Dalton et al., 1984; Crewe and Denver, 1985; Franklin et al., 1992). This group of revisionist scholars stressed that the system of frozen party cleavages was thawing, producing greater volatility and fluidity in contemporary party systems. Dalton and his colleagues drew attention to these changes, stating that "Electoral alignments are weakening, and party systems are experiencing increased fragmentation and electoral volatility. … Virtually everywhere among the industrialized democracies, the old order is crumbling" (Dalton et al., 1984). Similarly, Franklin et al. (1992) found that political cleavages are becoming more irrelevant to party success, and in some cases, this irrelevance was probably already well underway by 1960.

This debate has continued to the present. Peter Mair (1997) recently supported the frozen cleavages model in his book, Party System Change. Mair states that levels of electoral volatility and systems stability today are not substantially different from those of thirty years ago (Mair, 1997). In contrast, Dalton and Wattenberg (2000) argue that the strength of partisan ties has weakened in nearly all of the OECD nations and party volatility is increasing. It would seem that researchers have yet to reach a consensus in answering the question, "How stable are the political systems of Western democracies?"

If the answer to this question remains elusive, part of the problem could be that researchers have yet to arrive at a common method of measuring system stability. For instance, Bartolini and Mair (1990), Pedersen (1983) and Rose and Urwin (1970) all rely on differing macro-level indicators, while Dalton et al. (2000) employ a micro-level indicator in their analysis; the withering of partisan affiliations. Although they are attempting to answer the same question, they approach it from different vantage points with different indicators, and arrive at different conclusions.

These departures from a common method are not without merit. Since Lipset and Rokkan's initial study of political cleavages, researchers have struggled to find a suitable way of measuring system stability, and naturally they have differing opinions as to which measure is most accurate. One way of measuring stability has been to employ Pedersen's Index of Electoral Volatility.[1] The Pedersen Index can be used to calculate electoral volatility for a single party, party blocs, or entire party systems. However, indices like Pedersen's factor out negative signs,[2] and thus, eliminate any information regarding the direction of a party's volatility. In other words, the results explain the magnitude of electoral volatility, but not the direction.

Still, what is most lacking in the debate over system stability seems to be less an issue of accuracy than one of comparability. In other words, we cannot reasonably hope to arrive at a truly accurate conclusion regarding the status of system stability without maintaining a constant methodology over time. To this end, this paper replicates and extends Rose and Urwin's study of system stability to the present, even though their methodology is not without due critique.

Rose and Urwin's use of macro-level data to draw conclusions regarding the status of political cleavages, which are micro-level political phenomena, has been challenged by many of the aforementioned authors. For the most part, these methodological critiques seem to point out two main deficiencies in their analysis: the use of electoral data to analyze shifts in political cleavages and the validity of the their measures. In their defense, Rose and Urwin argue that by using election data they avoid several pitfalls other analyses may encounter with survey data. Specifically, they state that in many ways, electoral data are more representative, more accurate and more comparable across their set of nations than survey data (Rose and Urwin, 1970: 289). In addition, since the analysis of electoral change per se is our focus, the patterns of individual

level cleavages are a separate topic. Because Rose and Urwin maintain that election data are a more accurate and comparable means of gauging party system stability, we focus chiefly on the second of these two deficiencies in the methods section.

Measuring Electoral Change

Rose and Urwin analyze system stability with three main indicators, *electoral volatility*, *elasticity* and *variability of party support*. They apply these indicators to measure stability across 92 parties in nineteen democracies for the 1945-70 period, and aggregate their findings to suggest general trends for three regions, Anglo-America, Scandinavia and Continental Europe.[3]

Their first indicator, electoral volatility, is calculated by regressing a party's share of the popular vote against the period of time that the party contested elections. The resultant slope coefficient of these individual regressions, 92 in all representing one for each party, denotes a per annum trend in a given party's vote share. This measure assesses whether there are systematic long-term trends in party support.

Rose and Urwin (1970: 289-92) required that five conditions should be met in calculating per annum change in votes.[4] First, in order for a party to be included in the analysis, it should have contested at least three elections within the twenty-five year span. Second, it must have won at least 5% of the vote in one of its elections. Third, a party will be considered to have contested an election if its results show that it gained more than 0.0% of the vote in an election.[5] Fourth, if a party receives zero votes in an election and does not recover before the end of the time period, then the election with the zero-term is not included. Finally, a per annum change of more than 0.25% of a party's vote either up or down is considered the minimum significant trend (representing a 1.0% change in four years).

A second measure of party support is elasticity. Elasticity is calculated by the percentage difference between a given party's best and worst electoral performances. To use an analogy, if we consider a single party to be a swinging pendulum, the velocity of that pendulum, both its speed and direction, could represent electoral volatility, while the distance between the highest points on either side of the pendulum would represent the elasticity of the party's support.

Finally, variability of party support is calculated as the standard deviation of the party's performances across the set of elections under study. If we took snapshots of the pendulum swinging through its arc at during the 25 year time span, variability of party support would give us hints as to where on that arc the pendulum can most often be found.

Because they can account for net changes in the electoral strength of more than a single party, both elasticity and variability are useful measures for examining the effects of floating voters. As Rose and Urwin point out, however, neither measure can successfully account for voter movements that tend to cancel each other out. In such instances, the net result remains the same, although some higher amount of volatility is surely present. For this reason, it would seem that additional measures would be necessary to account for such changes. Furthermore, this critique lends substantial support to important research that employs partisan affiliation or inter-election vote switching as an indicator of system stability. Such indicators could provide additional evidence to analyses based on electoral data in determining volatility resulting from party crossover. While crossover votes result in little or no change in the overall vote for a party, both gains and losses in party votes are signs of party volatility.

The methods employed here are consistent with Rose and Urwin's methods. Although we believe their chief measurement is somewhat biased in favor of constancy, we will nevertheless use their measures for two reasons. First, we ensure the highest level of

comparability between the previous findings of Rose and Urwin and the newer findings from 1970-1995. This allows me the possibility of investigating whether the frozen political cleavages that dominated party politics up through 1969 are thawing. Second, although the bias can be easily corrected, maintaining it for this analysis can also help prove its existence more definitively, as many newer parties cropped up between 1970 and 1995. If my results point to a thawing of these frozen cleavages despite a systematic bias toward constancy, correcting for that bias would only make this thawing more dramatic.

Patterns of Party Change

The following analyses summarize the trends of party system stability in Western democracies since 1945 by comparing Rose and Urwin's data on electoral volatility, elasticity, and variability of party support for 1945-1970 with more recent data on the same indicators for 1970 to 1995.

Electoral Volatility
Rose and Urwin argue that the general trend in electoral volatility in the post-war era (1945-1970) is that of constancy--that is, there is no systematic trend. Two thirds of all parties during this period had trends in their electoral strength of less than 1.0% change per four years (.25% per annum change), an insignificant amount of change according to their standards. Scandinavian countries for example, showed the greatest electoral stability of the three regions, with 80% of all parties registering no significant trend (Rose and Urwin, 1970: 291-92). Cumulative party trends across all three regions are also low for this period; the mean party shows a per annum trend of 0.23% of the vote, also an insignificant amount of change.

If the period between 1945 and 1970 was marked by little systematic trend, then the next twenty-five years could be considered more raucous. Table 1 illustrates new data on electoral volatility measured for each of the same regions as in the Rose and Urwin analysis. Only 52% of parties register no trend in this second period, down from the previously reported 68%. Anglo-America and Scandinavia see marked increases in the percent of parties deviating (up or down) from a stable party trend. While the overall shift does not seem like a dramatic turn in the atmosphere of party politics, the 16% decrease in the number of stable party trends indicates slow and systematic changes in party fortunes and a gradual shift toward heightened volatility.

Elasticity of Party Support
In addition to the long-term trends in party support, Rose and Urwin gauge voter volatility through the elasticity of party support: the absolute difference between a party's best and worst showing. Table 2 illustrates their general findings that the average elasticity across all parties was 7.9% from 1945 to 1970. Rose and Urwin argue that this result, coupled with evidence of low electoral volatility, points to 1945-70 as a period of relatively low change.

The results from 1970-1995, however, indicate that this constancy has been interrupted. The elasticity in parties' support increases, with the average measure for all parties reaching 9.2%. This increase in the gap between a party's highest and lowest vote shares in the time period indicates that the electoral environment is becoming more unpredictable. This increase is driven by two of the three regions, Anglo-America and Scandinavia, which show greater gains in elasticity in the second time period. Scandinavian parties experience a statistically significant increase in their elasticity of support (up 3.2% in the time period). Anglo-American parties on

Table 1. Summary of Electoral Volatility per annum by Region and Time Period

Volatility Trend	Anglo American Nations			Scandinavian Nations			Continental Nations			All Regions		
	1945-70	1970-95	Change	1945-70	1970-95	Change	1945-70	1970-95	Change	1945-70	1970-95	Change
Up (>.24)	10% (2)	9% (2)	-1%	3% (1)	17% (6)	+14%	15% (6)	16% (7)	+1%	10% (9)	15% (15)	+5%
Nil (-.24 to +.24)	57% (12)	41% (9)	-16%	80% (24)	58% (21)	-22%	66% (27)	52% (23)	-14%	68% (63)	52% (53)	-16%
Down (< -.24)	33% (7)	50% (11)	+17%	17% (5)	25% (9)	+8%	20% (8)	32% (14)	+12%	20% (20)	34% (34)	+14%
Mean (absolute value)	.24	.32	+.08	.16	.25	+.09	.27	.26	-.01	.23	.27	+.04
(Total N)	(21)	(22)		(30)	(36)		(41)	(44)		(92)	(102)	

Source: All data used in this piece were taken from Thomas Mackie and Richard Rose. 1991. *The International Almanac of Electoral History* and Richard Rose and Derek W. Urwin. 1970. "Persistence and Change in Western Party systems Since 1945."
Note: Significance levels for differences between means denoted by asterisks as follows: * = significant at p < .05 , ** = significant at p < .01 , *** = significant at p < .001.

Table 2. Elasticity of Party Support by Region and Time Period

Elasticity	Anglo American Nations			Scandinavian Nations			Continental Nations			All Regions		
	1945-70	1970-95	Change	1945-70	1970-95	Change	1945-70	1970-95	Change	1945-70	1970-95	Change
0-1.99%	0%	0%	0%	3%	3%	0%	7%	2%	-5%	4%	2%	-2%
	(0)	(0)		(1)	(1)		(3)	(1)		(4)	(2)	
2.0-3.99%	5%	0%	-5%	20%	6%	-14%	20%	16%	-4%	16%	9%	-7%
	(1)	(0)		(6)	(2)		(8)	(7)		(15)	(9)	
4.0-5.99%	14%	14%	0%	27%	22%	-5%	15%	23%	+8%	18%	21%	+3%
	(3)	(3)		(8)	(8)		(6)	(10)		(17)	(21)	
6.0-7.99%	24%	14%	-10%	27%	11%	-16%	15%	20%	+5%	21%	16%	-5%
	(5)	(3)		(8)	(4)		(6)	(9)		(19)	(16)	
8.0-9.99%	14%	5%	-9%	10%	17%	+7%	17%	11%	-6%	14%	12%	-2%
	(3)	(1)		(3)	(6)		(7)	(5)		(13)	(12)	
10.0-11.99%	14%	18%	+4%	10%	17%	+7%	7%	7%	0%	10%	13%	+3%
	(3)	(4)		(3)	(6)		(3)	(3)		(9)	(13)	
12.0-13.99%	5%	27%	+22%	3%	14%	+11%	10%	7%	-3%	7%	14%	+7%
	(1)	(6)		(1)	(5)		(4)	(3)		(6)	(14)	
14.0% Plus	24%	23%	-1%	0%	11%	+11%	10%	14%	+4%	10%	15%	+5%
	(5)	(5)		(0)	(4)		(4)	(6)		(9)	(15)	
												+1.3%
Mean	9.9%	12.2%	+2.3%	5.6%	8.8%	+3.2%***	8.5%	8.1%	-.4%	7.9%	9.2%	
(Total N)	(21)	(22)		(30)	(36)		(41)	(44)		(92)	(102)	

Source: See Table 1.1
Note: Significance levels for differences between means denoted by asterisks as follows: * = significant at p < .05, ** = significant at p < .01, *** = significant at p < .001.

Table 3. Variability of Party Support by Region and Time Period (Percentage and number of parties with standard deviation between)

Standard Deviation	Anglo-America Nations			Scandinavian Nations			Continental Nations			All Regions		
	1945-70	1970-95	Difference	1945-70	1970-95	Difference	1945-70	1970-95	Difference	1945-70	1970-95	Difference
0.0-.99%	0%	0%	0%	3%	3%	0%	10%	7%	-3%	5%	4%	-1%
	(0)	(0)		(1)	(1)		(4)	(3)		(5)	(4)	
1.0-1.99%	24%	14%	-10%	45%	11%	-34%	24%	25%	+1%	31%	18%	-13%
	(5)	(3)		(13)	(4)		(10)	(11)		(28)	(18)	
2.0-2.99%	19%	9%	-10%	38%	31%	-7%	20%	27%	+7%	25%	25%	0%
	(4)	(2)		(11)	(11)		(8)	(12)		(23)	(25)	
3.0-3.99%	24%	32%	+8%	10%	31%	+21%	24%	20%	+4%	20%	26%	+6%
	(5)	(7)		(3)	(11)		(10)	(9)		(18)	(27)	
4.0-4.99%	10%	9%	-1%	3%	17%	+14%	10%	5%	-5%	8%	10%	+2%
	(2)	(2)		(1)	(6)		(4)	(2)		(7)	(10)	
5.0-5.99%	10%	23%	+13%	0%	0%	0%	5%	7%	+2%	4%	8%	+4%
	(2)	(5)		(0)	(0)		(2)	(3)		(4)	(8)	
6.0-6.99%	0%	5%	+5%	0%	8%	+8%	2%	5%	+3%	1%	6%	+5%
	(0)	(1)		(0)	(3)		(1)	(2)		(1)	(6)	
7.0% Plus	14%	9%	-5%	0%	0%	0%	5%	5%	0%	5%	4%	-1%
	(3)	(2)		(0)	(0)		(2)	(2)		(5)	(4)	
Mean	3.6%	4.2%	+.6%	2.2%	3.2%	+1.0%***	3.2%	3.1%	-.1%	3.0%	3.4%	+.4%
(Total N)	(21)	(22)		(29)	(36)		(41)	(44)		(91)	(102)	

Source: See Table 1.
Note: Significance levels for differences between means denoted by asterisks as follows: * = significant at p < .05, ** = significant at p < .01, *** = significant at p < .001.

average see the elasticity of their support increase by 2.3% over the time period, although this is not statistically significant. These results tend to fit in with the larger picture of a gradual shift toward greater volatility and system instability since Rose and Urwin's study.

Variability of Party Support

Rose and Urwin also analyze variability of party support, the standard deviation of party vote shares, to determine if parties are generally becoming more sporadic in their vote support. Table 3 illustrates their findings regarding the normal range of parties' vote shares. From 1945-1970, the average of variability of party support was 3.0%, meaning that the average party had a standard deviation of 3.0% in its share of the votes across elections. Rose and Urwin argue that the distribution of these data is skewed in the direction of stability, indicating that the vast majority of parties in their study were relatively stable over time.

From 1970 to 1995, however, the average variability of party support is slightly higher (3.4%), an increase of 0.4% over the period. Scandinavia sees a statistically significant rise in the average party's mean variability, from 2.2% in the previous period to 3.2% in 1970-95. Anglo-American parties experience a statistically insignificant increase of 0.6% over the period; Continental Europe actually stabilize with a decrease of 0.1%. The data suggest that there are more parties now with higher variability in their support than there were twenty-five years ago, in effect driving system stability down through increasingly unpredictable electoral showings.

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Plotting Change Over Time

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One way to graphically represent party stability are is to plot the distances between a party's actual vote shares and the trend line that is produced when these vote shares are regressed over time.[6] Figures 1 through 4 illustrate the relationship between these distances and time for each individual region, and finally for the entire population of parties in all regions. In an effort to determine which points on the scatterplot should be considered significant, we calculated first the mean and then the standard deviation for each of the four groupings. Those points that represent distances greater than one standard deviation from the mean are considered here to be substantively significant. Finally, we include a best fit curve for the data on each graph in an effort to provide some answer to the general direction of the changes.

For instance, from 1945-70, 8.3 % of the cases in Anglo-America exceeded the mean by more than one standard deviation (S.D. = 4.804). The number of significant cases doubled for Anglo-America in the second time period to 16.6% (Figure 1). The best fit curve indicates a slight parabolic effect over time, with the residuals of Anglo-American parties decreasing toward the end of Rose and Urwin's time period and then slowly rising again toward the end of ours.

Figure 2 plots the Scandinavian residuals over time; the percent of cases greater than one standard deviation from the regression line as 6.3% in the total 1945-1970 period. By 1995, this number nearly triples in magnitude, to 18.3%. These data illustrate a marked increase over the two time periods, and are generally in line with the tabular results on Scandinavian volatility, variability and elasticity. The best fit curve for Scandinavia indicates a sinusoidal relationship over time, strongly suggesting that extending the analysis backward to include previous decades of data could provide for exciting evidence of a pendulum effect over time in volatility.
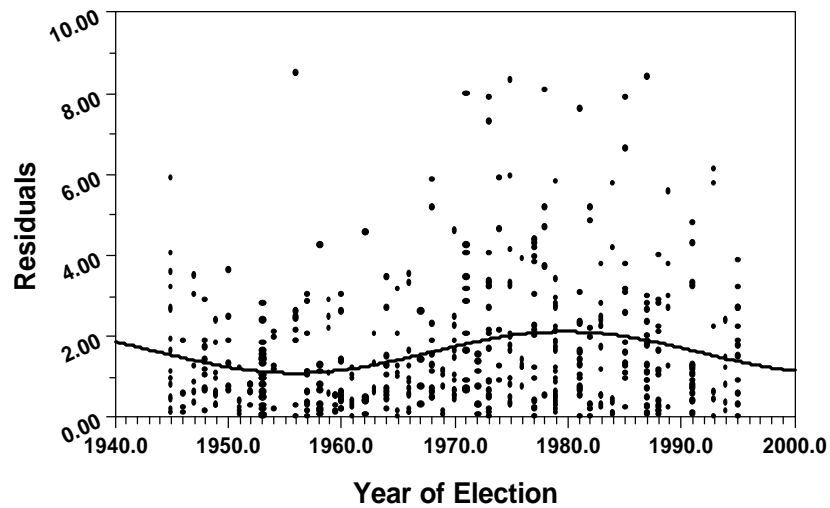
Fig. 1 Distance from Individual Trend Lines for Anglo-American Parties, 1945-1995
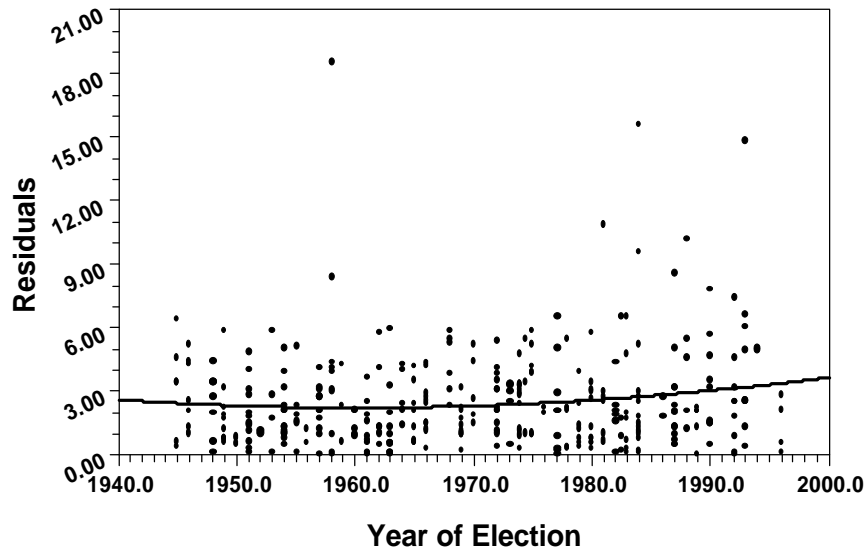
Source: See Table 1.
Note: Graph produced using Curve Expert 1.3. Curve equation: $y = 3461.27 - 3.53x + 9.0e^{-04} x^2$
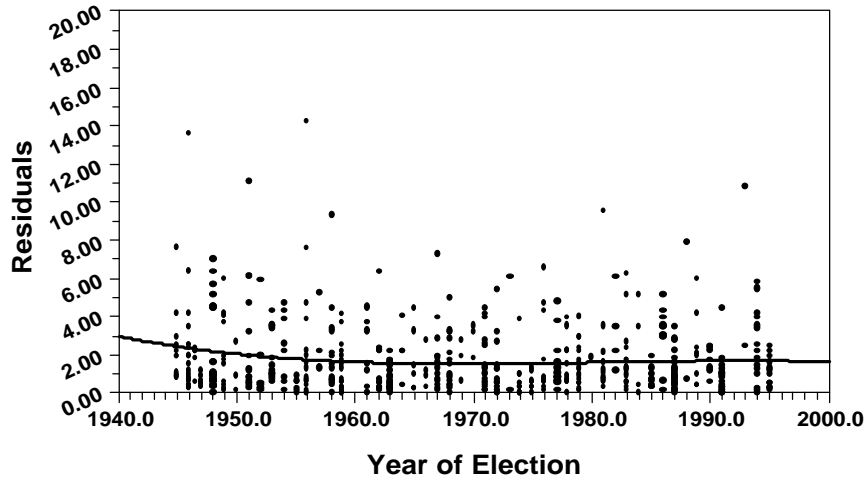
Fig. 2 Distance from Individual trend Lines for Scandinavian Parties, 1945-1995

Source: See Table 1.
Note: Graph produced using Curve Expert 1.3. Curve equation: $y = 1.61 + .51\cos (.13x - 135.26)$
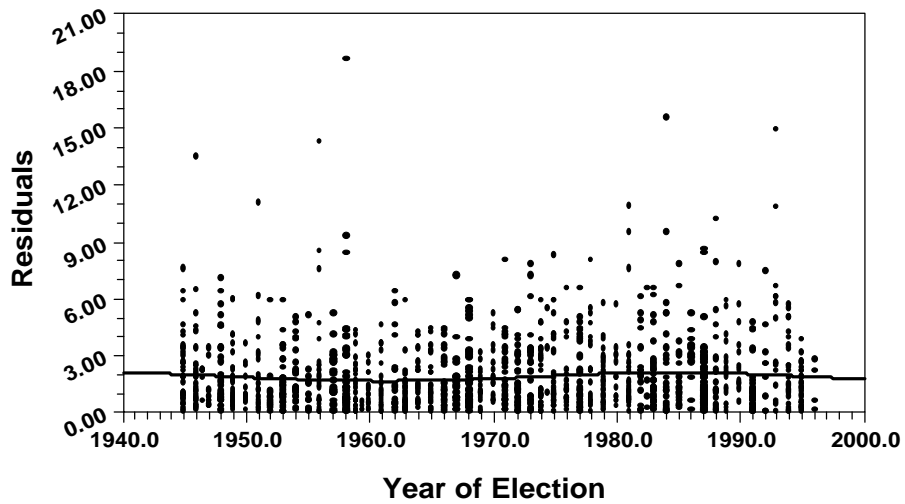
Fig. 3 Distance from Individual Trend Lines for Continental Parties, 1945-1995

Source: See Table 1.
Note: Graph produced using Curve Expert 1.3. Curve equation: $y = 20{,}264.46 - 306.89x + .15x^2 - 2.61e^{-05}x^3$

Fig. 4 Distance from Individual Trend Lines for All Parties, 1945-1995

Source: See Table 1.
Note: Graph produced using Curve Expert 1.3. Curve equation: $y = 1.89 + .22\cos(.13x - 21.70)$

Only in the Continental Europe does the percentage of large residual cases decline from the first time period to the second, from 15.4% to 11.6% (Figure 3). The best fit curve for Continental Europe bears this observation out, illustrating a slight decrease over time in the size of the residuals.

When taken as a whole, however, the data point to a gradual increase in the variability of party support (from 11.8% for 1945-70 to 15% for 1970-95), with the greatest increase in significant values occurring in the last ten to fifteen years (Figure 4). The curve shows a sinusoidal relationship between time and the size of residuals across all parties, which is most likely driven by the dramatic results from Scandinavia. Again, extending the time period backward would provide for more conclusive evidence of whether party systems are witnessing a pendulum effect in volatility.

Party Age

If electoral volatility and its correlates seem to be increasing, we still do not have a clear picture as to why. To be sure, the indicators of system stability that Rose and Urwin employ and we replicate, are not well suited for this task. The use of trends, while appropriate for determining general magnitudes and directions of change, cannot provide the refined view of voters' changing preferences that surveys and other micro-level indicators can afford.

However, if the endurance of political cleavages determines to some degree which parties persist, party age could be used as a broad-stroke method of determining one possible source of change. Rose and Urwin tested this assumption by pitting the age of a party (when the party was founded) against party volatility and variability of party support. Tables 4 and 5 summarize their results, as well as the updated results for the 1970-1995 period. In general, Rose and Urwin found that Old Parties, those founded before 1914, were more stable than newer parties. They point to the fact that more Old Parties had positive per annum trends than either Interwar Parties, parties founded between 1914 and 1939, or New Parties, parties founded after 1939. Furthermore, Old parties were less likely to have strong volatility trends up or down, than Interwar or New Parties.

The more recent data, however suggest that things have changed somewhat. First, the percentage of Old Parties with positive trends, while still much greater than that of Interwar Parties, is virtually identical to the percentage of New Parties with positive trends (42% for Old Parties, 40% for New Parties). This constitutes an 8% drop from the previous time period for Old Parties and an increase of 4% for New Parties. New Parties on average also experience increase volatility, with 55% displaying large increases or decreases in volatility (Table 4).

Variability of party support for Old and Interwar Parties is also increasing. Interwar parties overall have undergone a statistically significant change during the time period, experiencing a 67% increase in the standard deviation of their volatility trends. New Parties on the other hand, have seen a decline in the mean standard deviation, although the change is not significant (Table 5).

These results lend credence to the argument that many party systems are undergoing growing pains as a result of electoral dealignment and/or realignment. Since 1970, many new parties have been born out of necessity to counteract traditional politics. New Politics parties, as they are often referred to, and their differing political ideologies could be a causal factor behind the increase. These data however, can only point to further study of such phenomena, as the measures themselves can only identify affective patterns, and not causal influences. It might also

Table 4. Volatility Trends by Party Age and Time Period

Volatility Trend (per annum)	Old Parties			Interwar Parties			New Parties		
	1945-70	1970-95	Change	1945-70	1970-95	Change	1945-70	1970-95	Change
+.25 or more	9% (3)	13% (4)	+4%	10% (3)	4% (1)	-6%	12% (3)	22% (10)	+10%
+.01 to +.24	41% (14)	29% (9)	-12%	30% (9)	17% (4)	-13%	24% (6)	18% (8)	-6%
-.01 to -.24	32% (11)	35% (11)	+3%	37% (11)	26% (6)	-11%	36% (9)	27% (12)	-9%
-.25 or more	18% (6)	23% (7)	+5%	23% (7)	52% (12)	+29%	28% (7)	33% (15)	+5%
Mean (absolute value)	.19	.21	+.02	.19	.32	+.13**	.33	.28	-.05
(Total N)	(34)	(31)		(30)	(23)		(25)	(45)	

Source: See Table 1.
Note: Significance levels for differences between means denoted by asterisks as follows: * = significant at p < .05, ** = significant at p < .01, *** = significant at p < .001. Party Age codes: Old = pre-1914; Interwar = 1914-1939; new = post-1939

Table 5. Variability in Party Support Party Age, Region, and Time Period (median standard deviation)

Region	Old Parties			Interwar Parties			New Parties		
	Median S.D. 1945-70	Median S.D. 1970-95	Change	Median S.D. 1945-70	Median S.D. 1970-95	Change	Median S.D. 1945-70	Median S.D. 1970-95	Change
Anglo-America	4.6 (8)	4.0 (8)	-.6	2.8 (7)	5.0 (7)	+2.2	2.1 (6)	2.4 (7)	+.3
Scandinavia	2.6 (12)	3.1 (10)	+.5	2.0 (14)	3.5 (11)	+1.5	1.6 (4)	2.9 (14)	+1.3
Continent	3.0 (16)	2.9 (12)	-.1	2.6 (9)	2.5 (5)	-.1	2.9 (16)	2.4 (27)	-.5
Mean	3.1	3.6	+.5	2.4	4.0	+1.6***	3.4	2.9	-.5
(Total N)	(36)	(30)	-6	(30)	(23)	-7	(26)	(48)	+22

Source: See Table 1.
Note: Significance levels for differences between means denoted by asterisks as follows: * = significant at p < .05, ** = significant at p < .01, *** = significant at p < .001. Party Age codes: Old = pre-1914; Interwar = 1914-1939; new = post-1939

prove fruitful in order to bear out any effects New Politics parties might have had, to distinguish between New Parties and New Politics Parties.

Conclusion

Rose and Urwin made the claim in, "Persistence and Change in Western party Systems Since 1945", that political parties across three different regions seemed to be relatively stable in their electoral fortunes. By providing evidence on general trends in electoral volatility, elasticity and variability of party support, their data supported the model of frozen political cleavages in Western democracies. In doing so, Rose and Urwin also gave fuel to numerous subsequent studies of party stability. The resultant debate over the degree to which Western political systems are stable focuses on whether Lipset and Rokkan's frozen cleavages model is beginning to thaw.

By updating Rose and Urwin's analysis to include results up to 1995, we have doubled the time period of analysis. With a second comparable study of system stability, one can assess whether trends in stability or change are more prominent, and discern the direction of change. My results indicate that since 1970, political parties generally are experiencing gradual increases in electoral volatility, variability and elasticity. One region in particular, Scandinavia, seems to be undergoing significant changes in the stability of its party systems, while smaller changes in stability for Anglo-America and Continental Europe still point in the direction of increased variance. In other words, the fortunes of the average political party seems to be less predictable today than was the case some thirty years ago.

Still, these results should not be taken as definitive proof that stability is decreasing. Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair argue quite convincingly that any proof of trends in electoral volatility should take into account volatility levels both before *and* after World War II. In doing so, they argue that recent work detailing increases in volatility since 1970 is less persuasive when compared to electoral volatility from before 1945. In fact, they state that if anything, electoral volatility could be the rule, rather than the exception, and that focusing on data taken from after 1945 provides us with a limited account of the true trends in system stability. We take their critique to heart, but suggest that because their measures were different from the ones used by Rose and Urwin and numerous subsequent researchers, the question is still very much up for debate.

What we have provided is an update of Rose and Urwin's methodology and results that provides us with a snapshot of volatility trends after 1945, which seems to illustrate a gradual decrease in stability. Within the larger context of the debate over stability, these results lend support to those who believe an electoral dealignment or even realignment is occurring in the West. However, if we are to know for certain if these trends represent an exception to the rule, or whether volatility is in fact the status quo, further research must expand its scope to include longer periods of analysis *while* still maintaining the highest degree of comparability with previous research.

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Endnotes

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[1] Pedersen's Index of Electoral Volatility can be expressed by the following equation:

$$\tfrac{1}{2} \left(\sum_{i=1}^{n} | P_{i,t} - P_{i,t-1} | \right)$$

Where $P_{i,t}$ = Party i at time t, and n = total number of parties.

[2] Pedersen's Index, Gallagher's Deviation Measure, and the Loosemore-Hanby measure of deviation all factor out negative signs by calculating shifts in vote shares from election to election as absolute values. Both the Pedersen Index and the Loosemore-Hanby measure simply take the absolute value of these shifts, while Gallagher squares the terms and then takes the radical of the sum.

[3] The three regions are taken from Rose and Urwin's 1970 study, in which parties were recoded to fit into one of three regions: Anglo-America (parties from the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Ireland, and New Zealand), Scandinavia (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), and Continental (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Switzerland).

[4] The first condition, three elections must be contested, is appropriate if for no other reason than, that a regression line is meaningless without at least three points. The second condition, although somewhat arbitrary as to where one makes a cut-off point for vote shares, is arguably a good breaking point because small changes in the vote shares of small parties result in large measures of volatility. We also agree with their third condition, which states that any party receiving more than 0.0% of the national vote in any election will be considered to have contested that election, because anyone should be able to get at least one vote. The fourth condition, .25%t per annum change denotes significance, also seems to make some sense, given that over a twenty-five year time period, a 6.25% total change in a party's vote is enough for a small party to double its size, or fade out of existence. One condition however, could bias their results. By excluding the parties with zero vote shares as an indication that the parties did not contest the particular election, they may bias their results toward more moderate downward trends in general, and often times toward positive gains. In fact, if included, these zero vote shares might result in stronger downward trends. Excluding the death of a party is obscuring some of that volatility, and could bias results in favor of moderate losses and gains, rather than major losses. Furthermore, the bias is not uniform in that it tends to affect only the smaller parties. Strong contenders rarely die out in the political arena, and often they gain from the losses of those who do.

Because of these considerations, we conducted a second analysis for the combined time periods (1945-1995) that includes these zero term parties. About half of the parties for which the missing zero terms were included already had negative trends that were above the threshold for significance. For some, including the zero term actually weakened this trend since a zero vote share was actually higher than the expected value given the previous trend line. In none of the cases, did including the zero term result in pushing a party over or pulling it back from the threshold of significance.

[5] This criterion assumes that Rose and Urwin do not rely on rounded measures of parties' vote shares. Excluding a lackluster performance by a smaller party that has a bad enough showing so as to make its rounded vote percentage for a given election zero, would skew their results toward more moderate gains and losses. This is largely what we argue happens when considering the fifth condition

[6] These regressions were calculated for the analyses of Table 1, one for the 1945-70 period and a second for the 1970-95 period. We present the party residuals combined from these separate regression analyses.