5
How Party Systems Develop in Mixed Electoral Systems

5.1 Introduction

German-style electoral systems have become a bestseller in the charts of European and worldwide electoral reforms of the 1990s and the early twenty-first century. Combining PR with elections by majoritarian rules, usually in SSD, the German electoral system unifies two different worlds of electoral system logics. Since Central and Eastern Europe is a region where mixed electoral systems are frequently applied, it is crucial for this study to look at their functioning.

Under catchphrases such as ‘the best of both worlds’ (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001b, pp. 592–6), mixed electoral systems have been discussed as combining the advantages of two opposing electoral system logics. Mixed electoral systems, as defined here, have several overlapping sets of electoral districts for the same elected body, in which each voter gives his or her vote according to different electoral formulae. One part of the seats, the ‘PR tier’, is elected by PR (often with national districts), whereas the ‘district tier’ consists of mandates elected in single-seat districts (see Section 5.2 for details). This combination of plurality/majority vote and PR is seen to have a moderating impact in a number of dimensions. The ‘best of both worlds’ school praises mixed electoral systems as striking a happy medium between fractionalisation and concentration of the party system and providing a compromise between both extremes with regards to proportionality (Grotz, 2000, pp. 707–8; Kostadinova, 2002; Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001b, p. 592). Similar advantages are praised for the combination of a party element and a personality element (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001a, p. 582), local and national representation (Shugart, 2001; Stratmann and Baur, 2002; Thames, 2005a; see Crisp, 2007 for a critical view),
and, finally, they can allow compromises between different actors' preferences in constitution-building processes (Schiemann, 2001 for an example).

Recently, after they were discussed and introduced in many countries from the 1990s onwards, scholars have increasingly been interested in how mixed systems affect party strategies and voting behaviour (Cox and Schoppa, 2002; Ferrara et al., 2005; Gschwend, 2007; Herron and Nishikawa, 2001; Moser and Scheiner, 2004), legislative behaviour (Ferrara, 2004b; Smith and Remington, 2001; Thames, 2005a) or representation of women and minorities (Kostadinova, 2007; Moser, 2001a).

Few previous studies have focussed on the fractionalisation of the party systems under mixed electoral systems in systematic cross-country studies. The social laboratory school argues that each applied formula has its effect independent of others (see below). In contrast, research on contamination has found that voting behaviour in each tier is affected by the other (Ferrara et al., 2005; Herron and Nishikawa, 2001). Accordingly, the vote distribution in both tiers is interdependent, so that it cannot be directly compared to simple electoral systems with no contamination effect. So far, no model has been established that would make it possible to predict the number of parties in mixed electoral systems.

After a series of elections under mixed electoral systems, some of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe have developed rather stable and small party systems (Croatia, Hungary and Albania, apart from the 2005 elections). In these countries, if no dominant party emerged in an election, disproportionality became rather low, similar to single-seat district systems with a stable two-party system. In Russia and Lithuania, however, the level of party system fragmentation has remained high even after repeated elections under a mixed electoral system. These differences persist after a number of elections, so that they do not seem to be simply random outliers occurring in the first few elections (Figure 5.1).

Not all mixed electoral systems in the region are equal. Most of them have a roughly even share of seats allocated by PR and in single-seat districts, but they differ in the linkages between both tiers. In many cases, there is no linkage at all, but both Albania and Hungary employ (in certain elections) mixed compensatory systems with a partial linkage mechanism that should make the seat allocation more proportional. Ironically, however, in all cases where the element of proportionality is stronger, either due to such a (partial) linkage mechanism, because the PR mandates clearly outnumber the single-seat districts (Croatia in