

**Political protest and party systems:
An institutional study of the European countries**

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Comments are more than welcome!!!

1. Introduction

Political participation is considered as being an essential element of democratic regimes (Dahl: 1989). It can be seen as a fundamental part of democracies because, through it, citizens can use their voice in order to influence the policy makers and the rulers. It is, in a few words, one of the pillars of democracy. Some scholars argue that low level of political participation and, in particular, low levels of electoral turnout are clear signs of political apathy and disinterest towards the public affairs (Jackman: 1987, Franklin: 2004). Others, instead, argue that low levels of political participation contribute positively to the stability of a democracy (Lipset: 1960). There is a further perspective that affirms that equilibrium between political participation and the structuring of state institutions is needed in order to achieve political order (Huntington: 1968). Conversely, for other scholars, a high level of political participation is a sign of democratic vivacity, satisfaction for government institutions and for democracy in general (Prezeworski et al.: 2000). If citizens participate to political life, they communicate to the rulers their preferences and their needs (Burns, Schlozman, Verba: 2001). Therefore, citizens have an important role in shaping public policies and, more generally, in expressing preferences in governmental choices.

There are different explanations trying to account for political participation. For a long time, political participation has been meant as electoral turnout. Many studies made an important effort to demonstrate how it changes, in democracies, according to different variables (Geys: 2004). Other studies have been interested in individual attitudes and individual resources constraints, both concerning the socio-economic status and politically relevant skills. The former approach known as the Socio-Economic Model (SES) argues that political participation can be understood as a function of the status of the participants, either at the individual or at the societal level (Verba, Nie: 1972; Barnes, Kaase: 1979, Verba et al.: 1991). The latter approach has been more concerned with the structure of context and the possibilities and opportunities that participants see within their environment in order to get mobilized (Tarrow: 1989).

These approaches, in my opinion, do not focus sufficiently their attention to the political institutions and to the influence they exert over political participation. In this paper, I argue that there are some factors related to the political system which should be considered in order to accomplish a more detailed assessment of political protest in contemporary democracies. In the last thirty years, many countries lost their status of dictatorships or autocracies (O'Donnel, Schmitter: 1986; Huntington: 1991). These countries started being democratic and, therefore, started experiencing forms of political participation that before

the transition were strongly repressed or discouraged. The forms of political participation are of a relevant interest to understand the modes of transition to democracy (Karl, Schmitter: 1991) and the process of democratic consolidation (Linz, Stepan: 1996). Moreover, the importance of political participation has been emphasized as an important dimension to be considered in studying the quality of democracy (Diamond, Morlino: 2005).

In this paper, I will argue that the characteristics of party systems shape political protest. This issue has been studied in depth regarding the electoral turnout, but, in my opinion, there is not sufficient attention towards this topic. Parties are considered as the linkages between the civil society and the governmental institutions, either in an instrumental form or in an identifying form (Pizzorno: 1993). Many scholars underlined the importance of party system in producing and accomplishing the challenges that come from the citizens (Almond: 1960; Duverger: 1954; Huntington: 1968; Lipset, Rokkan: 1967; Sartori: 1976). For this reason, we can suppose that an efficient party system is more able to transmit and to communicate the issues that are important for the citizenship. We can also imagine that a party system that is not fragmented or/and polarized can respond with a higher effectiveness to the requests of the public. If a party system is homogeneous, it can respond efficiently to the requests of the public; conversely, if it is heterogeneous it will be not able to cope with citizens answers.

The paper is structured as following. In the next paragraph I discuss the different forms of political participation, having a particular attention on protest. Then I dwell upon the main theories that explain political participation, concluding that a deeper focus on political institutions is needed, since social characteristics or rationality cannot explain, alone, the variation of political protest. Subsequently, I link political protest to the characteristics of party systems. Democracy is unthinkable without parties, but if they do not perform their functions properly, the amount of protest may arise. The last part of the paper is dedicated to the test whether two characteristics of the party systems, fractionalization and polarization, affect the amount of people participating to some political action, such as demonstration, unofficial strikes and occupation of buildings or factories.

This test will be performed on a set of European countries, both Western and post-Communist, in order to have a comparative approach which allows to control the findings (Morlino: 2005). This is done to understand if there is a difference between party systems that are long established and party systems, instead, that have experienced a shorter period of democracy.

2. The forms of political participation and political protest

Political participation does not have a unique meaning. Participating to political activities may have different meanings according to the people we are dealing with. Generally, political participation is closely related to the act of voting. For a long time, political participation has been strongly related to electoral behavior and voting. Many studies have tried to understand how and to what extent participation to elections varies according to different factors, such as class, gender, education, group membership, etc. (Powell: 1986, Jackman: 1987, Franklin: 2004, Geys: 2004). It is undoubtedly true that the background concept (Collier, Adcock: 2001) of political participation is usually linked to the act of putting a voting paper in a ballot box, but it should not be considered just as such. Political participation is more than voting and sometimes the act of voting it is not a necessary condition for identifying a person involved in politics. In the following lines the different forms of political participation will be illustrated.

Some important publications (Milbrath: 1965; Milbrath, Goel 1977; Verba, Nie: 1972; Verba, Nie, Kim 1978) showed that political participation has different forms. By and large, we can identify four modes of political participation which are: a) voting; b) campaign activity; c) contact officials directly; d) communal activity. These four modes of participation are identified according to the different requirements of participants and differ in the nature of their influence. The typology is created using four criteria: whether the act conveys information about the individual's political preferences or/and applies pressure for compliance; the potential degree of conflict that is implied in the activity; the effort put into the activity; the amount of cooperation with the other people involved in the action (Dalton: 2008). It is interesting to add to this typology two further modes of participation which are: protest and other forms of contentious politics and internet activism. The last two forms of political participation are considered the sign that the involvement of citizens in the political life is not decreasing, but changing. From many sides we hear that apathy is growing in contemporary democracies, instead what we are experiencing is that the publics engage different modes of political action (Inglehart: 1997). Furthermore, protest and internet activism can be considered non-institutional or non-conventional forms of political participation since they go beyond the institutionalized forms and, more, have a potential in challenging the ruling élites through different modes (Barnes, Kaase; 1979).

Different forms of contentious politics are, historically, bounded in situations of deprivation, feeling of frustration and hardship. But in the present time, protest is not only related to these contexts but also to various issues that are emerging. The idea is that the

nature of protest is changing in advanced industrial democracies (Dalton: 2008, 48). People no longer protest to overthrow a regime, to establish a new one or, generally, to undermine the basis of the current political legitimacy of a regime. People, nowadays, get organized for different kinds of issues that in the past would have not been considered strictly political, such as the protection of environment (Diani: 1995), homosexual rights (Rayside: 2001), consumer issues, the quest for a higher quality of democracy, etc. For many people, protest has become another political resource to access their rulers and policy-makers, both at a local and a national level.

I am interested in protest, first of all, because it is a *direct* form of political participation, in this meaning political participation is “something more pregnant, namely a direct involvement in the various political issues without intermediation” (Cotta: 1979, 198). As a form of direct participation, protest requires a deeper and more extended effort, it presupposes a certain degree of conflict, potentially it produces a high amount of pressures onto the people who are contested, although it may not produce the expected outcome. Protest presupposes also collective action (Tilly, Tarrow: 2006), citizens do not live in a vacuum, so they aggregate and get organized in order to accomplish what they desire. This is, usually, done through forms of organizations that vary in structures, memberships, scopes, resources, capacity of mobilizations and so on (Della Porta, Diani: 1999). Following Tarrow and Tilly, I mean for protest:

“Episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants” (2007, 438).

“Episodic” refers to the fact that protest does not happen following a fixed schedule, it can happen just occasionally and for specific reasons. “Public” it is used in this definition in order to differentiate all those events that are organized, promoted and sponsored by private organizations. “Collective action” refers to the fact that a multitude of citizens participate, but the benefits of the action are not only distributed among the participants, but also among a wider public. In this sense “collective” refers to the action but also to the result. A mass demonstration may involve thousands of people, but also the non-participants would benefit from that action.

Political participation and, in particular, political protest have “roots”. Several studies pointed out that the determinants of political protests are very similar to those of conventional political action (Barnes, Kaase: 1979; Inglehart: 1990; Norris: 2002). Next

paragraph deals with the factors that influence political participation and therefore a brief illustration of the theories explaining it will be drawn.

3. The determinants of political participation

Many empirical studies assume that political participation is a product of the status of the participants. This approach links individual resources, civic orientations and political participation. For this reason it is called the “socio-economic status model”. Roughly, this approach discovered that high-status citizens live in a social environment that encourages them to participate more to political life than citizens having a lower-status (see Verba, Nie: 1972; Almond, Verba: 1963; Barnes, Kaase: 1979). This approach has been extensively used as a guide to understand how citizens participate and to interpret the attitudes and the types of action that people belonging to different socio-economic status would have and use (Leighley: 1995). Therefore, people participate differently according to their status and the characteristics of the individual affect the decision for participation and the mode for action. This approach focuses deeply on individual characteristics of the participants. The variables used to explain political participation are numerous. In fact, education, income, gender, age have been one of the main insights of this approach (Jennings: 1979). Others have focused more on the effects of race, gender and ethnicity (Verba, Nie: 1972). This model strongly relies on the individual acquisition of resources during the life cycle. It assumes that all the instruments that enable citizens to participate are built up during their life through the experience had in the workplace, in the organizations that people belong to, in the family and in all those places where an exchange of political information is possible¹. This approach, despite being broadly accepted, has some flaws. The first is that there is an overestimation of the relation between civic orientation and political participation. It is in fact almost impossible to link causally political participation and the characteristics of the individuals. The second is that political participation is seen as an atomistic social fact. People participate in political life as aggregates not as individuals. The “atomistic assumption” needs to be taken in order to make the whole approach coherent with the theoretical tenets and the methodology used for the analysis. A third flaw, related with the second, is that this model does not consider the fact that political participation is not just a

¹ This idea relies upon Berelson et al. (1954).

matter of opportunities but also a question of constraints². People in the life cycle and in the societal environment can be pushed towards political activity, but they can, at the same time, be deterred of engaging forms of political participation. This, in my opinion, is related to the fact that some structures, such as political institutions, play an important role in shaping the forms and the variation of political participation across time and space.

The “mobilization model” states that political participation is a product of the context and political opportunities present in the environment in which the individuals live. This model sees political participation as a response to the political opportunities that the context in which the individuals live produces. Social characteristics have still a role in political participation, but they do not have the same function as in the former model. In fact, personal resources structure “individuals’ civic orientations as well as *the level and nature of their political mobilization*” (Leighley: 1995, 189). This approach is more concerned with the external motivation of political participation and the research has dealt mainly on electoral turnout, electoral campaigns and informal political discussion (Gilliam: 1985; Tucker: 1986; Rosenstone, Hansen: 1993). This approach also has a particular interest for social organization (i.e. third-sector organizations, churches) for the fact that they are seen as “mobilizers” of political participation (Rosenstone, Hansen: 1993). This type of organizations give to their members a sort of training which serves as a “tool box” for political activities (Verba, Nie: 1972, 184). The role of groups or organization has been also stressed by those scholars that are interested in social movements. The reason is that groups provide the incentive and the opportunities to participate to political actions because they build informal networks producing a “mobilization potential” (McAdam: 1986). As we have just seen, the mobilization model pays its attention almost exclusively on the political opportunities given by the context. The problem, in my opinion, is the evident lack of attention on the formal institutions that shape opportunities or constraints that may influence political participation. A thread of research studied the effects of these formal institutions, but just taking into account the voters turnout studying the role of electoral or registration laws (Powell: 1986).

Another approach to the study of political participation is to assume rationality in political action. Drawing from Downs (1957), the “rational model” assumes that political participation is a rational phenomenon. Individuals participate to political sphere since they

² Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995) try to go beyond the SES model of political participation focusing more on resources than on social characteristics, but the general assumption there is that non-political institutional settings shape the opportunity for political activities. Therefore there is no reference to politically relevant institution that may exert an influence over the possibility of political participation.

want to achieve defined objectives. They decide to act politically when the costs of the action are lower than the benefits (Aldrich: 1993; Jackman: 1992). So, political participation is just a matter of calculation. Citizens get involved in politics only if it is economically convenient, namely if they can draw from political participation some benefit. This approach has been extensively applied to the study of the electoral turnout and to the act of voting (see Leighley: 1995). Although the attention has been paid principally on the conventional forms of political participation, some studies focused on the rationality of political protest. Some scholars, focusing on protest activities, state that rationality is exerted by a psychological mechanism that stimulates political participation (Finkel, Muller and Opp: 1989). The problem with this approach, in particular in studying political protest, is that the measures of the incentives are often unclear or vague. The choice of the indicators representing the incentives or the benefits of political participation makes them not valid because they measure things that are not incentives. Furthermore, this model studies political participation as product of individuals that evaluate the relationship between costs and benefits, forgetting that the political context is of a great importance and that people often act irrationally. In fact, this model has been challenged by those scholars that pay their attention to the expressive motivations (Melucci: 1988) or to the role of identity in political participation (Pizzorno: 1993).

Although these three approaches are concerned with the problem of constraints and opportunities in political participation, it can be easily noted that these elements come exclusively from society. These determinants emerge from the social context and the studies relying on these factors do not consider the fact that opportunities and incentives may come from political institutions, such as the political and the party system. I argue that individual attitudes or characteristics pushing citizens to participate politically may be shaped not only by the societal context, but also from the political sphere. In a few words, I follow the advice of Giovanni Sartori (1969), that political phenomena should be explained with political variables³. Political participation is an object of study that can be approached from different sides. The sociological literature underlines, correctly, the role of social variables, such as the social status and the role of groups. I think that it is important, in order to understand deeply this phenomenon, adding different factors to the explanation of political

³ I do not fully endorse Sartori's perspective. I think that political variables should not be the only variables taken into account in order to explain political phenomena. Politics can be explained also with sociological, psychological and economical variables. In the case of political protest, I believe that it can be studied *also* with institutional variables, since they have not been considered particularly as being factor of its explanation.

participation. Integrating social and political factors can be a more pregnant way of analysis exactly because the objects is tackled from different sides and it can reveal its different aspects.

This approach, that is not absolutely new, states that political institutions are independent variables of a function in which political protest is the dependent variable. This model argues that political institutions and the structures of the state have an important room in shaping political protest. Citizens, therefore, participate to the political sphere not only because they have a particular status, belong to social organization or, rather, are placed in certain social networks. This approach, in a few words, poses its interest on how political structures and organization can be used as factors of a partial explanation of political participation⁴. An approach which tries to understand how political institutions influence political participation should take care of at least three things. First of all, it should understand how political institutions influence individual behavior, in fact the opportunities and incentives to political participation may be found in the institutional structure of politics (Tilly, Tarrow: 2006). Second, this approach should investigate how political institutions may have a role for the choice of different modes of political participation (Verba, Nie: 1972; Verba, Nie, Kim: 1978). Third, political institutions may have a room in defining individuals' preferences concerning the goals they want to achieve. Preferences are not just produced by socialization or by the experience (Easton: 1957) or within the social groups (Berelson et al.: 1954), but also by political institutions through the policies they promote. The following discussion concerns the role of party systems in shaping political protest.

4. Political protest and party systems

It is important, at this point, to understand the relationship between democracy, party systems and political protest. To begin with, it is useful to see how political participation is included in the definitions of democracy. In procedural definitions of democracy the element of competition is introduced and presupposes forms of political participation in order to achieve political power (Schumpeter: 1942; Dahl: 1971). Procedural definitions have been extensively used in the study of democratic transition and consolidation at a national level. These types of definitions focus more on the procedures that are used in democratic regime, rather than focusing on the content of the policies that these regimes

⁴ For an overview see: Huntington: 1968; Powell: 1986; Powell, Whitten: 1993; Rokkan: 1966, 1970; Rosenstone, Hansen: 1993; Rosenstone, Wolfinger: 1978; Uhlaner: 1989; Verba, Nie, and Kim: 1978.

produce. These definitions are also seen as being "minimal" because they try to incorporate the smallest number of features that make the democratic regime possible. Other scholars have proposed *expanded* definitions of democracy (Collier, Levitsky: 1997), one of which is the following:

“Democracy is a political concept involving several dimensions: (1) contestation over policy and political competition for office; (2) participation of the citizenry through partisan, associational, and other forms of collective action; (3) accountability of rulers to the ruled through mechanisms of representation and the rule of law; and (4) civilian control over the military” (Karl: 1990, 2).

Some publications (Rokkan: 1970; Dahl: 1971) underline the importance of the process of political development in shaping the characteristics of the political regime and, consequently, the structure of political opportunities. As we can see from this definition, political participation is assumed to be a necessary part of a definition of democracy. It can be considered as being a condition without which a regime cannot be classified democratic. Furthermore, another necessary component, directly linked with the previous, is the associational aspect of democracy that refers to the parties' presence, to their functions and roles. Hence, in order to understand how the parties are responsible for the variation of political protest we need to describe briefly their functions. Following the scheme proposed by Key (1964) that divides parties' functions in three sets depending on the context in which these parties operate, we have: (1) Parties in the electorate; (2) Parties as organizations; (3) Parties in Government. The first refers to the fact that parties serve as an organizing device for the voters' political evaluations and judgments (Borre, Katz: 1973). Practically, parties have the role of making politics closer to the citizens and of simplifying the political positions that are that can be chosen in the arena of politics. Moreover, parties mobilize the citizens to participate (Rosenstone, Hansen: 1993) not only as far as the electoral campaign is concerned, but also because parties create identification and socialize citizens to politics (Neumann: 1956). Therefore they “prepare” citizens to activities that are strictly related to the political sphere and that have the aim of influencing the policy making process. The second set of functions concerns the role of parties as organizations. Parties have the function of articulating and aggregating the interests that come from society (Almond et al. 1993). In short, political parties are the speakers through which the citizens can raise their voices and take stands on political issues, trying to have an impact, again, on the governing process. The last set of functions concerns all those activities that parties perform during the process of governing. They create majorities in the government, sustain

the governing process, implement what they have proposed during the electoral campaign, organize the opposition in case they are not part of the government offering an alternative to what the government in office is doing (Dahl: 1966). This last remark points out that parties are responsible for channeling the discontent that grows in the electorate that did not vote for the parties sustaining the government and for organizing the mobilization when the government produces policies that neither the parties at the opposition nor their voters like or favor.

We have just seen that political participation can be achieved, channeled and sustained by the parties. As Dahl puts it (1971, 7), modern democracies can be defined as *polyarchies* that have some procedural features that enable them to account for citizens' demands through two processes: (1) liberalization (public contestation) and (2) inclusiveness (participation). Therefore, extensive participation is essential for democracy, in other words it is an "emancipative essence of democracy" (Wezel et al.: 2006, 875). There is an interdependence between the rules that allow political participation and the outcome that the political system is able to produce. Party systems are, therefore, strictly connected to civil society. Following Rokkan (1970), party systems origin and consolidate on social cleavages, so they are the means through which representation takes place. Furthermore, the meaning of participation reminds to the role of subjects that have an intermediate position between civil society and the governmental institutions. Political parties are the organizations of citizens that aggregate the interests and defend and promote them towards the constituted-elected authority (Schmitter: 2000). Briefly, "modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties" (Schattschneider: 1942, 1).

Parties shape and structure political participation in order to achieve a influence towards the policy makers and the rulers. The activities of the intermediate organizations and, in particular, of parties are addressed to those institutions that have the function of regulation social life. In fact, "citizens in Western democracies are represented *through and by* parties [...] this is inevitable" (Sartori: 1968, 471, italics in original). The roles of the parties are manifold (Della Porta: 2001, 16-19), but one these is relevant for this analysis. This role is the function of the *aggregation* and *articulation* of interests, parties have the task of gathering the relevant issues that emerge from civil society, they select what is important to be pursued, in order to make them eligible of public attention (Almond, Powell: 1966). Parties are those instruments able to structure and organize people's needs and desires and that can, through election, achieve political power and then satisfy citizens' will.

But, what if parties are not able to pursue this task? Easton (1965) called the problems of inefficient response towards citizens “content stress” or “overload”. The first is the inability of political system to cope with the inputs and demands that citizens ask either because of the procedures or because of the content. The second is the incapability to respond to the citizens’ demand because of their quantity, since the political system has a limited capacity to examine the inputs. The same concern was expressed by Huntington and colleagues (1975) referring to the potential capacity of disruption that too many demands can have on political systems. Therefore, if parties are not capable of structuring and aggregating the demands, forms of dissatisfaction can emerge. The idea is that the structure and the characteristics of a party system can affect the amount and intensity of contentious politics in a given country. This idea relies upon the political opportunity structure literature (Tilly: 1978, Tarrow: 1998). I suppose that the structure of the political system influences the mobilization of groups in a society. In other words, there is a relationship between the features of a system and the capacity of the groups acting in a society to get organized. The political opportunities that political/intermediate group have to draw on policy making depend on the characteristics of the political systems, in this case to the characteristics of the party system.

We have seen above that political parties have the important role, in democracies, of being the jointing point between the societal sphere and the political sphere. The idea here is that a party system that does not perform its functions will produce a higher amount of protest since it is not able to channel and aggregate the interests of citizens. A party system that is not trusted by the citizens, that is not able to organize the discontent, which does not articulate the interests, which is not, briefly, capable of linking society and politics is not doing what it is called to do. The idea behind this paper is that *party systems’ characteristics affect political protest*. Some scholars argue that strong party systems are more effective in controlling the legitimacy of the political system, and therefore they contribute relevantly to the stability of the democratic regime (Huntington: 1968). In this perspective, a strong party system is able to moderate and channel political participation. Instead other scholars argue that the strength of a party system can produce centrifugal and immoderate politics (Sartori: 1976). In order to evaluate the role of party systems it is useful to present a definition of it and then to illustrate some criteria for describing them. The following definition put its emphasis in the parts that make up the system:

“Parties make for a ‘system’ [...] only when they are parts (in the plural); and a party system is precisely the system of interactions resulting from inter-party

competition. That is, the system in question bears on the relatedness of parties to each other, on how each party is a function (in the mathematical sense) of the other parties and react, competitively or otherwise, to the other parties” (Sartori: 1976, 44).

This definition clearly states that the system is more than the mere sum of its parts, so we need to identify the dimensions of a party system. First of all, the degree of *homogeneity* or *heterogeneity* of the parties making up the party system. If the parties are heterogeneous, the system will be less integrated. For example, strong ideological distance between the parties may produce a bad functioning of the system. Second, the *salience* or the *importance* of the party system for the political system⁵. It is possible to analyze the importance of the party system relating the parties to the degree of differentiation of society and to the degree of institutionalization of political, social and economic structures. Third, party systems can be studied by their performance, their *efficiency*, the ability to cope with and to answer to the demands that come from the citizens. Fourth, they can be analyzed on the grounds of the *receptivity*, the capacity of acknowledging the citizens’ issues and promoting the participation of the citizens as much as possible (Pasquino: 2004, 878-879). To conclude on this point I would like to quote an excerpt that perfectly represent the relationship between parties and the sphere of contentious politics:

“[The] party structure is probably the single most important variable for understanding the pattern of social movements. Movements can only be understood as one part of a range of options that also includes political parties. Movements compete with parties. Movements infiltrate parties. Parties spin off movements, either deliberately or in the process of factionalizing. Movements appear within parties. Movements become parties. Both are organizational forms for pursuing political ends, so it is not surprising they are so closely intertwined” (Garner, Zald: 1987, 312).

In the next paragraph I illustrate the analysis which was carried out.

5. The analysis and the findings

As already stated in the introduction, in this paper I test some hypotheses:

Hp₁: The more the party system is fractionalized, the more the citizens join political protests.

Hp₂: The more the party system is polarized, the more the citizens join political protests.

⁵ Following Sartori, the important parties are those which effectively “count” (1976).

Hp₃: The fractionalization of the party system, holding constant the difference between Western and Eastern European countries or the government effectiveness, increases the amount of citizens joining political protests.

Hp₄: The polarization of the party system, holding constant the difference between Western and Eastern European countries or the government effectiveness, increases the amount of citizens join political protests.

We can expect that the amount of citizens joining in political is lower in Western Europe because the party systems are facing different challenges (Luther, Mueller-Rommel: 2002), while in post-Communist countries the party systems is still in evolution an may be the representation of both old and new cleavages. For this reason, I think that it is very important to control for Western and Central-Eastern European countries because some of them have experienced, in terms of time, longer democracies, while others recently experienced a transition to democracy and can be considered consolidated, but still their democracies are in the making. By doing this, I attempt to understand if a characteristic of the party systems affect the level of protests in these countries.

The depend variable is measured using a question present in the European Values Survey and the World Values Survey:

“Now I’d like you to look at this card. I’m going to read out some different forms of political actions that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it.

- Signing a petition
- Joining in boycotts
- Attending lawful demonstration
- Joining in unofficial strikes
- Occupying buildings or factories”⁶

This question simply measures the quantity of people that have done, that would do or that would never do the cited forms of political participation. For the purpose of the paper, just the variables referring to the attendance to lawful demonstrations, joining in unofficial strikes and occupying building or factories are used, taking into consideration just the people that actually made these acts. For measuring the political protest I created an index calculated by the mean of respondents that attended lawful demonstrations, joined in unofficial strikes and occupied building or factories. The countries’ scores for these variables are built by calculating the percentage, for each country, of people who participated to the mentioned action.

⁶ The question is quoted from the Great Britain questionnaire (1999).

To measure party system fractionalization, the index proposed by Rae (1968) has been used. It looks at the number of parties and their relative size, in fact it is an index based on both these variables. The idea behind the design of such an index was that the universe of party system sizes is continuous and that scholars thus needed a continuous measure rather than setting numerical criteria in order to identify different classes of party systems⁷. The polarization index measures “the maximum difference between the left-right-center orientation of the chief executive’s party and the placement of the three largest government parties and the largest opposition party” (Teorell et al: 2010, 86). The fractionalization and the polarization indexes are built using the mean of the scores that each country has had since 1960. For the post-Communist countries, the scores were available only after 1990/1991, therefore just index score has been calculated using the available data. The selected cases for the analysis are European countries both Western and post-Communist countries⁸. This choice has been taken in order to understand how the relation between the dependent and the independent variable varies including a dummy variable for Western/post-Communist countries. Furthermore, another control variable, the government effectiveness, has been used. This has been done to take under control the fact that protest may be affected by the capacity of a government to perform the functions which belong to it. Government effectiveness is measured by an index produced by the World Bank focusing on the inputs required by a government which allows it to produce public policies (Kaufmann et al.: 2008).

In order to test H_{p1} , I ran Model 1 (see table 1). In this model I included all the countries without controlling for Western and post-Communist countries of the level of government effectiveness. This was done to have a general scenario of political protest in Europe.

⁷ Data come from: Armingeon K., Engler S., Gerber M., Leimgruber P., Beyeler M. (2009). Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2007, Institute of Political Science, University of Berne; Armingeon K., Careja R. (2007). Comparative Data Set for 28 Post-Communist Countries, 1989-2007, Institute of Political Science, University of Berne; European and World Values Surveys four-wave integrated data file, 1981-2004, v.20060423, 2006. Surveys designed and executed by the European Values Study Group and World Values Survey Association. File Producers: ASEP/JDS, Madrid, Spain and Tilburg University, Tilburg, the Netherlands. File Distributors: ASEP/JDS and GESIS, Cologne, Germany; Teorell, J., Charron, N., Samanni, M., Holmberg, S., and Rothstein, B. (2009). The Quality of Government Dataset, version 17June09. University of Gothenburg: The Quality of Government Institute, <http://www.qog.pol.gu.se>.

⁸ Albania (WVS 2000), Austria (EVS 1999), Belgium (EVS 1999), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria (EVS 1999), Croatia (EVS 1999), Czech Republic (EVS 1999), Denmark (EVS 1999), Estonia (EVS 1999), Finland (EVS 1999), France (EVS 1999), Germany (EVS 1999), Great Britain (EVS 1999), Greece (EVS 1999), Hungary (EVS 1999), Iceland (EVS 1999), Ireland (EVS 1999), Italy (EVS 1999), Latvia (EVS 1999), Lithuania (EVS 1999), Luxembourg (EVS 1999), Macedonia (WVS 2000), Netherlands (EVS 1999), Norway (WVS 1995), Poland (EVS 1999), Portugal (EVS 1999), Romania (EVS 1999), Slovakia (EVS 1999), Slovenia (EVS 1999), Spain (EVS 1999), Sweden (EVS 1999), Switzerland (WVS 1995), Ukraine (WVS 2000).

Model 1 shows us that an increase of one in the fractionalization of the party system will produce an increase in political protest of 48%. So, the more a party system is fractionalized and the more people join demonstrations. This result shows that there is a direct relation between the dependent and the independent variable.

The second hypothesis was tested with model 2. With this model I tried to understand if the relation between political demonstrations and the polarization of the party system is present in this set of countries. Looking at the results, we can notice that the increase of polarization of the party system affects the amount of citizens joining political demonstration of 41%. Alike in the previous hypothesis, also here this characteristic of the party system has a significant effect of demonstrations.

Table 1. Regression of political protest index against fractionalization, polarization, countries and HDI.

Variables	Index of Political Protest					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Index of fractionalization	0.483*** (0.123)		0.253 (0.208)	0.482** (0.186)		
Index of polarization		0.409*** (0.146)			0.171 (0.152)	0.315 (0.201)
Western European country			0.561 (0.410)		0.809** (0.301)	
Government effectiveness				0.006 (0.186)		0.146 (0.216)
Constant	-0.138 (0.122)	-0.124 (0.143)	-0.433 (0.256)	-0.138 (0.125)	-0.511** (0.210)	-0.122 (0.147)
Observations	33	31	33	33	31	31
R-squared	0.330	0.214	0.354	0.327	0.349	0.220

Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Note: The analysis has been performed using robust regression. Political protest index is created adding the items: attending lawful demonstration, joining in unofficial strikes, occupying buildings or factories (Cronbach's alpha= 0.6626). All the variables are standardized, except Western European country.

This means that a party system that produces different orientations amongst itself also produces a higher amount of political demonstrators. Since the relation between the dependent and the independent variable is positive, we can apply the same consideration formulated for the first hypothesis. The third hypotheses has been tested with model 3 and 4. Model 3 assesses the relation between political protest and the fractionalization of the party system, controlling for the countries. Assuming that there is not any difference between Western and Eastern European countries, the impact of the fractionalization of the party system on political protest is not significant. On the other hand, controlling for the level of government effectiveness (model 4), we can notice that political protest has an increase of about 48% and the coefficient has a significance. Therefore, this hypothesis is not fully confirmed, the two assumptions made in the two models bring to different results. When the countries are held constant, the fractionalization of the party system does not have

an impact on protest, while when the government effectiveness is assumed constant, the independent variable has a relevant impact on the independent one.

Nonetheless, if we consider the set of cases as a universe it is possible to argue that the relation between the fractionalization and the political protest is positive, although not significant⁹. What is important to say is that the control variables have an important role in understanding the relations between these two characteristics of the party system and political protest. Assuming that the countries are the same does not help us in understanding the relation between protests and the party system features, while the other assumption is much more relevant. This could mean that, although being a citizen of a Western European country is a significant determinant for understanding the variation of protests, the difference between countries is not helpful to predict political protest, while the difference in government effectiveness is much more relevant for the analysis and the findings.

Model 5 and 6 have the aim of testing the last hypothesis, that is that a relation between the amount of citizens attending political demonstrations and the polarization of the party system exists. Holding the countries constant, we see that party system does not have a significant effect on the amount of citizens that undertake political protest actions, although the relation is positive. The results coming from model 6 are similar to those coming out from the previous model. In fact, when we hold constant the government effectiveness, we see that an increase in polarization produces an increase in political protests of 31%, but the coefficient is not significant. Therefore this hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

What we do notice is that fractionalization is a more relevant variable to understand the variation of political protest. In fact, this has a bigger explicative power than the variable polarization. This could be interpreted by the fact that the first measure is based upon the number of parties and their relative size, while the second is more concerned on the orientation of the parties that are present in the system. Therefore, it could be said that the structure of the party system is a more important predictor of political protest than the parties' positions or orientations.

6. Conclusion

Parties can be considered as being the links between the political system and the citizens. The latter communicate with the former through the party system, making requests, raising

⁹ For a discussion on regression analysis on a universe sample, see Berk, R. (2004).

issues, asking for rights, looking for new policies. In this paper I argued that it is important to include in the explanations of political protest also the institutional elements that make up the political system and in particular the party system. Therefore, my argument is that if the party system does not perform well, it can be responsible for the increase of political protest. The party systems, if fractionalized, polarized, with a high number of parties, with an inefficient electoral law, can be a cause of discontent exactly because parties cannot perform well their functions. *Inter alia*, one of their main functions is the transmission of the wishes and desires of the electorate. Therefore, in this paper I argued that potentially ineffective party systems produce higher level of political protest. For this reason I tested my hypotheses. The first two tested models tells us that there is a significant relation between the amount of citizens that participate to political protest and the fractionalization and the polarization of the party system. The difference between fractionalization and polarization is that the former explains more variance than the latter.

The analysis also tells us that the difference between these countries does not account for the fractionalization of the party systems. In other word, adding the dummy variable does not help us to understand the relation between party systems and political protest. On the other hand, the inclusion in the models of the government effectiveness has an important effect for understanding the relation between protest and party systems.

The results are clear just for some models, but my hypotheses are not fully confirmed. On the one hand, the models illustrate that there is a significant relation between the fractionalization of a party system, the polarization of the party systems and protest. As noted in the previous paragraphs, if a party system is heterogeneous there might be also a high ideological distance between them and for this reason it may be unable to answer efficiently to citizens' requests. This may lead to discontent and to political protest. On the other, this pattern is defined for the first two models, but not for the others. For this reason, I believe that some additional research is needed in order to understand whether this relation holds or not. The analysis underlines that there is a relation between fractionalization, polarization and protest is present among the cases that are included in the model and so a further investigation can be very useful to assess the strength of this relation.

The analysis carried out in this paper should be taken with some precautions. First of all, just a few variables have been included in the model. This, of course, is because the impossibility of retrieving data for building useful indicators of the party systems. Since the hypothesis of a relation between the characteristics of the party system and political protest holds, the analysis should be deepened including different indicators such as the effective

number of political party, the ideological distance between the parties, the relative strength of the opposition, the electoral law, the competitiveness of the parties, the organizational structure of the parties, their representation and so on. Second, a further analysis should enlarge the number of cases. We know that this type of analysis works better with large-N samples, so in case of a new inquiry more cases will be added in order to have a more precise scenario of the relationship between the party system and political protest. Another relevant improvement would be an application of a quantitative causal analysis which allows to identify separate effects of mediation variables that can be worth to be included in the explanatory model (Imai et al.: forthcoming).

To conclude, this paper had the aim of exploring how political protest varies according to some characteristics of the party system. Since the relation seems to exist, I think that further investigation is needed and the path to be followed is the one indicated in this paper.

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