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**PARTY SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN
SERBIA OVER THE COURSE OF THREE
CONSECUTIVE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
(2012, 2014, 2016)**

Title:	Party System Institutionalization in Serbia over the Course of Three Consecutive Parliamentary Elections (2012, 2014, 2016)
Abstract:	<p><i>Political scientists often consider transitional party systems are less institutionalized than those in more developed democracies. In this context, the paper will examine the impact of different factors on the level of party system institutionalization in Serbia, over the course of three recent electoral cycles.</i></p> <p><i>For this purpose, authors will create Index of institutionalization, a tool for measuring the changes of relevant factors in three individual time points (2012, 2014, and 2016). Index will include: electoral volatility (vote transfer between the cycles); strength of party identification; strength of ideological and organizational linkages between voters and parties (as oppose to more personal links between voters and leaders); and level of trust in political parties.</i></p> <p><i>Moreover, not just due to the relatively large number of political parties in electoral competition, but also because of widespread tendency of excessive coalition making in Serbia, the index will also include factors determining the fragmentation of party system. The latter will be determined on the basis of measuring Laakso-Taagepera Index of effective political parties in legislature, calculated for 2012, 2014, and 2016.</i></p> <p><i>Depending on trends of the index, authors will draw conclusions on the process of party system institutionalization – in connection not just to the frequent elections, but also to the overall stability of Serbian political system.</i></p>
Keywords:	Serbia; elections; early elections; party system; institutionalization; electoral volatility; fragmentation
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Introduction

While we are writing this paper, final results of the 2016 parliamentary, provincial and local elections in Serbia are being determined. Citizens of Serbia went to the polling booths for the eleventh time since the reintroduction of multiparty system in 1990, which is an extremely high number for a period of 26 years. Elections were held in 1990, 1992, 1993, 1997 and also, after the toppling of authoritarian Milosevic regime, in 2000, 2003, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2016. Current election, like many other in a short history of renewed democracy in Serbia, were called earlier than expected, this time by the ruling party, which already controlled a stable majority in Serbian parliament. Just the sole frequency of parliamentary elections (not counting all the local, provincial and presidential voting organized over the same period) implies unconsolidated state of Serbian democracy.

As the results are being announced, it is clear that incumbent ruling party (Serbian Progressive Party – srb. *Srpska napredna stranka*) is again a clear winner with more than fifty percent of parliamentary seats taken. This is hardly a surprise – the party merely repeated the result from 2014 election. While it is highly unusual for one list in proportional electoral system to win an absolute majority of seats,¹ the result does not prove the stable state of Serbian political system, and more specifically, of party system. Serbian Progressive Party was formed only eight years ago, in 2008, and in a short period of time has managed to position itself as a crucial actor in Serbian political scene. Moreover, parties who spearheaded the overthrow of Milosevic regime in the year 2000, and have formed several governments in the first decade of the new millennium, now find themselves strained at the very brink of the electoral threshold.²

How can we explain these frequent and tectonic changes in the party dynamics? Since the year 2000, democracy in Serbia has been consolidated at the level of free and fair elections, which is a substantially lower degree not just than Western democracies, but also than many other new democracies which emerged after the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. Unlike the hybrid regime of electoral authoritarianism prevalent in Serbia during the last decade of the twentieth century, where the electoral competition was subject of manipulation, the electoral processes after the year 2000 can be evaluated as free and fair. Electoral democracy is present because all of the actors involved in the process, both victorious and defeated, accept the voting results as the sole method of seat allocation. Moreover, violations of basic civil and political rights, such as freedom of association, of assembly, of press and free speech, that were so common during the first decade of Serbian multipartism, are now rare. Finally, there are no discriminatory norms or regulations that could favor one party in the electoral race. Therefore, the aim of democratic consolidation in Serbia is no longer the sole survival of democracy, but further democratic progress.

Current electoral democracy in Serbia possesses several specific features. We believe that one of the core characteristics of Serbian politics is extremely low level of party system institutionalization. Can the aforementioned democratic progress be achieved despite the absence of institutionalized party system? Different authors argued that parties are indispensable for the survival of democracy,³ being the central brokers between society and state.

¹ As argued in: Sona Nadenichek Golder, *The Logic of Pre-Electoral Coalition Formation*, The Ohio State University Press, 2006, pp. 23-37.

² Results for 2016 (as well as all the other years) are available on the website of the Republic Electoral Commission: <http://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/index>

.php (01. 05. 2016). Note that the results of April 24th 2016 election, cited throughout the paper, are still preliminary.

³ Seymour Martin Lipset, *The Indispensability of Political Parties*, „Journal of Democracy“, No. 1, Vol. 11, 2000, pp. 48-55.

The aim of this paper is to examine the level and impact of party system institutionalization in Serbia. We will focus on defining the institutionalization and establishing the methods of operationalization and measurement of its level. Moreover, we will measure the level of institutionalization in three individual time points (2012, 2014, and 2016) – corresponding with the last three electoral cycles. While doing that, we can monitor the trends of this important attribute of party system in relation to the core political changes in short period of time. Moreover, we will not just gain insight in development of institutionalization through the electoral cycles, but also draw conclusion on whether the Serbian party system is headed for higher levels of institutionalization over time: towards more stable party system and, subsequently, consolidated democracy.⁴

Party system institutionalization

It is widely believed that one of the most important distinctions between party systems of less developed democracies and those of advanced democracies can be identified in the level of party system institutionalization.⁵ Party systems of new democracies and transitional countries in general are thought to be less institutionalized (in comparison to Western liberal democracies), with their institutionalization being critical to the process of democratic consolidation. This is especially the case with former communist countries. One of the most appealing explanations when analyzing lower levels of institutionalization in post-communist party systems regards the

unexpected breakdown of monolithic communist societies as the prime cause of today's fragility of political systems. The so-called tabula rasa perspective⁶ assumes that decades of communist system leveled social and economic differences in the countries in question, incidentally leveling the intermediary structures of former party cleavages and stable social links between voters and parties as well. Furthermore, sudden economic, political and societal (and, in cases of former socialist Yugoslavia, national) transformations created uncertainty and unpredictability within the society, which in turn delayed creation of patterned political preferences. Finally, transitional societies tackled issues of institutional, economic, social, cultural and political change simultaneously, thus making difficult for voters to define their party affiliations, which consequentially produced weak political identities that are evident even today.

Third wave of democracy, more precisely, the disappointment in the protracted transition process, brought about an ironic twist – growing distrust of citizens towards certain democratic institutions. In number of cases, this is most visible in the rising distrust in political parties.⁷ Moreover, lack of confidence in political elites is evident even in developed industrial democracies, not just through the constant erosion of party memberships and weakening of party identifications,⁸ but also in the electoral results – the success of populist, anti-system and protest parties in number of established democracies all over Europe.⁹

⁴ Several authors claim that the stable party system also induces consolidated democracy. See for example: Larry Diamond, *Introduction: Roots of Failure, Seeds of Hope*, in: Larry Diamond et al. (eds.), *Democracy in Developing Countries: Africa*, Boulder, 1988, pp. 1-32; also: Scott Mainwaring, *Party Systems in the Third Wave*, „Journal of Democracy“, No. 3, Vol. 9, 1998, pp. 57-81.

⁵ Scott Mainwaring, Mariano Torcal, *Party system institutionalization and party system theory after the third wave of democratization*, Working Paper No. 319, Kellogg Institute, 2005, p. 1.

⁶ Based on: Jack Bielasiak, *The Institutionalization of Electoral and Party Systems in Postcommunist States*, „Comparative Politics“, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2002, pp. 190-191.

⁷ See: Pippa Norris (ed.), *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁸ Dalton, Rusell, *Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, in: Pippa Norris (ed.), „Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance“, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 65-66.

⁹ National Front in France, Five Star Movement in Italy, PVV in Netherlands, Vlaams Belang in

Party system, as defined by Mainwaring,¹⁰ is a system of interactions that takes place as a result of inter-party competition. This definition also implies continuity of key components of the system - in other words, stability in patterns of party competition.¹¹ Sartori has differentiated party systems according to two criteria: fragmentation, i.e. number of parties (stipulating the difference between two-party and multi-party systems) and ideological polarization within the spectrum (which can be moderate or extreme).¹² With the emergence of new democracies in the third wave of democratization, the need for additional criteria of differentiation has recently become apparent. In that context, level of institutionalization has been identified as important dimension for analyzing and understanding the party systems.

There is no universally recognized definition of institutionalization among political scientists. Huntington, for example, says that institutionalization is process in which organizations and procedures gain value and stability.¹³ Value-infusion part of this definition is debatable, because it implies evaluation of institutions based on value judgment. Furthermore, when operationalizing institutionalization as quantitative variable, precise measuring of values and their influence can lead to subjective and arbitrary evaluations. On the other hand, Bertoa considers party system institutionalization as the process by which the patterns of interaction among parties become predictable, routine and stable over time.¹⁴ In this context, it might be

possible for us to measure stability by quantitative means, through operationalization of the sub-variables of predictable party behavior and broader, of overall stability of the party system.

Measuring the party system institutionalization

Several authors have already defined various measurements for determination of the level of party system institutionalization. The most important concept in this sense is the notion of system stability, which is considered as a crucial attribute of institutionalized party systems. Simply stated, the position, strength and behavior of main parties in institutionalized party system are evident and predictable, and this setup in turn produces clear expectations in party competition process. Also, in this context, radical changes in party configuration are limited and certainly not expressed over short periods of time.

Scott Mainwaring proposes four dimensions of analyzing party system institutionalization: stability and regularity of party competition patterns, strength of party roots in society, legitimacy of political parties and importance of party organization (as opposed to importance of party leaders).¹⁵ Mainwaring identified substantial differences among these four categories between advanced and unconsolidated democracies, finding that most of the advanced liberal democracies feature high level of party system institutionalization.¹⁶ Other authors draw from this concept, adding different indicators to the four categories aforementioned. For example, Basedau and Stroh measure institutionalization through four dimensions: roots in society, level of organization, autonomy of political parties

Belgium, Podemos in Spain, UKIP, Alternative for Germany – to name just a few.

¹⁰ See: Scott Mainwaring, *Party Systems in the Third Wave*, „Journal of Democracy“, No. 3, Vol. 9, 1998, pp. 57-81.

¹¹ Scott Mainwaring, *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹² Djovani Sartori, *Stranke i stranacki sustavi*, Politicka kultura, Zagreb, 2002.

¹³ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Yale University Press, 1968, p. 12.

¹⁴ Fernando Casal Bertoa, *Parties, regime and cleavages: explaining party system*

institutionalization in East Central Europe, „East European Politics“, Vol. 28, No.4, 2012, p. 453.

¹⁵ Scott Mainwaring, *Rethinking party systems theory in the third wave of democratization: The importance of party system institutionalization*, Working Paper No. 260, Kellogg Institute, 1998, pp. 8-11.

¹⁶ Scott Mainwaring, *Op.Cit.*

and their coherence.¹⁷ J. P. Luna avoids measuring of Mainwaring's fourth dimension (party organization), while separating the variable of party rootedness into several sub-indicators, which include: age of parties, congruence of executive and legislative elections, identification with parties, ideological linkages between parties and voters and results of non-partisan or anti-system candidates in elections.¹⁸ Some authors have been using the electoral volatility as a sole indicator. Others added party fragmentation to the formula, assessing that party systems with extreme fragmentation cannot be considered institutionalized.¹⁹ For the purpose of this paper, we will consider the impact of five common indicators on party system institutionalization: electoral volatility, rootedness in society (party identification), social legitimacy, importance of party organization and finally, party system fragmentation.

Volatility

Electoral volatility is often considered to be synonymous with the concept of party competition stability. Volatility could be defined as the change in voting behavior between elections. Simply said, it is an absolute difference in (percentage of) votes received by each party between elections.

Mainwaring, along with many other authors, highlights the importance of this indicator, stating that systems with extreme volatility are most likely under-institutionalized.²⁰ Oscillations in election results indicate absence of structured

interactions between parties and citizens, high instability of party system and, subsequently, low level of institutionalization. Furthermore, stable party systems are characterized by regular patterns of competition, with constant number of parties competing in elections and winning stable support of voters over longer periods of time.

As stated before, volatility indicates total fluctuation of votes between political parties relative to previous electoral cycle. It is measured via Pedersen Index, which adds all gains and losses in percentage of votes, dividing their sum in two. The resulting index can vary between values of 0 (identical result repeated by all parties) and 100 (all parties from the last election lost all votes, and new parties emerged and gained total support of voters).²¹

As for Serbia, we have calculated the Pedersen Index of volatility for all the elections since the year 2000 (Table 1). Prior elections have been held during the authoritarian regime and hence do not constitute viable points for our analysis.

Table 1. Pedersen Index for Serbian parliamentary elections (2003-2016)

Elections	Electoral Volatility
2003	47.60%
2007	22.29%
2008	20.72%
2012	27.56%
2014	32.98%
2016	15.03%

The results are consistent with tendencies prevalent in former communist states, which are all prone to high volatility. Voters in these countries usually have many available options on the ballot, and often shift the public support for political parties, which results with high

¹⁷ See: Matthias Basedau, Alexander Stroh, *Measuring Party Institutionalization in Developing Countries: A New Research Instrument Applied to 28 African Political Parties*, German Institute of Global and Area Studies, 2008.

¹⁸ Juan Pablo Luna, *Party System Institutionalization: Do We Need a New Concept?*, „Studies in Comparative International Development“, Vol. 49, Issue 4, 2014, p. 407.

¹⁹ Sergiu Gherghina, George Jigla, *The Ideological Institutionalization of the Romanian Party System*, „Romanian Journal of Political Science“, 11(1), 2011, pp. 75-81.

²⁰ Scott Mainwaring, Mariano Torcal, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 10-11.

²¹ For further explanations, see: Mogens Pedersen, *Electoral Volatility in Western Europe, 1948-1977, 1979*. Available on Kenneth Janda's webpage: <http://janda.org/c24/Readings/Pedersen/Pedersen.htm> (01.05.2016).

swings in vote percentage over relatively short periods of time.²²

High volatility in Serbia, especially when comes to last three electoral cycles, can be explained if we consider the patterns of competitions. Namely, incumbent ruling party (Serbian Progressive Party) emerged in late 2008, gaining popularity ever since. In the last two electoral cycles (2014 and 2016), this party gained prevalent support of voters (48.35% and 48.24%, respectively). Their growth and stable support over the last two cycles can explain not just the high volatility in 2014 but also the lowest volatility ever recorded in 2016. Moreover, parties such as Democratic Party and Democratic Party of Serbia, which in turn lead consecutive governments formed in 2000, 2003, 2007 and 2008, find themselves strained at the brink of electoral threshold (which stands at five percent of votes) in the last two cycles. Finally, the Serbian Radical Party, once the strongest opposition party, underwent a huge loss of votes since the establishment of Serbian Progressive Party, which emerged from their party ranks. The Radicals result ranges from 29.46% in 2008 election, through loss of all seats in 2012 and 2014 (4.62% and 2.01% respectively), to comeback with 8.11% in recent 2016 election.

These results indicate unstructured patterns of party competition and voters' preferences. Nevertheless, stable growth and subsequent result of one party (Serbian Progressive Party) indicates the possible trend of institutionalization of party system, especially if we consider the Pedersen Index result for 2016 elections – which is the lowest in the period of free and fair elections in Serbia, since the year 2000.

Legitimacy

In institutionalized advanced democracies, voters see parties as both

necessary and desirable institutions, which intermediate between the society and the government.²³ This constitutes the social legitimacy or social credibility of political parties, which transfers to party system in general.

Legitimacy can be measured as a level of confidence in political parties. We have compared different surveys done in Serbia for three electoral years in our analysis (Table 2). Values are standardized on the scale ranging from 0 (no confidence at all) to 3 (full confidence in parties).

Table 2. Level of confidence in Serbian political parties²⁴

Elections	Level of confidence
2012	0.55
2014	0.92
2016	0.67

As evident, the trust in political parties is low, apparently peaking in the year 2014. Once more, this trend can be explained with the initial surge in popularity of Serbian Progressive Party, which produced high confidence of their voters (more than 48% in 2014) in politics in general. Although this party repeated almost identical result in the 2016 election, the level of confidence decreased, which, albeit currently it did not convey to the amount of votes received, can be considered as a sign of voters' fatigue, and can indicate further changes in both stability and institutionalization of Serbian party system in future electoral cycles.

²³ Dusan Vucicevic, *Uloga politickih partija u procesu konsolidacije demokratije u Srbiji*, „Politicka revija“, 3/2012, pp. 57-58.

²⁴ Due to the infrequency of similar surveys in Serbia, the data has been taken from three different sources: for 2012, *European Values Study*, available at: <http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>, (01.05.2016); for 2014, from the report *Stanje demokratije u Srbiji* (State of democracy in Serbia), available at: <http://www.izbornareforma.rs/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Stanje-demokratije-u-Srbiji-Izve%C5%A1taj-2014.pdf> (01.05.2016); and finally, for 2016, from the yet unpublished public survey done by Centar za drustvena istrazivanja (Center for social research).

²² Jack Bielasiak, *The Institutionalization of Electoral and Party Systems in Postcommunist States*, „Comparative Politics“, Vol. 34, No. 2, 2002, pp. 200-201.

Roots in society

Party roots in society create stronger bonds between voters and parties over the longer periods of time, resulting in stable support patterns. Rooted parties hold to their societal positions and rarely cross between both ideologies and traditional support groups, which results in more institutionalized party systems.²⁵ The prevalent method of measuring the party rootedness is identification of citizens with political parties, either through surveys or through exact data on party membership. This could be considered as problematical in Serbia. First of all, very limited amount of research of party identification has been done, especially in requested time sequence (2012 – 2016). Furthermore, there are no certain indicators regarding the party membership.²⁶ Most of the studies are done arbitrarily and without exact figures, while the political parties cite drastically exaggerated membership data, most likely for purposes of self-promotion. Serbian parties do not possess transparent membership registers, with most of them also having unregulated membership databases. Finally, membership exclusion mechanisms are underdeveloped and rarely exercised in Serbian parties, which all together results with absurd situations, where one citizen can be a member of multiple political parties simultaneously. For all these reasons, operationalization of party membership as an indicator in assessing party system institutionalization in Serbia would not be particularly helpful.

Second method considers the strength of ideological preferences of voters in relation to parties' positions on ideological scales. However, even if we ignore the ideological fluidity of Serbian parties and manage to categorize them on left-right scale, these types of surveys on ideological

preferences of citizens are extremely rare in Serbian political science, and could not answer the needs of our analysis.

On the grounds of absent data, we must omit the category of party identification from our composite Index of party system institutionalization and settle for other indicators available. Based on the electoral results in the last decade, we could argue that party rootedness is generally low, with parties emerging and disappearing without clear patterns. Moreover, we could support this claim with the fact that electoral competition in Serbia is not primarily based on programmatic differences or ideological cleavages.²⁷

Importance of party organization

Parties in institutionalized party systems tend to be well organized, with coherent internal structure and procedures, and also routinized mechanisms for electing their leadership. The organization prevents parties from being subordinated to short term electoral interests of ambitious leaders.²⁸ Strong degree of personalization in internal decision making and external image of the party indicates low level of institutionalization. As a result, links between voters and parties in those systems are more personal, based on individual attributes of party leaders, and without much regard to the party identity, organization, rootedness, ideology or even electoral manifesto. Parties in new democracies tend to serve as an instrument for exercise of personal ambitions, while the party organization remains fundamentally underdeveloped.²⁹ Related to the previous indicator, the party identification, it is often considered that the importance of personality tends to be higher in societies where party roots are

²⁵ Dusan Vucicevic, *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

²⁶ See: Mirjana R. Milenkovic, *Svaki peti gradjanin clan neke stranke*, "Danas", 08 .09. 2009. Available at: http://www.danas.rs/danasrs/hronika/postovanje_us_tava_dovelo_do_krsenja_manjinskih_prava.3.html?news_id=87790 (01.05.2016)

²⁷ See: Dejan Bursac, *Predizborne koalicije: ideologija ili interes?*, in: Milan Jovanovic, Dusan Vucicevic (eds.), *Izbori u Srbiji 2014 – Politicka rokada*, Institut za politicke studije, Beograd, 2014, pp. 53-69.

²⁸ Scott Mainwaring, *Op. cit.*, p.10.

²⁹ Dusan Vucicevic, *Op. cit.*, p. 54-55.

weakly established, summarily producing less institutionalized party systems.

Authoritarian tendencies are evident in almost every Serbian political party. It is reflected not just through the untouchable position of leader, but also through the ignoring of internal structures and democratic procedures, prohibition of party factions, ideological and programmatic pragmatism spearheaded individually by the leaders. Furthermore, the leadership positions are reinforced by the delegate system effective in prevalent number of parties: both party functions and parliamentary or government seats are being allocated by party heads, according to their personal preferences and loyalties. This system is manifested over long period of time in almost every Serbian party, and is especially visible in terms of longevity and irreplaceability of party elites. If all the parties manifest the same models of authoritarian behavior, we can conclude that the indicator of party organization is having a negligible effect on the composite Index of party system institutionalization.³⁰

Fragmentation

Giovanni Sartori considers fragmentation as one of the key factors for assessing party systems, ranging from two-party to multiparty variations in democratic countries.³¹ Several authors have associated high levels of fragmentation with low levels of institutionalization of party system, and vice versa, especially when comes to post-communist Central and Eastern Europe.³² In the context of our paper, fragmentation is operationalized through the effective number of legislative parties, presented as the Laakso-Taagepera Index for years in question (Table 3). Laakso-Taagepera Index³³ is counting

parties not just in their absolute number and strength, but also relative to other parties and their share, resulting with the effective number of parliamentary parties.

Table 3. Laakso-Taagepera Index for Serbian party system

Elections	Effective number of political parties
2012	7.52
2014	3.11
2016	4.51

Observing the effective number of parties in Serbian parliament (Table 3), we can conclude that there are still many relevant actors on the political scene, despite the fact that some reduction is taking place. Although political fragmentation was present during the whole post-authoritarian period (since 2000), the 2014 election brought huge reduction in both effective and nominal number of parties, with just four lists crossing the five percent threshold (along with three national minority parties, which are elected through the positive discrimination mechanism, i.e. natural threshold – which stands roughly at 0.4% of votes). That number was clear decrease from 2012 elections, which saw six majority lists winning seats in parliament, along with five minority lists. The difference is also visible in Laakso-Taagepera Index, corresponding to values of 7.52 in 2012, and 3.11 in 2014. One should also note that six additional lists gained between 2% and 4.5% in 2014 elections, leaving almost 20% of votes below the five percent threshold. In contrast with that, 2016 elections brought seven lists in parliament, along with five minority lists, accounting to twelve lists in total. Although the number of parties is slightly higher than in 2012 election (twelve lists in 2016 compared with eleven in 2012), one should notice that the Laakso-Taagepera Index is much lower. The explanation lies in the nature of Index

³⁰ The decision to omit this variable from the composite index is further reinforced by the fact that the importance of party organization is not systematically examined among the voters in Serbia.

³¹ Djovani Sartori, *Op. cit.*

³² This has been concluded in: Fernando Casal Bertoa, *Op. cit.*; or Jack Bielasiak, *Op. cit.*

³³ For further explanations, see: Markku Laakso, Rein Taagepera, "Effective" number of political

parties: A measure with application to Western Europe, „Comparative Political Studies“, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1979, pp. 3-27.

itself, which measures the relationship between the parties, along with their relative seat strength. Unlike the 2012 election, when neither of the parties in competition crossed the 25% of votes or seats, the 2014 and 2016 elections put forward one party with overall majority. The difference between Index values in 2014 and 2016 therefore accounts for higher number of parties managing to overcome the 5% threshold, which in the last election rose to seven (and twelve in total, if minority lists are counted).

Index of party system institutionalization

Finally, we have computed a composite Index of party system institutionalization, made from variables previously analyzed. As stated before, electoral volatility, legitimacy of political parties (operationalized as level of confidence) and level of fragmentation are included. Due to the lack of research and nontransparent stance of Serbian parties, there is not enough substantial data to include party identification variable. The situation is similar to the party organization variable, which also lacks credible survey data. However, in the case of latter, we can also claim that majority of parties suffers from lack of internal democratic procedures which resulted in prevalent importance of leaders compared to party structure. The phenomenon is exhibited ever since the beginning of political pluralisation in Serbia, so we can omit the variable without interfering in results of our Index.

We used standardized scores of three established variables (Pedersen Index, level of trust in political parties and Laakso-Taagepera Index) for three years in question (2012, 2014, 2016) in order to create our Index. Addition of these scores gave us the final degree of party system institutionalization, as previously done by Bertoa in 2012.³⁴ This author takes stability into account as a key feature, and also uses fragmentation as one of the

constituting variables. Based on previous analysis, we have also included legitimacy, finding that in institutionalized party systems, voters regard parties as necessary institutions of mediation between society and government. Index of party system institutionalization is given in Table 4.

Table 4. Index of party system institutionalization³⁵

Elections	Index of PSI
2012	-0.98
2014	0.30
2016	0.45

Index is clearly showing the rising trend in institutionalization, over the course of last two electoral cycles, especially compared to the value from 2012. Falling level of electoral volatility contributed significantly to the trend, causing the rise in institutionalization. Also, there is an increase in level of confidence and less fragmentation in 2014, but the trend is aborted in 2016, with reduced trust in political parties among citizens and increased number of parliamentary parties. However, due to the repeated electoral success and prevalent

³⁵ Several range control values have been applied in the creation of Index. For electoral volatility, values of 0 (as minimal range) and 65 (as maximum range) have been set (0 as the lowest possible swing in votes, and 65 as highest Pedersen Index value ever recorded in post-communist country, in 2000 Lithuanian parliamentary election, where incumbent conservative coalition lost almost all seats to opposition parties). See: Brad Epperly, *Institutions and Legacies: Electoral Volatility in the Postcommunist World*, „Comparative Political Studies“, Vol. 44, No. 7, 2011, pp. 829-853. For fragmentation, values range from 1 (smallest possible number of effective parties in parliament) to 10.5 (highest Laakso-Taagepera Index ever recorded, after 1991 parliamentary elections in Poland, when 29 parties entered the parliament). See: Radoslaw Markowski, *EU Membership and the Polish Party System*, in: Paul Lewis, Zdenka Mansfeldova (eds.), *The EU and the Party Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 129. As stated before, confidence level values are set in range between 0 (no confidence at all) and 3 (full confidence). Final Index of party system institutionalization values have been inverted, so the higher values indicate higher levels of institutionalization, and vice versa.

³⁴ Fernando Casal Bertoa, *Op.cit.*, pp. 453-454.

majority of one political party, the Laakso-Taagepera Index is much lower than the nominal number of parties suggests. Fluctuation of votes has proved to have the most significant impact when comes to increased institutionalization in 2016, with record-low level of volatility causing the steep fall of Pedersen Index and, subsequently, clear rise in Index of party system institutionalization. However, when analyzing results from 2014, we must recognize the fact that higher level of confidence and especially low fragmentation had more effect than high volatility, causing the overall trend of party system institutionalization to be rising over the course of these three electoral cycles.

Conclusions

Twenty six years and eleven electoral cycles after the fall of communism, we can observe that party system in Serbia is becoming more institutionalized. Our findings have identified positive impacts of lowering levels of party system fragmentation, slight increases in levels of confidence, and low electoral volatility. We have specifically underlined the record-low level on volatility in the last election and its effect on rising Index of institutionalization. However, we underline the fact that level of volatility in the last three electoral cycles depends mainly on political dynamics of one party, who rose from their emergence in 2008 to two consecutive electoral successes in 2014 and 2016, claiming more than fifty percent of parliamentary seats in the process. Considering the fact that absolute majorities in proportional electoral system are viewed as anomalies, especially when repeated consecutively, we cannot exclude the possibility of reverse trend of institutionalization in the future elections, possibly by means of high volatility or higher degree of fragmentation.

In comparison with the rest of Central and Eastern Europe, we can say that Serbian party system has not yet achieved successful institutionalization. Various factors affect this process, apart from three variables included in our Index:

patterns of party identification and ideological preferences in Serbia are still unclear, with strong leaders dominating their parties and suppressing internal democracy. Weakly institutionalized parties in similarly institutionalized system, with lower levels of internal democracy and strong leadership tendencies, delay further democratic consolidation in Serbia.

It is evident that electoral democracy can survive in weakly institutionalized party system, but the condition of this system and parties itself in turn reduces and limits the quality of democracy. As Mainwaring states,³⁶ competitive regimes can exist in systems with lower levels of institutionalization. But the democratic processes in these party systems manifest different attributes than those exhibited in advanced democracies: they are more personalized, have weaker mechanism of internal democracy, higher levels of volatility and fragmentation, lower trust in political parties and processes, and finally, they are more uncertain and less predictable. This conclusion, originally intended for party systems of third wave democracies in former Eastern bloc and Latin America in mid-nineties, perfectly corresponds to the situation in Serbia in 2016. There is still much progress needed for Serbia in order to approach the party system institutionalization level of not just liberal Western democracies, but also new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe.

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³⁶ Scott Mainwaring, *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

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