

Chapter 7

Decline or Change? Party Types and the Crisis of Representative Democracy

*Heiko Giebler, Onawa Promise Lacewell, Sven Regel,
and Annika Werner*

Abstract

7.1 Introduction

The decline of parties, crucial actors in representative democracies over the past three decades has been of great concern for party development scholars and democracy scholars alike. Such scholars point to decreasing vote shares for established parties, the rise of third parties and niche parties, the increasingly key role played by non-party actors in fulfilling roles traditionally the purview of parties, and decreasing party membership levels as red flags signaling the end of the party era. These observed developments are often discussed as leading to a range of distortions in the functioning of democracy. However, the assumptions underlying such causalities remain largely theoretically derived and the causal mechanisms linking party decline and democratic malaise (or, in other words, a crisis of democracy) remain empirically untested. This chapter presents a first step towards such an empirical test and aims to link the developments in party and party system evolution to the fulfillment of the basic functions of political parties, namely mobilization, representation and forming and sustaining stable governments in democracies. To do so, we deduce a measurable concept focusing on size, political program, and societal rootedness which encompasses the most important party types in Western democracies. The importance of these party types is based, on the one hand, on the roles these parties play in their national context. We concentrate on *large parties*, which form the backbone of their respective party systems. On the other hand, the importance of party systems is deduced from their empirical frequency. On this basis and connecting to the typology of Gunther and Diamond (2001, 2003), we can identify the three most important party types: *mass-based*, *catch-all* and *programmatic parties*.

For the differentiation of the three party types we use the most comprehensive dataset of party membership collected to date, which includes membership figures for 15 countries for the time period between 1960 and 2010, employ an innovative approach to measuring programmatic clarity of party manifestos and develop a party size measure which is not biased by the nature of the electoral system. This enables us not only to gain insights into the development of political parties and the validity of the literature on the crisis of parties but to provide crucial information on the linkages between party development, party types, and the fulfillment of elementary functions for democracy by political parties. In this way, we go

beyond normative claims on the crisis of democracy induced by the crisis of political parties. Our findings suggest that the emergence and vanishing of certain party types does indeed have an impact on the 'health' of democracy. At the same time, these effects are much smaller than and not necessarily as negative as the public and scientific discourses would have us believe.

7.2 Theory

7.2.1 *Parties and their functions in democracies*

Any discussion of the decline of political parties and the subsequent crisis of democracy has a natural beginning in the general concept of political parties. Universally, parties share the unique role of brokering relationships between the mass of citizens and governments. This crucial role is evidenced in the very definition of political parties, from Schumpeter's general view that a "party is a group whose members act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power" to Sartori's (1976) even more abstract definition that "a party is a part-of-a whole." Schattschneider (1942, 1) went so far as to claim that "[...] modern democracy is unthinkable except in terms of parties." While the concept of a political party is broad, the purpose of parties in democracies can be defined rather narrowly as seeking to control the apparatus of government on the part of their supporters (Schumpeter 1943; Epstein 1967; LaPalombara 2007).

In the parlance of the embedded democracy concept (Merkel et al. 2003), parties form the crucial actor of the second partial regime (political participation) and, as such, are crucial to this conceptualization of democracy. Moreover, they are of major relevance for democratically representative elections, which highlights their importance for the first partial regime (electoral regime). Gunther and Diamond (2001) provide a useful outline of seven key functions parties perform in democracies: candidate nomination, electoral mobilization, issue structuring, societal representation, interest aggregation, forming and sustaining governments, and social integration. Whether all seven functions are equally important to democracy is debatable. However, it seems clear that, were these functions to be interrupted or left unfulfilled, the very survival of representative democracy could be at stake.

Given the traditional emphasis on political parties in democracies, it is unsurprising that an observed weakening of political parties in modern democracies would be seen as a sign of crisis within the democracy itself. There are three of the democratic functions—mobilization, representation, and government formation/stability—that are deemed particularly relevant by the literature on the crisis of democracy (Merkel in this book). Thus, these functions are suitable to test the relationship between the often decried decline of (established) parties and the central topic of this book, the crisis of representative democracy.

7.2.2 *Looking through rose colored glasses: Parties and party decline from the 'Golden Age' of party politics*

The current literature decrying the decline of the role of political parties in modern democracies is set against a backdrop of a strong period of party politics in Western European democracies beginning sometime after the Second World War (Dalton and Wattenberg 2002;

Mair 2006; LaPalombara 2007). The supposed ‘Golden Age’ of parties occurred during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s and was characterized by large parties which dominated political competition, winning major shares of electoral votes and comprising either the major government or opposition parties in most countries. Around the mid-1970s, this ‘Golden Age’ ended and a surge of literature proclaimed the “decline of political parties” (see, for instance, Lawson and Merkl 1989; Reiter 1989; LaPalombara 2007; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000).

This is not to say, however, that the idea that political parties were in decline first occurred during the demise of this ‘Golden Age’. Even during this period, scholars such as Otto Kirchheimer (1965) cautioned against the trend toward an increasingly catch-all nature in traditional mass-integration parties and claimed that this trend would lead to parties “losing ideological baggage” as they moved toward the middle of the political spectrum, de-emphasized their traditional class clientele, and formed stronger ties to interest groups. Dennis (1966, 613) observed that “anti-party norms and images are present as a living part of the political culture in many Western political systems.” Also in the 1960s, scholars began to seek explanations for a perceived decline of parties (Fraenkel 1964; Haas 1964; Reiter 1989, 326). Despite these early discussions of signs of decline in Western European party systems, the pattern of party politics during this Golden Age did, supposedly, lead to high levels of mobilization, increased representation, and high levels of government stability. In this sense, despite the signs of decline already evident during this period, established parties performed well on a functional basis.

Internal and external pressures on traditional parties at the end of the ‘Golden Age’

In the 1970s, formerly dominant large parties began to come under both internal pressure from intra-party fractions and external pressure from new parties on both the right and the left of the ideological spectrum.¹ The most obvious manifestation of this pressure was the decreasing share of the vote for large parties. These electoral losses led to much discussed shifts in party tactics in the 1990s when parties such as the British Labour Party and the German Social Democrats began to pursue ‘Third Way’ strategies (Giddons 2000; Merkel et al. 2008; Allen 2009; Poguntke 2014) as party leaders fought desperately to stop the hemorrhaging of traditionally core voters.

Nevertheless, the decline of large parties after the ‘Golden Age’ is shown by more than just lost votes. Internally, decreasing membership numbers (Mair and van Biezen 2001; van Biezen et al. 2012) throughout the period also reveal pressure leading to a decrease in social rootedness—a characteristic of most traditional mass parties through the ‘Golden Age’. While there is debate about whether the decline of reported membership figures is indeed fully indicative of a net loss of active members,² the decline is so dramatic that it unarguably poses

¹ The literature discusses a wealth of developments that is either deemed reason or indicator for the decline of parties. It is, however, important to distinguish between challenges to parties that they need to react to and signs of their decline. Therefore, we do not discuss developments like the decrease of party identification and partisanship (Dalton 2002; LaPalombara 2007), the emergence of sub- or supra-national government (e.g., Strøm 2002) or the role of media and new technology (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; LaPalombara 2007) at this point.

² Scarrow 2002, for instance, discussed other reasons for a nominal decline of membership numbers, while scholars like Heida and Saglie (2003) highlight that the raw numbers are under-complex indicators and issues such as the ratio of active and passive members as well as the role of members need to be taken into account.

a challenge to parties that had, in the past, relied on members as a source of party strength and financial support.

Externally, large parties had to deal with a changing landscape of political competition, when serious opposition from post-modernist, or New Politics movements such as ecology movements began to erode the traditional basis of support for large parties. Rather quickly, such movements established themselves as important players in party systems. One need only to think of the Green parties, new left parties or radical right parties that mushroomed in many party systems throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s for an indication of this trend (e.g., Adams et al. 2006; Spoon 2009; Wagner 2012). While the specific type of niche parties that developed was highly dependent on the national context (Kitschelt 1993), virtually every party system was affected and, thus no formerly dominant party was left unchallenged. The example of Germany is particularly salient in that a stable 2.5 party system dominated by the SPD and the CDU/CSU in the 1960s and 1970s gave way, rather quickly, to today's five party system where both traditional large parties fight to maintain their relevance (Poguntke 2014).

Similar stories have been repeated throughout Western democracies, leading to increasing unease among party scholars that democracy in general is threatened by this trend. There are many hypothesized reasons for the general upheaval that began to plague Western European party systems during the mid to late 1970s (Reiter 1989, 329). The decline of traditional parties and the rise of niche and small party movements are but one symptom of general unrest. Into this framework came what are now well-known theories of post-materialism (Inglehart 1977) and the un-freezing of party systems (Mair 1989) as well as a general discussion about the rise and fall of traditional social cleavages versus new cleavages (Bartolini 2007; Bornschier 2010; Kriesi et al. 2012). Generally, though, it is clear that the traditional cleavage structures underlying Western European societies and political systems in the decades before the 1970s—namely the four identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967)—began to weaken at some point in the mid to late 1970s. The decreased salience of class and the secular cleavages, specifically, directly influenced the constituencies of the very parties who dominated the 'Golden Age' as these parties relied on traditional social groups for voters.

7.2.3 Lions and tigers and bears: Distinguishing different types of large parties

This standard summation of the decline of parties from the Golden Age period is not without critics, however (Daalder 1992). As Ignazi (1996) points out, much of the literature equated the decline of large parties with an overall decline. However, equating large parties with parties in general is problematic. As early as 1989, Reiter notes that the observed decline in large parties is really a shift in support from traditional mass parties to minor parties and that this shift may, in fact, be an indicator of hope that newer, smaller parties may eventually become larger, major parties fulfilling the same role as their predecessors. Reiter goes on to summarize the problematic nature of equating large parties to parties generally by stating that "using the rise of minor parties as an indicator of party decline reflects the major-party bias of many political scientists, who equate partisanship with major-party-sanship" (Reiter 1989, 327). If we take Ignazi and Reiter's point to heart—that what really happened after the 'Golden Age' was not a general decline of parties but a decline of large parties—then it is useful to, first, differentiate between large and small parties.

A quick glance at Western European democracies shows us a vast array of different types of traditional party actor. Much of the literature focuses on the rise and fall of *catch-all parties* but clearly not even this standard party type developed in all countries, as Kirchheimer (1965, 30) points out, because the historical development of some countries did not render *catch-all parties* useful. For example, the British parties came under scant pressure from new parties because of the majoritarian electoral system but had to deal with increased internal disruptions—particularly obvious in the case of the Labour Party. The traditional parties in the Netherlands, on the other hand, had to cope with internal pressures similar to those of the British parties but the proportional nature of the electoral system led to an increasing number of new parties, i.e., external pressure, as well. Furthermore, we know from party development literature that such pressure led parties to alter their behavior (e.g., Kitschelt 1993; Katz and Mair 1995; Poguntke 2014). Parties modified their own organization to counter internal pressure or repositioned themselves within the context of political competition to counter external pressure. Such behavioral ‘corrections’ also contributed, in part, to their electoral decline, for instance when—in Germany—the moderate left party (SPD) moved to the center of the political spectrum while one or more competing parties remained in the left spectrum. Depending on original party type, national contexts, and subsequent behavior alteration that took place, the type of party that developed after the ‘Golden Age’ could be very different. Strategically, a party facing a general decline in social rootedness as evidenced by falling party membership in addition to decreasing shares of the vote must make a choice to secure the survival of the party. One choice, based on a purely Downsian model of party competition, would be for the party to diversify its ideological stance in order to try to capture as many non-traditional members as possible. Another possibility, in case of relatively homogenous societies (such as those found in many Scandinavian countries), would be to tighten the ideological cohesiveness of the party around the median party voter position.

The types of party that developed from the demise of the ‘Golden Age’, then, may be very different beasts. It is important to note at this juncture that we take a primarily functional rather than developmental view of parties. While factors such as national context may help explain why different parties developed in different party systems (Kirchheimer 1965; Lipset and Rokkan 1967), we do not take a “parties as biographies” approach in this chapter. Doing so would demand that we trace the decline of parties already in place in the 1960s across time. Therefore, we do not focus on whether the German Social Democratic party, for example, maintained its vote share across time or whether it had or has a crisis in terms of popular support. We do so because, e.g., all catch-all parties will show similar features and behaviors and will have similar effects on national democracy. From such a functional perspective, it is utterly irrelevant whether it is one and the same catch-all party or whether it is party A in a political system until the 1980s and party B from the 1980s onward.

Furthermore, we argue that it is not sufficient to distinguish only between large and small parties. It is also necessary to provide a typology that further differentiates between types of large party. Put simply, in the context of the supposed decline of large parties, it may be important to understand whether certain types of large party lend themselves more readily to the lack of fulfillment of the three functions of mobilization, representation, and government stability than do others. This approach is in concordance with recent research on party types and their consequences for (a crisis of) democracy (Bardi et al. 2014).

Party types and democratic functions

The link between party decline, or large party decline to be more specific, and supposed consequences of such a decline for democracy are normatively precise but lack rigorous empirical testing (for example, Kirchheimer 1954, 1965; Crozier et al. 1975; Crouch 2004). Generally, scholars pinpoint those aspects of democracy most threatened when parties are no longer able mobilize voters, represent voters, or form stable governments. Once parties stop fulfilling these functions, the implications are far ranging: governments become unstable, citizens experience alienation and, as a result, may stop participating in politics. While such conclusions seem to be plausible, well-theorized outcomes of large party decline and the causal mechanisms underlying them remain unclear. Somehow, the (de)evolution of modern parties is subsequently connected to the end of party competition and, hence, the complete breakdown of representation mechanisms (Blyth and Katz 2005). Additionally, decreasing partisanship among voters is supposed to lead directly not only to a decrease in the effectiveness of government (Allen 2009; Whiteley 2011) but perhaps to the end of party government (LaPalombara 2007, 148). LaPalombara (2007) provides a comprehensive discussion of the alleged ills facing democracies if parties decline. Among them: the end of societal change, decline in public confidence, and the end of responsible government as well as accountability. However, the precise relationship between large party decline and democratic malaise has remained purely argumentative. Moreover, large parties are more or less seen as a homogenous group of political actors, which divorces the party development literature from the party decline literature.

This section introduces a typology of large party types that is also empirically testable, provides a clear definitional distinction between party types, and is directly linked to the fulfillment of democratic functions. Based on this typology we are able to address the two guiding questions of this chapter: first, what kind of developments regarding political parties have taken place in the last five decades in Western democracies? Second, how do these developments contribute to an increasing or decreasing fulfillment of the core functions of political parties and, in consequence, to a crisis of democracy?

Instead of creating a new typology from the ground up, we choose to use a subset of Diamond and Gunther's (2001, 2003) party typology. There are five types of party included in this definition: *elite*, *mass-based*, *electoralist*, *ethnic*, and *movement*. *Elite parties* were parties of the prewar period, primarily and are, according to Diamond and Gunther, the predecessors of postwar *mass parties*. Therefore we would not expect to find them in modern democracies. Likewise, *ethnic* and *movement parties* are both very specific party types that deal with niche, or single, issues. As such, we would not expect them to overlap with what we consider traditional established parties in Western European democracies. Given this, we begin with the assumption that electorally large parties will fall under one of the two types in modern democracies: *mass-based* or *electoralist*—both of which have clearly distinct profiles. The main distinction between these two types is the role of party members (Diamond and Gunther 2001, 10f.). While *mass-based parties* rely on a strong link between themselves and the societal group they focus on, i.e., have many members, *electoralist parties* are free of such ties and are more focused on pursuing voters independent of social groups. For *electoralist*

parties, then, party membership comes low on the list of concerns.³ Programmatically, mass-based parties attempt to mobilize member voters with tailored policy programs that are ideologically congruent to members' interests (Diamond and Gunther 2001, 17).

With a focus on party programs, the conceptualization by Diamond and Gunther includes an important further subdivision of *electoralist parties* into two distinct subtypes: *catch-all parties* and *programmatic parties*. While both subtypes have low linkages to party members, they differ in their programmatic clarity. *Catch-all parties* follow a purely vote maximizing strategy, which means that they will take only vague programmatic policy positions and will also obscure their true positions in favor of appealing to a broader spectrum of voters. While *catch-all parties* have the potential to aggregate the interest of a large group of citizens, they are likely to avoid programmatic commitment (Diamond and Gunther 2001, 27). *Programmatic parties*, on the other hand, present themselves with a clear programmatic profile that is easily identifiable and ideologically sound—similar to *mass parties*. While programmatic parties, too, aim at vote maximization, they do so by focusing mainly on their ideologically homogenous core voters. As Diamond and Gunther (ibid.) put it: “It [the programmatic party] has much more of a distinct, consistent, and coherent programmatic or ideological agenda than does the ideal-type catch-all party, and it clearly incorporates those ideological or programmatic appeals in its electoral campaigns and its legislative and government agenda.” Thus, they do not obscure their profiles by claiming contradictory policy positions or by hedging their bets and supporting both positions of a bi-positional issue as we would expect from catch-all parties.

These two features of large parties—party membership and programmatic clarity—allow us to distinguish between three types of large party commonly found in Western European democracies: mass-integration parties, catch-all parties, and programmatic parties. Table 7.1 summarizes this typology of large parties:

Table 7.1: Scheme of party types and characteristics

	<i>Mass Party</i>	<i>Programmatic Party</i>	<i>Catch-all Party</i>
<i>Programmatic Clarity</i>	High	High	Low
<i>Party Membership</i>	High	Low	Low

Party types and their performance

While party membership and programmatic clarity provide a clear way to distinguish the three party types definitionally, it is also possible to distinguish between the three in terms of how, and to what extent, they fulfill the three key democratic functions identified previously.

According to Diamond and Gunther (2003, 178) *mass parties* are “characterized by a large base of dues-paying members who remain active in party affairs [...]” Hence, *mass parties* are specifically well suited to the task of electoral mobilization and societal representation as they are capable of drawing from their strong member base. However, these parties might have difficulties to form and sustain governments, as their primary goal will be

³ The party development literature refers to the ‘role’ of party members within the party organization, i.e., their involvement in candidate selection or program development. As the collection of such data is notoriously difficult, the ‘role’ is usually substituted with the ‘number’ of party members, assuming that members leave the party if their role diminishes. We follow this approach.

the implementation of the maximal version of their ideological driven program, which tends to estrange centrist parties and those with opposing ideologies (Diamond and Gunther 2001, 17). It is also necessary to take into account that, in terms of electoral mobilization and societal representation, *mass parties* will only be strong in fulfilling these two functions when it comes to *their* voting constituencies and not necessarily those constituents falling outside the bounds of this membership.

Catch-all parties, like the *programmatic parties* discussed below, fall under the classification of electoralist parties as their main goal is building, and winning, electoral campaigns. *Catch-all parties* are “distinguished by [their] shallow organization, superficial and vague ideology, and overwhelmingly electoral orientation” (Diamond and Gunther 2003, 185). In other words, they are purely vote-maximizing parties who try to be ‘open to everyone’. Despite not having the large membership base enjoyed by mass parties, we expect that *catch-all parties* (given their electoral orientation) will be well suited to fulfilling the task of electoral mobilization. Kirchheimer (1965) acknowledges that catch-all parties are excellent at voter mobilization given the primary focus on electoral campaigning.⁴ Nevertheless, such parties are necessarily less capable of aiding societal representation as they lack clear policy positions and vertical integration into society. Political decisions, that these parties make, necessarily conflict with some positions of their very heterogeneous voters. Finally, their ability to form and sustain coalitions should be strong as *catch-all parties* are inherently flexible in their policy orientation and can accommodate potential coalition partners in order to sustain their power (ibid.).

Turning to the democratic functions best fulfilled by the second type of electoralist party included in our typology—*programmatic parties*—we would expect that such parties, given their electoralist nature, will be relatively good at electoral mobilization. Furthermore, their combination of a lack of a core membership base and programmatic clarity leads us to predict that these parties will have a harder time fulfilling the functions of societal representation than *mass parties* but should be better than their *catch-all* counterparts. While their primary aim is to win elections, they pursue this goal with the help of a clearly defined party program (Diamond and Gunther 2001, 27). Hence, their ability to form governments should range somewhere between that of *catch-all* and *mass parties*, as they should be less bound by their members or mid-level functionaries than the latter. The *programmatic party*, therefore, can be seen as a midpoint between the two other types. These parties have the organizational structures common to *catch-all parties* combined with strong ideological stances reminiscent of *mass parties*. Whereas *catch-all parties* and *mass parties* are both very good at fulfilling one or two of the three functions, they also fall short on at least one. *Programmatic parties*, on the other hand, are moderately good at fulfilling most functions but not extremely good at fulfilling any specific function.

7.3 Measurement

Following from the theoretical framework, we develop a two-stage measurement approach to identify and distinguish mass parties, programmatic parties, and catch-all parties. In the first

⁴ However, other scholars such as Panebianco (1988) question just how good catch-all parties can be at electoral mobilization when they lack a clear societal base to mobilize.

stage, we differentiate small from large parties while the second stage uses party membership information as well as the parties' programmatic profiles to distinguish different party types. The underlying research question makes it necessary to define these measures in a way that is applicable not only to a wide range of different democratic systems but, more importantly, to a long time period. Hence, we present our approach in detail in both formal and substantive terms. Obviously, such a large scale comparative approach does not come without costs or, in other words, a certain level of abstraction and simplification. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the measurement outlined below taps into the core elements of the party types in question, thereby complying with standards of content validity for political science concepts.

7.3.1 Stage one: Large vs. small parties

We subset out large v. small parties by applying a vote share threshold that is relative to the number and size of the other parties in the party system.⁵ Why rely on such a relative measure and not on a simple, absolute measure? Basically, we argue that the concepts 'large' and 'small' are in themselves relative, which, in consequence, has to be taken into account. Electoral systems have a strong impact on party size and the effective number of parties because they either encourage or discourage "voting with the heart" (Oppenhuis et al. 1996).⁶ Hence, the electoral support of parties is not just a result of their own appeal to voters but of an appeal induced by electoral system incentives. Therefore, any absolute measure of size is biased in favor of democracies with low district magnitudes because in these democracies vote concentration is more likely and subsequently leads to a reduction of the party system to only large parties. Moreover, the functional role of a party as a large party depends on the size of all other parties in the system.

Examples might help to clarify this argument: assume that in one country the largest party receives 30% of the vote and the remaining votes are equally distributed between four other parties (18% each). In the second country, the largest party wins only 29% of the vote but there are five other parties with equal vote shares (14% each). If one would apply an absolute threshold set to, e.g., 30%, the largest party in the first example would be classified as a large party while there is no large party in the second example. Such a result seems hard to defend; in the latter example, the largest parties receives more than twice the number of votes than all other contenders. The ratio is much smaller in the first example. To prevent such a bias as well as logical shortcomings, we develop the following relative measure of party size (RMPS) based on the parties' vote shares that is fully comparable between systems and over time.⁷

$$RMPS_{ik} = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{n_k} \frac{voteshare_{ik}}{voteshare_{jk}} - 1}{\sum_{i=1}^{n_k} (\sum_{j=1}^{n_k} \frac{voteshare_{ik}}{voteshare_{jk}} - 1)} \quad (1)$$

where i represents the party, k represents the election, n represents the total number of parties competing, and j is a running number from 1 to n . For each party in each election we calculate

⁵ The information on electoral results is taken from the department's data base (WZB 2014).

⁶ Beyond this psychological effect, their vote-to-seat translation rules mechanically favor larger parties to different degrees (Duverger 1963). As we are using vote shares, the latter effect is of no direct importance.

⁷ The number of competing parties n has to be larger than one which, obviously, is a precondition for democratic elections.

the ratios between the party's vote share and the vote share of all other competing parties.⁸ The sum of these ratios is then divided by the respective values for all parties to generate a common scale that resembles the party's relative weight. The range of this scale is $0 < \text{RMPS}_{ik} < 1$ and we define parties as large if their value is above 0.25.

7.3.2 Stage two: Differentiating large parties

As shown in Table 7.1, information on the party membership base and programmatic clarity is sufficient to differentiate between the three types of large parties.

Party membership base

The core characteristic of *mass integration parties* is a strong reliance on party members. Hence, building on existing work (Katz and Mair 1992; Mair and van Biezen 2001; van Biezen et al. 2012), we collected information on party membership figures for as many parties and time points as possible. Unfortunately, it is not feasible to get a full time-series data set for all parties. Therefore, we interpolate some of the missing data points: a) in the case of the availability of two sequential points in time we linearly interpolate the missing values in between, and b) at the two temporal endpoints we use the last available pair of real values for a linear interpolation beyond the temporal endpoints. In order to secure validity, we apply a minimum quality criteria by only allowing interpolation for missing data within a maximal distance of ten years to the next 'real' data point.

The party membership base (PMB) is calculated in a very straightforward manner:

$$\text{PMB}_{ik} = \frac{\text{members}_{ik}}{\text{electorate}_k} \quad (2)$$

where i represents the party and k represents the election. We divide the number of party members by the total number of eligible voters in the respective election. The range of this measure runs from 0 (no members) to 1 (in the implausible case that all eligible voters in a country are members of one and the same party). The threshold is set to 0.05 which refers to a situation in which 5% of the eligible population are members of the respective party. We refrain from using other measures, for example, the party members to party voters ratio, because they are not suited for comparison over time. While the denominator in our equation is rather stable over time—or, at least, follows a stable trend—electoral success is rather volatile. If one were to include electoral success, changes in PMB_{ik} could occur due to changes in membership figures but also because of electoral outcomes. A parallel decrease in votes and members would not influence such an indicator and fails to reflect decreasing societal rootedness. Our measure, on the other hand, is only sensitive to the numbers we are truly interested in—party membership figures.

Programmatic clarity

In order to measure the programmatic clarity of parties, we employ one of the most-used and well-known sources of party programmatic data, the Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al. 2012, 2013), which provides content analytical data on party policy positions derived from

⁸ We subtract one in the equation to eliminate the party's eigenvalue.

electoral manifestos.⁹ Within the coding scheme of the Manifesto Project are 13 pairs of antipodal policy, meaning that there is a positive and a negative category for one policy area (Werner et al. 2011). These 13 pairs concern most of the core policy questions in Western European party competition.¹⁰

A high level of programmatic clarity (PC) is evident if a party only mentions one side of each of these policy areas. Likewise, a party that makes statements for both sides of these areas obscures its position and is thus programmatically unclear. The same is true if a party makes no statements at all regarding one of these 13 core policy areas.

In order to assess the overall clarity of a program we build an index over all 13 pairs. Furthermore, the relevance of a single policy category depends on contextual factors, both internal and external to the polity. In other words, salient policies at the heart of political competition between parties are neither constant over time, nor do they have to be present in all countries. Again, contextualization of our measure becomes necessary. We do this by calculating election-specific weights for each of the policy categories. In a first step, all 26 policy categories (13 pairs)—measured as proportions of all statements in the party's manifesto—are rescaled that

$$\sum_{j=1}^n position_{ijk}^+ + \sum_{j=1}^n position_{ijk}^- = 1 \quad (3)$$

where n represents the total number of policy categories, j represents the single policy category, i represents the party, and k represents the election.

Now, the empirical values of the 26 policy categories no longer represent the proportion of the overall manifesto but of the 13 core policy areas (reflected by the 13 pairs). We then calculate the weight W_{jk} as the weighted¹¹ salience of the policy over all parties running in the election:

$$W_{jk} = \sum_{i=1}^n (position_{ijk}^+ + position_{ijk}^-) * RMPS_{ik} \quad (4)$$

where n represents the total number of policy areas, j represents the policy area, i represents the party, and k represents the election. This means that if a policy area is never mentioned in all party manifestos of one election, the weight of the policy area becomes zero.

Finally, we calculate the programmatic clarity as

$$PC_{ik} = \sum_{j=1}^n \left(\frac{|position_{ijk}^+ - position_{ijk}^-|}{position_{ijk}^+ + position_{ijk}^-} * W_{jk} \right) \quad (5)$$

where n represents the total number of policy areas, j represents the policy area, i represents the party, and k represents election. Hence, for each of the 13 pairs, we calculate a clarity value as the ratio of the absolute difference between positive and negative statements divided by the overall proportion of positive and negative statements. For example, a party presenting only positive statements receives a value of 1 while a party with an equal number of positive

⁹ Regarding the relevance of electoral manifestos, see also Merz and Regel (2013).

¹⁰ In detail, they cover foreign special relationships, military, European Union, internationalism, constitutionalism, political centralization, economic protectionism, welfare state, national way of life, education, multiculturalism, morality, and labor groups.

¹¹ In this case, weighted refers to acknowledgement of the parties' electoral size, measured as the RMPS.

and negative statements receives a programmatic clarity value of 0. This value is then multiplied with the overall weight of the issue in the election. As a result, parties with a clear profile regarding salient policy areas have higher levels of programmatic clarity. If a policy area is not salient in an election, clarity in this area is of either small or no importance for the overall score. The scale of this measure runs from 0 (no clarity) to 1 (full clarity). We define the threshold of programmatic clarity to 0.75. In somewhat abstract terms, this represents a party that has a clear position on 75% of the 13 core policy areas.

7.3.3 Thresholds

To prevent any argument that our thresholds to measure party types are set arbitrarily, we refer on the one hand to the high face validity of our classification presented in the following section. Moreover, we ran a set of simulations to emphasize the quality of our thresholds. The simulations follow the simple idea that reasonable changes regarding the thresholds should not lead to major changes regarding the classification of parties being large, having a large membership base or showing high programmatic clarity. If we would encounter such changes, neither the descriptive nor the causal analysis could be considered to be reliable and robust. For each of the three thresholds, we drew 1000 random values from a normal distribution where the mean of the distribution is equal to the respective threshold and the standard deviation is equal to 5% of the respective mean. For example, in the case of programmatic clarity we drew from a distribution with a mean of 0.75 and a standard deviation of 0.0375. In other words, 95.4% of the draws are values between 0.675 and 0.825. All these 1000 values are then used as simulated thresholds to calculate whether a party is above or below the threshold. Hence, for each party in each election we get 1000 comparisons between the original party classification, for example, as a large party, and the classification based on the simulated thresholds, either large party or small party. We then calculate the proportion of deviations from the original classification. For all three measures, the error probability, meaning the deviation from the original classification based on the described thresholds, is below 3%. We see this as a strong indicator in favor of the selected thresholds and thus the validity of the following analyses.

7.4 Party types: Descriptives

The first portion of the analysis is devoted to a more detailed look at the descriptives and examines variations in party types within countries and across time. The dataset includes parties from 15 Western European democracies beginning in 1960 and continuing through 2010. These countries are: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. In other words: we are looking at established democracies in Western Europe which constitute the empirical core of the crisis of political parties literature.¹² We refrain from extending our sample to countries from other regions, for example Eastern Europe, because parties and party systems there are radically different from their Western counterparts. Even

¹² Unfortunately, we are not able to include Luxembourg (due to missing information on party membership), Belgium (due to the special nature of government formation and the electoral system), and micro states like Liechtenstein or Andorra.

parties and party systems in other, older democracies like the USA or Japan are hardly comparable with the historical development we have witnessed in Western Europe (Duverger 1963). The analysis below shows how the measurement developed previously assigns parties into party types and whether there are noticeable patterns across countries and time with regards to party development.

7.4.1 Distribution of party types

Table 7.2: Share of party types per decade, in %

	1965-1969	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000-2005	Average
<i>Catch-all Party</i>	0.10	0.25	0.20	0.12	0.19	0.18
<i>Mass Party</i>	0.36	0.14	0.11	0.06	0.09	0.13
<i>Programmatic Party</i>	0.42	0.53	0.61	0.76	0.72	0.63
<i>Rest Party</i>	0.11	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.00	0.07
<i>Average Cumulative Vote Share</i>	60.70	59.40	60.99	50.45	52.71	56.78

To begin, in Table 7.2 we present the percentages of the party types across time as well as the average cumulative vote shares for all four types per decade. A few interesting conclusions are immediately apparent. First, we can see that the majority of parties in the sample are *programmatic parties* with just over 60% of the observations falling into this party type category. The rest of the observations are spread almost evenly between the *catch-all* and *mass party* categories. Second, we see that the share of *programmatic parties* has increased steadily over the decades while the share of mass parties has declined equally steadily. Whereas 36% of the observations in the 1960s could be labeled as *mass parties*, by the 2000s fewer than 10% of the observations fell into this category. The inverse is true for *programmatic parties* and the trend is even stronger: by the 2000s, over 70% of the parties under observation could be classified as *programmatic parties*. Interestingly, we see that the share of *catch-all parties* has somewhat increased in the 1970s and 1980s, decreased drastically in the 1990s just to increase again in the first half of the 2000s. Obviously, there is no clear pattern when it comes to this party type. More importantly, there is no validation at all of the domination of catch-all parties in Western party systems.

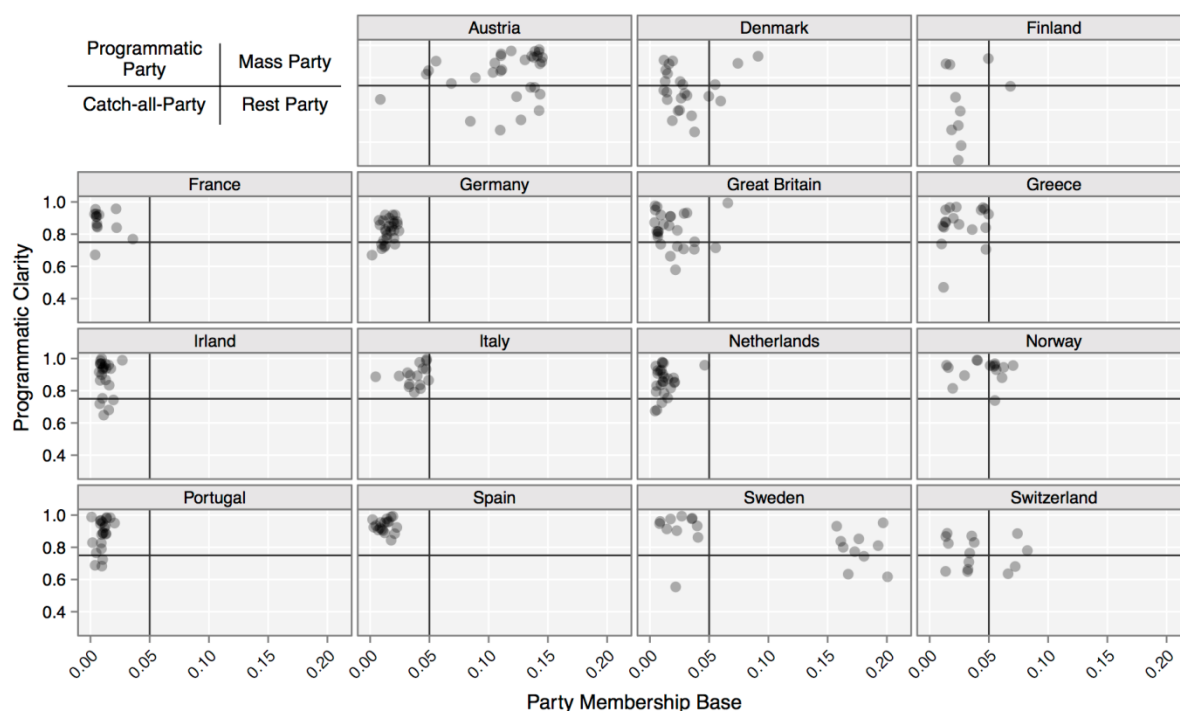
The table also presents all observations that cannot be classified with our scheme. It represents parties showing high membership figures but low programmatic clarity that can also not be classified as one of the other party types of the initial classification scheme of Gunther and Diamond (2001, 2003). It has to be clarified during analysis whether this category represents a party type not covered by our typology or whether this is a transitional category—some kind of evolutionary intermediate step—only. As we see in the analysis below, this category is not heavily populated with only around 6 parties at different points in time.

The last row gives the average cumulative vote shares of all types of large parties based on the relative vote share presented above in the measurement section.¹³ Clearly, the numbers are very stable for the period between 1965 and 1989, which covers the ‘Golden Age’ of political parties. Roughly 60% of the relative share of the vote falls to large parties. There is a

¹³ To calculate the values for each time period, we add the relative vote shares of all large parties in a country, calculate the total over all countries and divide this number by the total number of countries.

sharp drop in the 1990s consistent with the literature on party system development: large parties lose more and more votes, smaller parties grow in importance and the overall party system fragmentation increases. Nevertheless, large parties still represent the majority of voters.

Figure 7.1: Party types of large parties by countries



The second step of this descriptive analysis looks at cross-country variation in our typology of large parties. Fig. 7.1 includes all countries in the sample with the party membership variable on the x-axis and the programmatic clarity variable on the y-axis. For each subplot representing a country the black vertical lines indicate the threshold for high versus low party membership and the black horizontal line indicates the threshold between high versus low programmatic clarity. In all, these thresholds divide the graph into four quadrants with one large party type each—the three substantive types as well as the rest type.

As we can see from Fig. 7.1, there is variation in the types of large party found in the country sample.¹⁴ First, we see that there are two countries with a single type of large party only: Italy and Spain. In both countries, we only see *programmatic parties* although in Italy these *programmatic parties* are on the threshold of being *mass parties* but fail to obtain the membership numbers necessary to become actual *mass parties*. Second, the largest group of countries in the figure is the group where both *catch-all* and *programmatic parties* exist simultaneously: Germany, the UK, Portugal, Greece, Finland, and the Netherlands. Third, and regarding the problematic rest category, these observations are limited to a few countries. They feature most prominently in Austria; in fact, eight out of seventeen ‘rest parties’ are Austrian parties. One might conclude that this finding points to the very special character of Austria when it comes to party membership. There is no other democratic country showing higher and more stable membership figures in the period under research than Austria. This

¹⁴ The shade of the dots does not carry information but is created by overlapping dots.

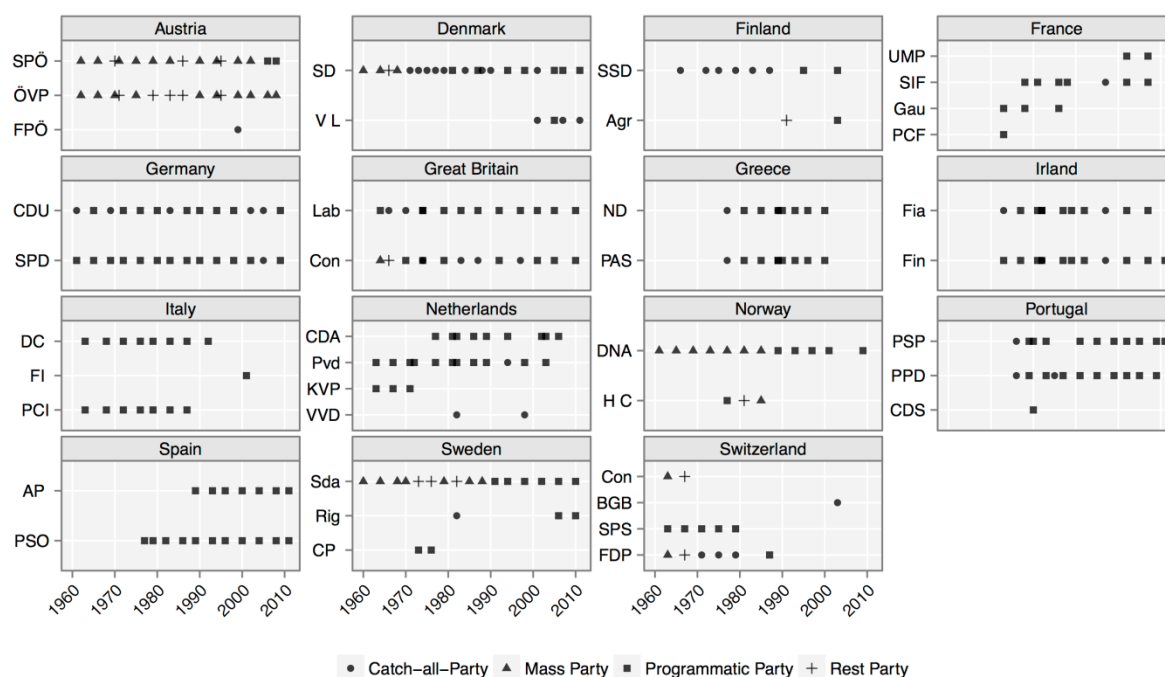
special relation between parties and members might give Austrian parties more room to maneuver regarding their political program. Party members have by definition a strong bond with the party, which can lead to a blurred perception of political action and political performance (Wagner and Giebler 2014). Moreover, in more recent decades societal modernization supposedly diversified membership at least to a certain degree, which might also be seen as a starting point for a weakening of the Austrian *mass parties*' ideological core.

7.4.2 Development of party types in countries and across time

Fig. 7.2 shows the development of large parties over time, grouped by countries and reveals several patterns.¹⁵ First, we see a close connection between *mass parties* and our “rest” category. Both the Swedish (Sda) and the Austrian Social Democrats (SPÖ) switched between the *mass party* and the rest category before developing into *programmatic parties*. The Danish Social Democrats (SD) developed similarly but with interludes as a *catch-all party*. The Austrian ÖVP, too, has switched between the two high-membership categories but seems to have stabilized as a *mass party*. The Norwegian Social Democrats (DNA), on the other hand, morphed directly into a *programmatic party* in the middle of the 1980s. Overall, it seems that the ‘rest’ category is indeed mostly a transitional phase of *mass party* development in very specific contexts. Furthermore, *mass parties* generally went through a phase of reshuffling identity during the 1970s and 1980s before most developed into programmatic parties. This both confirms and contradicts the theses of the critics that warn against the end of the ‘Golden Age’ (a.o. Kirchheimer 1965; Dalton and Wattenberg 2002). While the mass parties have indeed lost this status because of declining membership numbers, this has not coincided with higher levels of programmatic vagueness and the obscuring of programmatic positions as we would expect from the catch-all party development literature (Kirchheimer 1965; LaPalombra 2007), as especially programmatic parties have been founded or developed from other party types.

¹⁵ The figure displays parties only when they meet the criterion of being a “large” party. There are two explanations for parties not being represented for the whole time frame: they might not have run during the respective election or they might have been/become a small party.

Figure 7.2: Development of party types of large parties over time



A second trend is apparent if we look at the development of *catch-all parties*. In Greece, Portugal and Finland, large parties were indeed *catch-all parties* until the beginning of the 1980s (or 1990s in the Finish case) but then became more programmatically clear and concise as they developed into *programmatic parties*. A large number of other parties switched between these two party types—most of the British, Irish, and German parties—although usually only having single instances of being *catch-all parties* while being *programmatic parties* otherwise. Interesting is the similar development of German and British parties. While both the German Social Democrats (SPD) and Labour had only one short period of being *catch-all parties*, both conservative parties (CDU/CSU and Tories) often switched between being catch-all and programmatic parties. Indeed, the British Conservatives oscillated between two party types over nearly the whole period. Finally, the Swiss liberal FDP has developed in model fashion: starting out as a mass party, it went through a short transitional phase (in the ‘rest’ category) of decreasing programmatic category but retaining members. But then membership levels decreased as well and the party transitioned into a purely catch-all party for the period between 1970 and the mid-1980s before increasing programmatic clarity again and, thus, became a programmatic party.

Overall, at the end of our period of observation, the programmatic party dominated the party system in 12 out of 15 countries. Only in Denmark do we see a balance between catch-all and programmatic parties and in Austria neither programmatic nor catch-all parties playing a role as mass parties and ‘rest’ category parties (see above) are the major players.

Such trends show not only that the story of large party development during and after the ‘Golden Age’ period is more nuanced than the current literature would lead us to believe but also the potential power of national context in how large parties transform throughout this period.

Overall, these findings go strongly against the predictions of the party decline literature that we are currently in an era of ‘the end of party competition’ and that programmatic-oriented parties are losing in importance. While these parties have indeed lost many members, the programmatic arbitrariness of the *catch-all party* type often bemoaned in the literature seems to have been just one step in party development. In direct contradiction to the dire warnings of Kirchheimer, the development of *catch-all parties* does not seem to mean the end of strong programmatic representation (Kirchheimer 1965). Instead, it seems reasonable to assume that short periods of catch-all party-ness was enough to open the room for new party actors, which then forced those large parties to clearly situate themselves within the (programmatic) party competition again. Our findings, at least, lend more credibility to such a reading of party development than to any non-empirical ‘doomsday’ interpretations of parties and thus the representative democracy.

7.5 Analysis: Party types and democratic functions

7.5.1 Mobilization

Decreasing turnout levels are seen as one of the most obvious manifestations of the crisis of democracy. It is argued that they would signal disenchantment with politics, political apathy, and decreases the legitimacy of parliaments and governments. However, are developments regarding party types in any way connected to this? Are some party types indeed better or worse in mobilizing the electorate? We use a regression model to validate whether party types or, more concretely, *mass parties* and *catch-all parties* indeed had a positive effect on turnout figures.¹⁶ In other words: the model measures the impact of the number of mass parties and catch-all parties in the previous term (t-1) on the current turnout (t0). Relying on a time lag seems to be a reasonable approach to verify the mobilization capacities of these party types, while ignoring such a time lag would result in endogeneity problems. Obviously, aggregate turnout is affected by many different factors (for an overview see Franklin 2004; Blais 2006; Volkens and Weßels in this volume). Hence, we introduce several control variables to prevent an *omitted-variable bias*. These are (a) the closeness of the election (vote share difference between the largest and the second largest party), (b) the natural logarithm of the size of the electorate, (c) the effective number of parties (as a proxy for both the nature of the electoral system as well as of the supply side), and (d) compulsory voting (whether the country has compulsory voting or a history of compulsory voting). Additionally, we introduce dummy variables representing decades to control for time effects.¹⁷ Finally, the model also includes an indicator representing the number of parties falling into the rest category. Recall that the latter and *mass parties* share high membership figures while only *mass parties* show high programmatic clarity. By including the number of parties falling into the rest category, we can validate our claim that high turnout is not a mere consequence of high party membership figures but a feature of a specific party type.

Table 7.3: Party types and electoral mobilization

(1)	

¹⁶ Hence, the cases in this analysis are elections.

¹⁷ The hierarchical data structure makes it necessary to calculate cluster-adjusted standard errors.

<i>Number of Mass Parties (t-1)</i>	0.04*** (0.012)
<i>Number of Catch-all Parties (t-1)</i>	0.01 (0.762)
<i>Number of Programmatic Parties (t-1)</i>	0.00 (0.803)
<i>Number of Rest Parties (t-1)</i>	0.03 (0.247)
<i>Decades (Base Category: 1960s)</i>	
-1970s	-0.03 (0.165)
-1980s	-0.04 (0.100)
-1990s	-0.10*** (0.003)
-2000s	-0.11*** (0.007)
-2010s	-0.09 (0.151)
_cons	0.68** (0.023)
N	190
R ²	0.275

Note: p-values in brackets; * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

Table 7.3 presents the results of the regression analysis.¹⁸ The number of *mass parties* in the term period before the respective election has a significant effect on the turnout level. Holding all other predictors constant at their means, for each mass party in the system, turnout increases by about 4 percentage points. The existence of parties falling into the rest category also has a positive sign but the effect is not significant. Therefore, the positive effect of *mass parties* is not simply due to membership figures. There is no significant impact of *catch-all parties* on turnout. The assumption that *catch-all parties* have a positive effect on turnout due to their sophisticated mobilization strategies and campaign machines can be rejected. *Programmatic parties* do not significantly affect electoral turnout. They are neither good nor bad when it comes to voter mobilization.

Moreover, we can show that this effect holds even when controlling for decade. This is important due to the development trend of mass parties, which our initial descriptive analysis shows to disappear over time. Finally, the model explains about 28% of the variation in turnout while leaving out the mass party variable decreases the R^2 value to 0.25. Hence, including the information on the number of mass parties in the previous legislative term makes a significant explanatory contribution to predicting electoral turnout.

7.5.2 Representation

While the discussion on what exactly representation means and who can and should represent whom in a democracy is long and complex (see, e.g., Pitkin 1972; Rehfeld 2009; Mansbridge 2011), it is still possible to claim that one of the core representative mechanisms in modern

¹⁸ As the controls are of no primary interest, we have omitted them from the table with the exception of the decade dummies.

party democracies is between a political party and its supporters. This link is, for example, described within the framework of the ‘*responsible party model*’ (Thomassen 1994; Thomassen and Schmitt 1997; Mair 2008) where—in a nutshell—parties present their political profiles, voters choose the party offering the profile that best fits their own interests and vote for them on election day. The parties, then, take responsibility to implement their policy proposals should they be elected to parliament and are held accountable for their actions at the next election by their constituents. One way of assessing how well parties perform in this process is to examine the degree of congruence they create between the policy profile they put forth in a given election and the policy interests of their potential supporters (e.g., Adams and Ezrow 2009; Powell 2009; Golder and Stramski 2010). To assess congruence we use a combined data set of party left-right positions based on the Manifesto Project Dataset and of party supporters’ left-right self-positioning from Eurobarometer as well as CSES 1 - 3¹⁹ surveys.²⁰ We rescale the survey respondents onto the theoretical party position scale, ranging from –100 (left) to 100 (right). The next step is to then calculate the distance between the party’s position and the mean position of their respective supporters in order to assess the congruence between a party and their own supporters. Thus for this analysis a case is a single party at a single point in time. This allows us to verify whether *mass parties* indeed represent their own supporters better than *catch-all* and *programmatic parties*, as the theory suggested.

Before we come to this model, however, we compare the distribution of supporters by comparing the standard deviation of left-right self-positioning of the parties’ supporters between the party types. A simple ANOVA analysis, checking whether the party types have significantly different means, finds as expected. The supporters of catch-all parties have an average standard deviation of 32.98 scale points. In comparison, the average distribution of mass party supporters is 3.03 scale points smaller (significant with $p < 0.1$), while programmatic parties and the parties of the rest type do not vary significantly.²¹ This result gives a first hint that *catch-all parties* could indeed have a harder time representing their supporters than mass parties, given that their supporters are more dispersed along the left-right scale. This is not unexpected given the diffuse policy supply catch-all parties provide.

Table 7.4: Party types and representation

	(1)
<i>Party Type (Base Category: Catch-all Party)</i>	
- Mass Party	-15.19*** (8.454)

19 The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) is the largest comparative project dealing with election studies. A jointly developed questionnaire is used in a variety of national election studies. On this basis a comparable dataset covering multiple democracies was created (www.cses.org).

20 In order to avoid the problem that the ‘left-right’ dimension might have different meanings in different countries (Benoit and Laver 2006) and/or at different points in time we use the method of Simon Franzmann and Andre Kaiser (2006) to calculate country and time-specific party left-right positions from Manifesto data. We can then combine these positions with the respective country and time-specific survey results and only need the much less comprehensive assumption that citizens and parties in one country, at one point in time share the same understanding of the political competition.

21 $F(3, 181) = 2.56, p > F = 0.056$

- Programmatic Party	-4.14 (7.07)
- Rest Party	-2.64 (9.53)
<i>Decades (Base Category:1970s)</i>	
-1980s	-5.52 (4.51)
-1990s	-12.41* (5.85)
-2000s	-12.05* (6.7)
_cons	31.63* (16.79)
N	184
R ²	0.154

Note: Robust standard errors in brackets. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; * p<0.01.**

Indeed, this result is confirmed by the analysis explaining the parties' distances to the average left-right position of their supporters. In order to avoid the *omitted variable problem*, we include controls for the most likely variables influencing representation: (a) the electoral system, (b) effective number of parties, (c) the polarization of the party system, (d) the absolute number of large parties as well as (e) variables for time effects. Furthermore, standard errors are clustered by country to take the data structure into account. Table 7.4 shows the results of the analysis, omitting the results for the controls.

While the effect is only significant at the $p<0.10$ level, we do find that *mass parties* are indeed closer to their average supporter than *catch-all parties* by 15 scale points. The results for *programmatic parties* are not significant but the beta coefficient is in the expected direction and size: *programmatic parties* have a slight tendency to be better at representing their supporters than *catch-all parties* but not at the level of *mass parties*. These results confirm our theoretical proposition that the social rootedness and clear programmatic profile of *mass parties* lead to a strong representation link between these parties and their supporters. At the same time, the supporters of *mass parties* come from a significantly narrower left-right spectrum than those of *catch-all parties*. Hence, *catch-all parties* successfully appeal to a broader audience, drawing in supporters from a much broader segment of society. However, these are then significantly worse represented. With the disappearance of *mass parties* the performance of parties regarding representation has been reduced, which is a bigger problem for representative democracy. But as *mass parties* are mostly substituted by *programmatic parties* this effect is not dramatic enough to use the term crisis.

7.5.3 Government stability

In general, both types of electoralist party should be able to sustain governments better than *mass-based parties*, simply because their actions are more focused on office-seeking than policy-seeking. Moreover, their organizational structure gives more power to party elites, which increases the capacity of strategic behavior. At the same time, *catch-all parties* should

be even better at sustaining governments because they are less constrained by a clear political program than *programmatic parties*. In other words, *catch-all parties* are more flexible in reacting to internal and external developments and more able to reach a compromise with coalition partners. Does the configuration of governments in terms of the three party types under analysis have an effect on government stability?

Government stability here refers to the continuity of a government between two regular elections with instability being defined as either a change in the composition of the government (either the full government or the set of parties comprising the government) or when the prime minister changes (Müller and Strøm 2000, 12). Such a definition is commonly agreed upon in the literature (Budge and Keman 1990; Lijphart 1999; Conrad and Golder 2010). To be clear, however, the ending of the government by a regular election is not instability but part of the natural, stable transition of power in democracies.²² The unit of observation for this analysis is the first government in a country for each legislative term. As the dependent variable, we built a binary indicator: a government is considered to be stable if it lasts for at least 75% of the regular term.

The different party types are measured on the level of governments. Therefore, three dummy variables were created, each showing a value of one if the respective party type is present in the government. The fourth type of large parties, those falling into the rest category, are used as the base category.²³ Furthermore, we introduce three control variables: (a) the number of parties in government, (b) a dummy variable distinguishing minority from majority governments, and (c) the maximum left-right distance of all parties in government. Following from the literature (for example Taylor 1971; Immergut 1990; Lijphart 1999; Tsebelis 2002), these indicators have been shown to have an impact on government stability because they affect a government's ability to act and to establish policy programs. Again, the model includes variables controlling for time effects. The regression results are shown in Table 7.5²⁴.

Table 7.5: Party types and government stability

	(1)
<i>Party Type (Base Category: Rest-Party Government)</i>	
- Mass Party Government	0.96 (0.202)
- Catch-all Party Government	1.12** (0.022)
- Programmatic Party Government	0.53 (0.370)
<i>Decades (Base Category: 1960s)</i>	
- 1970s	0.15 (0.783)
- 1980s	0.73 (0.305)

²² Similar to the other parts of our analysis, we use cluster-corrected regression analysis to test the impact of different party types.

²³ Consequently, governments containing more than one party type had to be excluded from the analysis. Fortunately, only nine governments were lost due to this restriction.

²⁴ The control variables are omitted from the table.

- 1990s	2.00** (0.036)
- 2000s	1.37* (0.090)
_cons	-0.73 (0.221)
N	148
pseudo R ²	0.131

Note: P-values in brackets. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

First of all, we see a clear temporal effect: governments have become more stable in the 1990s and 2000s in comparison to governments in the 1960s, holding all other factors constant. The question whether this is caused by the increased experience of democracy or other factors cannot be resolved in this paper. At minimum, one can conclude that, in contrast to electoral turnout, there is not an overall downward trend endangering the efficiency of elected governments and, as a consequence, a crisis of the democracy phenomenon. Regarding our variables of interest—the party types—we get a result more or less consistent with theoretical expectations. Governments including at least one catch-all party have a much higher probability of surviving than the baseline category representing rest parties. In fact, holding all other independent variables on their empirical mean, the probability of a government being stable increases from 35% to 57% if a *catch-all party* is part of the government. The coefficients for *mass parties* and *programmatic parties* are positive but both are far from statistically significant. In other words, and consistent with our assumptions, only the purest type of an electoralist party in our analysis, the *catch-all party*, plays a relevant role in regard to government stability.

7.6 Conclusion

Much has been written about the decline of political parties and the more or less devastating effects of this decline for the functioning of modern representative democracies. In this chapter, we have raised the point that this literature is full of untested propositions and ‘doomsday’ predictions that have little, if any, empirical support. Therefore, we set out to take a first step toward a rigorous empirical test of whether and how much a ‘decline of parties’ exists and contributes to a ‘crisis of democracy’.

In order to do this we concentrate on the major players among political parties when it comes to the fulfillment of their democratic functions: large parties. In a second step, we subset large parties into three party types: *mass*, *catch-all* and *programmatic parties*. For this we develop a two-dimensional conceptualization focusing on party membership and programmatic clarity. Looking at the large parties in 15 Western European countries from the 1960s to 2010, we find that the *programmatic party* type dominates most systems. *Mass parties*, on the other hand, have declined steadily over time and are by now only a dominant feature in the Austrian party system. Given this development, it is safe to say that the age of the *mass party* is very likely past, as we cannot conceive how these parties would be able to win back large numbers of members. We also show that while the *catch-all party* type has not decreased in numbers to the extent that *mass parties* have, they have also not mushroomed as predicted by scholars such as Kirchheimer. Thus, while the strong vertical link between

society and political parties in the form of *mass parties* has indeed diminished substantially in most countries, a complete de-politization and de-ideologization of party competition in the form of *catch-all parties* has also not taken place in most systems. Thus, we were able to show that there is no general decline of large parties, but we did find changes among party types.

Furthermore, we analyze whether the existence or disappearance of certain (large) party types has an effect on the three key functions parties fulfill in democracy: mobilization, representation, and government stability. With regard to mobilization our results show that, controlling for several other factors, *mass parties* have a positive impact on turnout levels. In contrast to Kirchheimer's argument regarding the powerful campaign machines of *catch-all parties*, these parties do not affect turnout. This is not just a relevant finding but it might also be another piece to complete the puzzle of decreasing turnout rates in advanced democracies. *Mass parties* have clearly been on the retreat for several decades and this has a negative effect on citizens' electoral participation—obviously more severe in countries with a formerly strong tradition of *mass parties*. At the same time, neither the development of *catch-all parties* nor the large number of *programmatic parties* can fill this void. A programmatic profile still needs to be communicated to the voters and for this process party members still seem to play an important role.

Turning to fulfillment of the representation function, the results are in line with expectations. Specifically, we show that *mass parties* are better at fulfilling this function than their *catch-all counterparts*: *mass parties* are closer to the average supporter than *catch-all parties*. At the same time, we show that *catch-all parties* do appeal to a broader audience than do *mass parties*—something we would expect given the well documented nature of these parties programmatically. For the purposes of representation, however, the decline of the *mass party* is troubling as we show that these parties were clearly better at fulfilling the representative function than *catch-all parties*. On the other hand, the most common party type identified by our classification—the *programmatic party*—is better than *catch-all parties* at representing although still much worse than mass parties. With this finding we confirm that *programmatic parties* are functioning as the C-students of modern party systems with regards to key democratic functions.

Finally, our analysis shows that different party types in power do affect the durability of governments. Governments including a *catch-all party* are much more stable than governments without. At least in this regard they outperform the other party types; whether this is enough to outweigh their effects on turnout and representation seems questionable. On the other hand, forming stable governments has traditionally been seen as one of the weaknesses of *mass parties* but we find no empirical evidence that they perform worse than *programmatic parties*.

While the three functions of parties assessed in this chapter are arguably crucial for democracies, they are not the only functions parties fulfill. As presented above, Diamond and Gunther (2003, 2006) list additional functions for some of which we can draw cautious conclusions. For example, the fact that a large, and even growing, proportion of parties under investigation are *programmatic parties* shows that programmatic clarity remains a stable feature of political competition, which, in turn, is likely to have a positive effect on the capability of parties to fulfill other democratic functions. While we could not test this proposition directly in this chapter, we can argue that issue structuring is a given outcome if

roughly three in four large parties in a party system have high programmatic clarity. A less positive picture emerges if we think about large party development with regard to parties' social integration function. In this regard, we see, for instance, a clear pattern of decreasing party membership numbers, which may still affect democracy indirectly, e.g., through decreased societal rootedness. If we assume that one of the main integration mechanisms is via party membership and that the continuous 'learning' of democratic values and procedures as well as a political sense of belonging, which membership provides, are still highly relevant for fostering democracy, the picture looks grim. This function is clearly only fulfilled by one of the three large party types we identify: *mass parties*. Hence, we must draw similar conclusions as we do for mobilization: As *mass parties* seem to be irreversibly vanishing, the fulfillment of this function becomes increasingly difficult. Nonetheless, the process we are observing is clearly better characterized as a development of party systems and party types than as a crisis of democracy provoked by the decline of political parties in general.

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