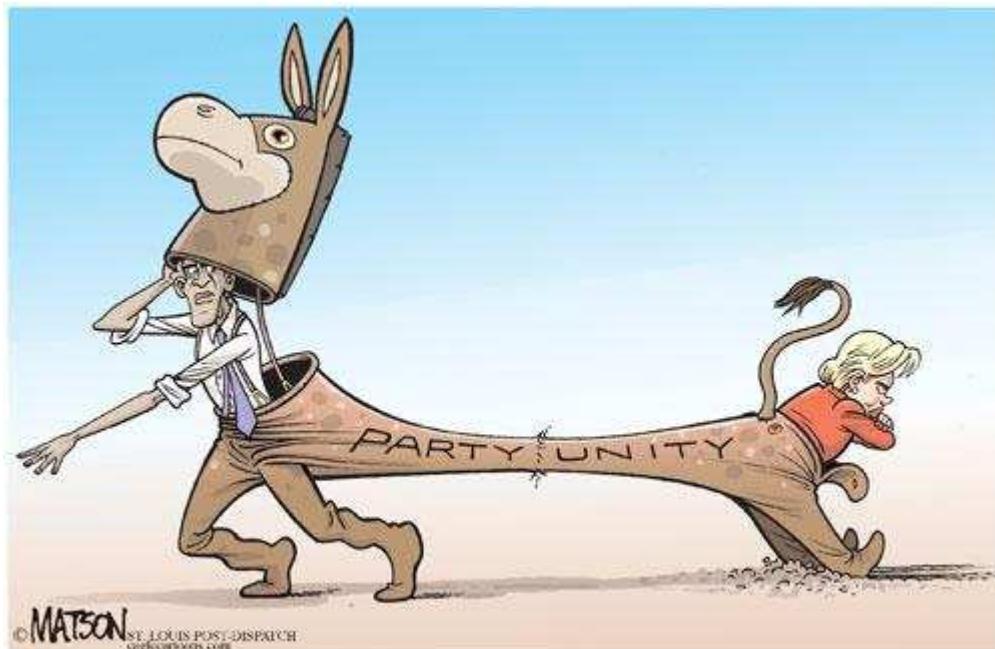


Determinants of Party Unity in Europe

A comparative study of parliamentary parties in twenty-three countries



by

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Gabriela Borz,

Budapest

May 11 2009

To my mother and father

Abstract

Empirically, this thesis presents an original cross-country comparison based on raw data about 187 European political parties and their levels of unity, as influenced by party characteristics and national political institutions. I offer various ways to measure party unity of behavior: measures based on elite surveys, the expert survey I have conducted myself, and roll-call data. *Firstly*, I argue that there is no significant discrepancy between the levels of behavioral unity in Central Eastern Europe and Western Europe. This justifies rejecting stereotypes of the two regions as being completely different in terms of party politics, and further substantiates the need for comparative party research to include Central Eastern Europe. There is however a significant difference in the unity of attitudes between Eastern and Western Europe, and the same difference in terms of unity of attitudes is also significant when old and new democracies are compared. *Secondly*, the results show the supremacy of party characteristics in explaining unity of behavior. Ideological congruence is a good predictor of how united a party is going to be in parliament. However, unity of attitudes is not a sufficient predictor of party unity of behavior. High centralization and disciplinary rules contribute as well to achieving a high level of behavioral unity. *Thirdly*, the MPs' focus of representation does predict their future behavior in the legislature. The more importance MPs allocate to representing their constituents, the lower will be their unity of behavior in the parliament. This tendency accentuates if an MP is elected under open lists. *Fourthly*, contrary to expectations and against many propositions advanced earlier in the party literature, systemic factors, like federalism, parliamentarism, and electoral system perform poorly in explaining MPs' voting unity in the legislature. The only systemic factors with a positive direct effect on the unity of behavior are: the amount of state subsidy that a party receives, the ceiling on donations and party system age. The systemic factors impact however, more strongly on the unity of attitudes and therefore indirectly on the unity of behavior.

Theoretically, the thesis explains party unity from state and party perspectives and advances a model which works for European political parties. While doing this, the thesis touches upon several theoretical issues in party politics, comparative politics and democratic theory. First of all, I suggest that *definitions* of political parties which regard them as unitary actors could be revised to consider the distinction between attitudes and behavior. My PhD thesis builds on the differences between unity of behavior and unity of attitudes, a conceptualization which better addresses the complexities inherent in the issue of party unity because unity on one of these dimensions does not always guarantee the same level of unity on the other. Secondly, my thesis shows that even if institutional conditions would not favor unitary party behavior in parliament, parties adapt and use their own tools in order to become a unitary voting bloc. Consequently, whether *party government* is in danger or not, because of declining partisanship within the electorate or because of the convergence of parties into a mainstream consensus, party unity will always enhance it and maintain it. Thirdly, the findings of this thesis allow me to conclude that some *paradoxes of representative democracy* still persist. If one assumes that external democracy is achieved, then there are instances in which this happens at the expense of internal party democracy. Some parties apply high levels of central control and disciplinary rules in order to be unitary in the parliament, to vote for the policies proposed and, consequently, to implement them. Fourthly, the process of *party formation* and *development* are also related to unity of attitudes and unity of behavior. While unity of attitudes develops rather slowly, the latter can change more rapidly when intra-party mechanisms of coercion are applied.

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