



# Party Law in Modern Europe

The Legal Regulation of Political Parties in Post-War Europe

## Does Regulation Make Political Parties More Popular? A Multi-level Analysis of Party Support in Europe

Paul Whiteley  
Department of Government  
University of Essex,  
Colchester CO4 3SQ  
United Kingdom  
([whiteley@essex.ac.uk](mailto:whiteley@essex.ac.uk))

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## **Does Regulation Make Political Parties More Popular?**

### **A Multi-level Analysis of Party Support in Europe**

This paper examines the relationship between party regulation, trust in political parties and partisanship in twenty-four European democracies in 2010. It tests two rival hypotheses, one suggesting that the regulation of political parties improves support for them among electorates, and the other arguing the opposite case that regulation inhibits support for parties. These hypotheses are tested using a multi-level modelling strategy which controls for a number of variables which might account for trust in parties and partisanship at the individual level. The evidence suggests that heavy regulation of political parties is associated with low levels of trust in parties and fewer partisans in these countries. The analysis uses cross sectional data and so definitive causal relationships cannot be fully identified, but the data implies that regulation by the state in the context of a severe economic recession could be having the effect of stifling support for political parties and weakening civil society.

#### **Introduction**

There are two prominent findings from comparative research into political parties in the advanced industrial democracies. The first is that parties are growing ever closer to the state, and are becoming, in effect, part of a state sponsored cartel (Katz and Mair, 1995; Detterbeck, 2005). The second is that with some exceptions parties are losing their voluntary organisations and fewer party members and activists are found in these democracies over time (Katz et al. 1992; Mair and Van Biezen, 2001; Van Bizen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012). These findings have been linked together by the argument that activism and volunteering in political parties is declining *because* they are growing closer to the state. This idea is supported by evidence that states which heavily regulate their party systems have fewer party activists and members, other things being equal (Whiteley, 2011). Essentially proximity to the state has the effect of smothering voluntary party organisations.

It can be argued that while the loss of grassroots volunteers in political parties is a very undesirable development because it weakens civil society, it is not fatal for the effectiveness of parties in these countries (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Dalton and Wattenberg,

2000; Web and Holliday, 2002; Whiteley and Seyd, 2002). This is because party volunteers have always been a small minority of citizens in these countries, and although they disproportionately contribute to political participation (Whiteley, 2009) democracy can survive without them. However, if we look beyond voluntary activity in political parties to partisanship in the wider electorate, that is a different matter. If proximity to the state is having the effect of weakening support for and trust in political parties among citizens in general this is a much more serious matter, since partisanship helps to anchor the political system and contributes to effective government (Whiteley, 2012).

Ever since the concept party identification was introduced in the US in the 1950s it has played a key role in explaining voting behaviour and also in the maintenance of the stability of party systems over time (Campbell et al. 1960; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). Originally, the concept of partisanship developed at the University of Michigan saw it as a stable, long-term psychological attachment which many individuals possess towards parties, and which influences their voting behaviour both directly and indirectly. It prompts them to vote for their preferred party, but it also acts as a perceptual screen which filters out dissonant messages that might otherwise persuade individuals to switch to other parties (Campbell et al. 1960). The Michigan model suggests that partisanship will be more stable and grow stronger as the individual grow older.

Subsequent work has criticised this conception of partisanship and shown that it is more dynamic and subject to influence by issues and by incumbent performances in office than the Michigan model allows (Fiorina, 1981; Franklin and Jackson, 1983; Achen, 2002, Clarke et al. 2004, 2009). Despite this, partisanship acts as a force for stability in a political system. As the experience of emerging democracies demonstrate, when partisanship is weak in a particular country electoral behaviour in that country becomes very volatile and the party system is often fragmented and unstable (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between government regulation of political parties, trust in political parties and the strength of partisanship in the advanced industrial democracies. The aim is to determine if the regulatory environment is weakening both partisanship and also trust in parties in the European democracies. This exercise uses data from the European Social Surveys conducted since 2002 when the first survey was carried out<sup>1</sup>. The paper begins by looking at trends in partisanship and trust in parties over time, and then goes on to model the individual level determinants of these variables in twenty-four countries using the 2010 European Social Survey data. This is followed by an investigation of the effects of regulation on partisanship and trust in parties using a multi-level modelling strategy with the assistance of data from the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) database on party finance and the Leiden database on party law in modern Europe<sup>2</sup>.

### **Changes in Partisanship and Trust in Parties Over Time**

The European Social Survey (ESS) is *'an academically-driven social survey designed to chart and explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations'* (ESS, 2012). It was established in 2001 and conducted the first round of surveys in 2002 which have been repeated every other year since with many common questions. The survey has paid particular attention to political parties repeating questions on partisanship, voting and party membership in each round since 2002. Some twenty-one countries have been surveyed in all five rounds between 2002 and 2010, and the percentage of respondents in these countries who said that they felt close to a political party appears in Figure 1.

-- Figure 1 about here --

It is apparent from the responses in Figure 1 that partisanship has been weakening in these countries over time. In the first of the ESS surveys in 2002 just under 52 per cent of respondents claimed to feel close to a political party. By 2010 this figure had declined to just under 46 per cent. That said, the decline is not uniform with significant changes occurring after 2006 and most notably in 2010. This period coincides with the arrival of the ‘great recession’ in Europe in 2008 and the start of the serious economic problems of the Eurozone, a topic we will return to below.

-- Figure 2 about here --

Figure 2 examines changes in another important indicator of the public attitudes to political parties, that is, trust in parties. The trust question did not appear in the first survey but it has been asked in all of the subsequent surveys. Trust in parties is measured with an eleven point scale where zero means no trust at all and ten means complete trust. The mean scores for the countries since 2004 tell a similar story to that of partisanship in Figure 1. The citizens of these twenty-one European democracies are rather less likely to trust political parties in 2010 than they were in 2004.

-- Figure 3 about here --

The averages in Figures 1 and 2 conceal considerable variations in partisanship and party trust in these countries over time. Figure 3 shows how partisanship changed in each of the countries between 2002 and 2010. It decline in ten of them and increased in ten while remaining stable in one. The overall scores declined because the loss of partisans in some countries considerable outweighed the increase in others. These data are not consistent with the evidence on declining voluntary activity in parties which has occurred more or less everywhere (Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012). However, one noticeable feature of Figure 3 is that the countries which have experienced the largest reductions in partisanship are those facing the greatest economic difficulties in the present period. These include

Greece, Spain, Portugal and the Irish Republic, all of which have been very severely hit by the ‘great recession’. (Reinhart and Rogoff, 2009; Krugman, 2012; Galbraith, 2012). In contrast, countries like Germany and Switzerland which have experienced relatively mild recessions have seen an increase in the number of partisans over time.

-- Figure 4 about here --

Changes in trust in political parties charted in Figure 4 show a similar pattern to the changes in partisanship in Figure 3. In this case twelve of the countries have experienced a decline in trust and nine have experienced an increase. In a repeat of the pattern found in Figure 3 the citizens of countries like Greece, Spain, Portugal and the Ukraine have experience particularly large declines in trust, notably Greece. While there is no evidence of a ubiquitous decline in partisanship and party trust in all of these European countries, it is evident that rather large reductions have occurred in some countries and this explains the patterns observed in Figures 1 and 2. Clearly when modelling the determinants of partisanship and party trust it is important to take into account the performance of the political system in delivering what the voters want. We examine this question in the next section.

### **The Determinants of Partisanship and Trust in Parties in 2010**

The European Social Surveys are not panels and so we cannot model changes over time with the same respondents. However, we can draw on the literature in political science and apply it to the task of explaining variations in partisanship and party trust across Europe. This will be done using the 2010 ESS data with the assistance of four different models of political participation which have been developed in the literature. These are the valence, the cognitive engagement, the civic voluntarism and the social capital models, and they will be described briefly next.

The valence model has been utilised particularly in research into electoral choice (Clarke et al. 2004, 2009; Whiteley et al. 2013). The term valence was introduced by Donald Stokes in a seminal article which provided a comprehensive critique of the Downsian spatial model of party competition (Downs, 1957; Stokes, 1963). He wrote:

*I will call "valence-issues" those that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate'. (Stokes, 1963: 373)*

He went on to explain that valence issues arise when there is broad agreement about the desired policy outcomes among the public, such as low unemployment and inflation, strong economic growth and efficient public services. Voters will support the party that appears to offer the best chance of delivering a competent performance in these areas (Clarke et al. 2004: 8). The valence model concentrates on policy delivery and is predominantly a theory about which party wins elections. However, it has wider implications in the contemporary situation facing many European states. Serious recession and an apparent inability of governments and the major political parties to deal with the problems arising from this, has the effect of extending valence concerns to the party system in general and even to the legitimacy of democracy. Systemic failure to deliver on the key policies which matter to voters can have the effect of weakening support for mainstream political parties of all types. Clearly, both partisanship and party trust are likely to be influenced by the politics of performance in the present economic climate facing Europe.

The key measures relevant in the valence model are public evaluations of the delivery of effective policies on the economy and also in relation to public services such as health care and education. There are indicators of these in the ESS 2010 survey which can be combined into a valence policy scale and this is discussed more fully in the appendix. Given the fact that valence considerations may help to account for wider support for the political system,



then public evaluations of the state of democracy and the performance of the government in general are also included as predictors in the analysis.

In contrast to the valence model, the central idea of cognitive engagement theory is the proposition that participation depends on the individual's access to information and on their ability and willingness to use that information to make informed choices about politics and government (Norris, 2000; Dalton, 2005; Clarke et al. 2004). Cognitively engaged individuals are close to the classical Greek conceptions of the good citizen, who is an informed member of the community, fully participates in politics and understands the issues and complexities of government. Cognitively engaged individuals are interested in politics and civic affairs, are politically knowledgeable and have a clear understanding of the principles and practice of democracy. At the same time they are also likely to be critical citizens in the sense of evaluating the performance of incumbent and opposition parties and leaders (Norris, 1999). So the model has links with valence theory. A perception that the state may be failing to deliver in terms of the expectations of its citizens is likely to mobilise individuals to participate in unorthodox ways, for example, by protesting (Muller, 1970). It may also reduce their willingness to support or trust mainstream political parties in general if they feel that they are not delivering on their promises.

The key variables in the cognitive engagement model are education, media consumption, interest in politics and political knowledge. Education is measured in the ESS in terms of the years of full-time education of respondents. Equally media consumption is measured by the extent to which citizens follow politics and public affairs in newspapers, television and on the radio. Interest in politics is measured with a variable which captures the extent which individuals are motivated to pay attention to government and politics. Political knowledge relates to the citizens understanding of the way the political system works and is

also about policies which are relevant to their concerns. Unfortunately, political knowledge is not measured in the European Social Surveys.

Turning next to the civic voluntarism model, this is perhaps the most well-known and widely applied model of political participation in political science. It has its origins in the work of Sidney Verba and his colleagues on participation in the United States (Verba and Nie, 1972). It was subsequently applied to the task of explaining participation in a number of different countries (Verba, Nie and Jae-On Kim, 1978; Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Parry, Moyser and Day, 1992; Verba, Schlozman, Brady, 1995). The central idea of the model is that participation is driven by the individual's resources which underpin their involvement in politics and society. The authors define resources in terms of '*time, money and civic skills*' (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995: 271). Thus high status individuals rich in these resources will participate more extensively than low status individuals who lack such resources.

In the model the psychological engagement of individuals with politics can also play an important role in influencing participation, and is defined largely in terms of the individual's sense of political efficacy (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995: 272). This derives in large part from the individual's resources, since individuals who are well off and work in high status occupations are more likely to develop a sense of efficacy than individuals who lack these attributes. In addition the model suggests that citizens can be mobilised to participate by other people in their social networks. This process of mobilisation is defined as: '*requests for participation that come to individuals at work, in church, or in organizations - especially those that come from friends, relatives, or acquaintances*' (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995: 272).

The 2010 ESS has fairly good measures of individual resources, making it possible to identify the respondent's occupational status, their educational background, income and the time they have available for outside activities. However, the survey lacks indicators of political efficacy and also mobilisation, although arguably these are secondary factors when it comes to explaining why people participate.

An alternative interpretation of the relationship between resources and efficacy in the model arises from the comparative analysis of participation in five countries. In this research the authors argued that group resources arising for example from trade union membership could counteract a lack of individual resources. In particular they suggest that: '*organization – and we might add – ideology – is the weapon of the weak*' (Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978: 15). So low status individuals who are involved in voluntary organisations might well participate as much as high status individuals. A similar point can be made about individuals who have strong ideological beliefs in relation to politics.

If the civic voluntarism model concentrates on individual resources, the social capital model tends to concentrate on community resources. Putnam defines social capital as '*features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating co-ordinated actions*' (1993: 167). The core idea of social capital theory is that if individuals are embedded in dense social networks which ensure that they interact frequently with other people in a voluntary capacity this will foster interpersonal trust or social capital. This can then be used subsequently to solve common problems. In this sense social capital is like other types of capital and can be used to make society more productive and the economy more efficient.

For many researchers trust is the key indicator of social capital (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Whiteley, 1999). Trust is important since it

allows individuals to engage in cooperative activities with strangers beyond their immediate family or community. There is a debate about the origins of social capital (Whiteley, 1999), but the dominant model argues that interactions between individuals in voluntary associations generates interpersonal trust. Communities characterised by high levels of social capital have dense networks of civic engagement and appear to have better health and education, less crime and higher rates of political participation (Putnam, 1993; 2000). By implication they will have more trust in, and support for political parties.

The 2010 ESS contains a battery of three items which measure interpersonal trust and a latent variable can be constructed from them. In addition there is a question asking respondents if they have worked in voluntary organisations during the previous twelve months, which captures one of the drivers of social capital. A third item asks how frequently respondents meet with friends, relatives or colleagues which provide a broad measure of social interaction, so a number of key components of the social capital model – interpersonal trust, voluntary activity and social interactions are reasonably well measured in the survey.

In light of this brief review of the four theoretical models used to explain support for political parties, in the next section we estimate models of party attachment using the 2010 ESS data.

### **Modelling Partisanship and Trust in Parties in 2010**

There are two models, one in which the dependent variable is trust in political parties, and the other individual partisanship. The pooled scores on the trust in parties scale appears in Figure 5 and it is apparent that trust was rather low in these twenty-four countries in 2010 with a mean score of only 3.17 on the scale. Some 19 per cent of respondents gave political parties a trust score of zero, and beyond a score of five trust scores tail off rather rapidly. The result is that only half of one per cent of respondents assigned a score of ten on the trust scale.

-- Figure 5 about here --

Figure 6 contains the distribution of scores on the strength of partisanship scale. To measure this respondents' were asked if they felt close to one political party rather than another, and the positive responses to this question appear in Figure 1. If they replied yes to this question a follow up question then asked how close they were to that party and so the responses to both questions are combined in Figure 6. With a total of 58 per cent of respondents saying that they did not feel close to any party and a further 1 per cent saying that they did have a preference for a party but did not feel at all close to it, then almost 60 per cent of Europeans can be described as non-partisan in 2010.

-- Figure 6 about here --

Trust in political parties and strength of partisanship are both modelled in Table 1 using the various indicators of the valence, cognitive engagement, civic voluntarism and social capital models. The table contains unstandardised coefficients in the first column and standardised coefficients in the second. It is important to note that with more than 45,000 respondents it is relatively easy for coefficients to attain statistical significance in these models, and so the standardised coefficients play a useful role in distinguishing between the variables in terms of their importance for explaining trust and partisanship.

-- Table 1 about here --

The goodness of fit of the party trust model is reasonable for an individual level analysis ( $R^2$  is 0.45). The valence model is the most important one for understanding party trust with all of the variables attaining statistical significance and having large standardised effects. Easily the most important variable, as the standardised coefficients show, is satisfaction with government. This was closely followed by the valence issues scale, and

then the satisfaction with democracy variable. Given that the valence model appears to be dominant for explaining trust in parties, it is easy to see why trust has declined in countries which have experienced the worst of the recession. This is fairly strong evidence to suggest that severe economic crisis coupled with an inability of governments to cope with the crisis has directly affected civil society in Europe. It has made people less likely to trust political parties. The effect works through policy dissatisfaction, but also goes beyond that to include concerns about the performance of governments, and also with democracy itself.

It is also apparent that the cognitive engagement model contributes to explaining trust in parties. Media consumption is an important predictor of trust while interest in politics has the strongest effect in that particular model with a standardised coefficient of +0.16. Clearly the politically engaged are more likely to trust political parties than the disengaged. However, educational attainment also plays a role in the cognitive engagement model and has a negative impact on trust, indicating that the most highly educated are less trusting of parties than the uneducated. This is an anomalous finding in relation to the cognitive engagement model since educational attainment is a positive predictor of participation in the model (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995; Pattie, Seyd and Whiteley, 2004).

The impact of the civic voluntarism model on party trust is particularly interesting since the signs of the effects are nearly all negative. Thus affluent and highly educated respondents are less likely to trust parties in comparison with their less affluent and educated fellow citizens. Given that we are investigating the influence of social status and its correlates on trust in parties in the middle of the largest economic crisis in Europe since the 1930s, these findings suggests that highly resourced individuals are reacting to this crisis more negatively than their poorly resourced counterparts. The exception to this is the negative impact of hours worked in the week on trust in parties. The expectation is that time

poverty caused by excessive working hours reduces political participation, and so this is consistent with the civic voluntarism model.

Two of the three variables in the social capital model contribute to explaining trust in political parties. If an individual works in a voluntary organisation and trusts their fellow citizens, then they are more likely to trust political parties. In a comparison of the two variables, interpersonal trust has a considerably larger impact on trust in parties than does voluntary activity. The social contacts variable which measures how embedded individuals are in friendship and family networks does not appear to have an influence on trust in parties<sup>3</sup>

The left-right ideology scale shows that respondents who identify themselves as being on the right of the ideological spectrum are less trusting of parties than respondents on the left. With regard to the other demographic control variables, older citizens are less likely to trust parties than younger citizens, although the quadratic specification shows that this lack of trust declines in importance as respondents get much older. Religious respondents are more trusting than the non-religious, a finding consistent with the civic voluntarism and social capital models, and women are more trusting than men. Finally, ethnic minorities are more trusting of parties than the ethnic majority. Overall, each of the four models makes a contribution to explaining trust in parties but it is apparent that the valence model dominates the picture.

Turning next to the strength of partisanship model, this is rather different from the party trust model. The goodness of fit is considerably smaller and although the valence indicators figure in the partisanship model, the effects are rather weaker than in the party trust model. Satisfaction with government and satisfaction with democracy are both positive predictors of partisanship but the valence policy scale is not a predictor. This suggests that partisanship is driven more by diffuse support for the party system rather than specific policy

concerns. The most important effects in the model are associated with the cognitive engagement model, since interest in politics has easily the largest impact on partisanship of all the variables. With respect to the social capital model voluntary activity has a positive impact on partisanship but interpersonal trust and social contacts do not appear to play a role.

Unlike in the party trust model the indicators in the civic voluntarism model all have a positive impact on partisanship. Thus affluent respondents with high occupational status are more likely to be partisans than poorer, low occupational status respondents. In addition males are more likely to be partisans than females and older people are more likely to support a party than younger people. Finally, citizenship counts in the sense that non-citizens are less likely to support a party than citizens, but ethnic minorities are closer to parties than the ethnic majority. In this respect ethnic minorities have the same impact as in the party trust model. Overall the models in Table 1 suggest that valence considerations play a key role in explaining trust in parties, and they also play a role in explaining partisanship although it is not the dominant role. The cognitive engagement model stands out as the key to understanding partisanship and to a lesser extent the civic voluntarism model.

Up to this point the modelling does not take into account the relationship between party trust and partisanship. Since they are both likely to figure as predictors in the models we examine this issue next.

### **Interactions between Trust in Parties and Partisanship**

The relationship between trust in parties and partisanship is very likely to be interactive with partisanship influencing trust in the first model, and trust influencing partisanship in the second. Given this reciprocal relationship it cannot be accurately estimated using an OLS regression (see Kennedy, 2003: 180-190). This is because OLS produces biased estimates in models with two-way relationships<sup>4</sup>. To deal with this problem



it is necessary to find instrumental variables which can stand in for the two endogenous variables when they appear as predictors. The idea is that if an instrumental variable is, for example, closely correlated with trust in parties but not with partisanship, then it can stand in for trust in parties as a predictor in the partisanship model without producing biased estimates. Theoretical considerations provide a guide to identifying these instrumental variables.

We will utilise two instrumental variables for the party trust measure and a further two for the partisanship measure, coupled with a two stage least squares estimation strategy (see Cameron and Trivedi, 2010, 183-192). The instruments for party trust are trust in the legislature and trust in the legal systems. Trust in political parties is quite likely to be correlated with trust in other state institutions such as the legislature and the legal system, but there is no obvious reason why partisanship should be influenced by institutional trust in the same way<sup>5</sup>. In the case of partisanship the instruments are party membership and if the respondent worked for a political party in the previous year. Again it is quite likely that party members and volunteers will have strong party attachments, but there is no reason to suppose that trust in parties in general is going to make people join or work for a political party<sup>6</sup>.

-- Table 2 about here --

The two-stage least squares estimates in Table 2 confirm that there is a reciprocal relationship between trust in parties and the strength of partisanship in the models. Strong partisan attachments make people more likely to trust political parties, and equally trust in parties has a positive influence on partisanship. The standardised coefficients in the two-stage least squares estimation shows that partisanship has a slightly stronger impact on trust in parties than the latter has on the former. These variables measure different aspects of the public's attitudes to political parties. It is noteworthy that when the variables are added to the

two models they do not materially change the size of the other effects appearing in Table 1, so the four different models of participation continue to be influential in the interactive model.

### **Party Regulation by the State**

To return to the opening theme, the aim of this paper is to investigate the relationship between partisanship, trust in parties and the state regulation of political parties. In this section we examine state regulation of political parties. The key argument is that excessive state regulation means that parties will be increasingly captured by the state instead of remaining independent institutions in civil society (Bartolini and Mair, 2001; Kopecky and Mair, 2003; van Biezen, 2004; van Biezen and Kopecky, 2007). However, it can be argued that the regulation of parties has one of two opposite effects as far as the public are concerned. On the one hand tighter regulation might have the effect of increasing trust in and support for political parties if the public are reassured by such regulation. This is a plausible argument if regulation means that parties will be well-managed, free of corruption and deliver the policies that their supporters want. If so, proximity to the state should enhance their reputations in the minds of the voters.

The other opposite effect is that tight regulation means that the public see parties increasingly as mere extensions of the state bureaucracy, or as part of a state sponsored cartel which is increasingly remote from their concerns. This may not be a problem if the state is seen as well run and effective in delivering policies, but in the context of the serious economic recession facing Europe at the present time, particularly in the Eurozone, states are increasingly seen as being unable to deliver on these policies. It is noteworthy that the average scores on the satisfaction with government and satisfaction with the economy scales for the twenty-one countries surveyed in all five rounds of the European Social Survey were

4.45 and 5.10 in 2006, the last pre-recession survey. By 2010 these scores had fallen to 3.83 and 4.02 respectively. Needless to say the reductions were much larger in some countries such as Greece and Portugal than in others. Accordingly in these circumstances political parties which appear to be part of a state sponsored cartel will increasingly prove unattractive to many voters, making them appear less trustworthy and weakening their partisan attachments. In this view, regulation will inhibit support for political parties.

The earlier paper on party members used the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) database to measure state regulation of political parties<sup>7</sup> (Whiteley, 2011). This database has been greatly expanded and updated and contains many more indicators. A total of thirty-two measures of party regulation are included in the present analysis covering regulations about donations to political parties, the scope and limits of public funding and the reporting requirements imposed on candidates and parties, particularly in relation to elections. A list of the thirty-two measures appears in the appendix and Figure 7 shows that there is considerable variation in the state regulation of parties in these countries.

-- Figure 7 about here --

Figure 7 shows that the least regulated party system in these countries is in Switzerland, which has only minimal restrictions on donations to parties and reporting requirements on party activities and expenditure. Interestingly, former communist countries such as Bulgaria and Croatia are among the most regulated party systems with a plethora of rules and reporting requirements applied to them. The Scandinavian countries such as Norway, Sweden and Denmark tend to be lightly regulated as is the Netherlands. In contrast, southern European countries such as France, Portugal and Greece tend to be more heavily regulated.

-- Figure 8 about here --

Figure 8 shows the relationship between the mean party trust scores in the twenty-four countries and the regulation scores. It is strongly negative with a correlation of -0.81, showing that low trust is strongly associated with heavy regulation. Of the two hypotheses discussed earlier it appears that proximity to the state undermines trust in political parties rather than increases it. As to the causal links in this relationship, cross-sectional data cannot definitively answer the question of which came first – regulation or mistrust – but it is evident that these variables are strongly associated. A plausible account in the case of ex-communist countries and former dictatorships in southern Europe is that a legacy of mistrust of parties still present after democratic transition had occurred, ensures that new parties have been heavily regulated even as democracy becomes consolidated.

-- Figure 9 about here --

Figure 9 shows the relationship between the mean scores on the strength of partisanship scale and the regulation index. The story is similar to that of Figure 8 except that the relationship is not as strong as in that figure with a correlation of -0.64. Overall though, regulation is heaviest in those countries in which there are fewer partisans and where the strength of partisanship is weakest. These figures show that the relationship between voluntary activity in political parties and party regulation highlighted in an earlier paper extends to partisanship and also to public trust in political parties.

A second source of information about party regulation in Europe is the Party Laws in Modern Europe database maintained at the University of Leiden<sup>8</sup>. This is an extensive database of the laws passed relating to the regulation and control of political parties in Europe since the Second World War. The laws vary in their scope and impact on political parties in the thirty-three countries in the database, covering Parliamentary and extra-Parliamentary parties, the activities and behaviour of parties and their external oversight. As a first

approximation we can count the number of laws passed in each of the countries represented in the 2010 European Social Survey governing the conduct of political parties between 1944 and 2012. This provides a rough measure of the amount of legislative control which has been imposed on political parties in the modern era. Clearly some laws are more important than others and so this is a fairly approximate measure, but it is nonetheless useful for capturing the legislative regulatory environment faced by political parties.

In the event there is a moderate correlation between the number of laws introduced to regulate parties and the scope of regulation measured in the IDEA database in these countries ( $r = +0.42$ ). This suggests that the two indices are measuring different, but related, aspects of state regulation of parties. The two measures can be used to model individual level trust in political parties and the strength of partisanship across Europe in 2010.

### **Party Trust, Strength of Partisanship and State Regulation**

The aggregate measures in Figures 8 and 9 are interesting, but they do not show that individual citizens are less trusting in parties or less partisan as a consequence of regulation. It would be an ecological fallacy to assume that aggregate relationships imply individual level relationships (Robinson, 1950), and so we model the effects of state on individual partisanship and trust.

Table 3 contains the two-stage least squares estimates of the models of partisanship and party trust at the individual level which incorporates the two aggregate level party regulation measures in a random intercept specification<sup>9</sup> (see Snijders and Bosker, 1999; Raudenbusch and Bryk, 2002). The impact of regulation at the national level on individuals is captured by the two variables with a specification which implies that they influence the intercepts of the party trust and strength of partisanship models. It is apparent that both the IDEA party regulation index and the Leiden party laws index have a significant negative

impact on political trust in these countries, controlling for the other variables in the individual level model. The goodness of fit of the aggregate trust model is high indicating that the effects are highly significant in both cases.

In the case of the strength of partisanship model the IDEA regulation index has a significant negative impact, but the party laws index does not attain significance although the negative sign is consistent with theoretical argument and the findings in the party trust model. Overall, in the case of partisanship the aggregate effect is much more modest than for trust in parties, but it is nonetheless consistent with the idea that party regulation inhibits both trust and partisanship in these countries.

-- Table 3 about here --

The individual level predictors in the models in Table 3 are very similar to those in Table 2, indicating that valence considerations play a key role in explaining trust in political parties whereas the cognitive engagement model tends to be more important in the case of partisanship. Thus the addition of the regulation variables to the model does not change the conclusion that performance issues have had the effect of weakening support for parties in Europe.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

This paper has linked together two important findings in party research, the growing relationship between political parties and the state on the one hand and the decline in voluntary support for political parties among electorates on the other. These findings are not the same as those showing that regulation stifles voluntary activity in political parties, because the decline of voluntary parties is much more ubiquitous than party trust or partisanship. In contrast to volunteering, partisanship and party trust are not declining more

or less everywhere. However, support for parties has declined rather precipitously in those countries most strongly hit by recession which has been the main problem facing European countries over the last five years. The individual level modelling suggests that a large part of this is due to growing disillusionment with the ability of governments to deliver on the valence issues such as economic prosperity and personal security.

These results show that the party systems in advanced industrial countries are weakened by prolonged recession and by government failure. But having controlled for these effects in the multivariate model it is still the case that over-regulation of political parties weakens their support among European electorates. State capture makes parties more remote from the concerns of individuals who have less and less of an ability to influence them as ordinary citizens. At the same time this process associates parties with policy failure and growing scepticism about the effectiveness of democracy in these countries. Quite clearly in some countries political parties are over-regulated and this inhibits their attraction to the public quite independently of the recession.

The policy implications of these findings are hard to discern from cross-sectional data. A longitudinal study of party support across Europe would greatly enhance our ability to untangle the causal processes. If regulation is the primary cause of weakening parties then de-regulation should have a positive influence. On the other hand if mistrust is the primary cause of party regulation then de-regulation might be ineffective. Future research should focus on acquiring such longitudinal data so that this important question can be addressed.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.partylaw.leidenuniv.nl> and <http://www.idea.int/parties/finance>.

<sup>3</sup> There is evidence that members of ethnic minorities tend to meet socially more frequently than the population in general and this might explain in part why ethnic minorities tend to trust parties more than the ethnic majority.

<sup>4</sup> The reciprocal relationship means that these two endogenous variables are correlated with the error terms in the equation in which they are predictors, making the estimation biased (Kennedy, 2003: 188).

<sup>5</sup> The correlation between trust in parties and trust in the legislature is high (+0.74) as is the correlation between trust in parties and trust in the legal system (+0.59). In contrast the correlation between partisanship and these variables is much weaker (+0.15 and +0.11 respectively).

<sup>6</sup> The correlation between partisanship and party membership is +0.22 and between partisanship and working for a party is +0.17. In contrast the correlation between partisanship and trust in the legislature is +0.08 and trust in the legal system is 0.01.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.idea.int/parties/finance>.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.partylaw.leidenuniv.nl/laws>.

<sup>9</sup> The multi-level modelling setup is:

### Individual Level Model

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j} X_{1ij} + \beta_{2j} X_{2ij} + \dots + \beta_{kj} X_{kij} + r_{ij}$$

$Y_{ij}$  is the activism score of individual  $i$  in country  $j$

$\beta_{ij}$  are the individual level model coefficients

$X_{kij}$  are the individual level predictor variables

$r_{ij}$  is an individual level error term

### Aggregate Level Model

$$\beta_{ij} = \gamma_{q0} + \gamma_{q1} W_{1j} + \gamma_{q2} W_{2j} + \gamma_{q3} W_{3j} \dots + \gamma_{q4} W_{sj} + u_{qj}$$

$\beta_{ij}$  is the  $i$ 'th coefficient from the  $j$ 'th country in the individual level model

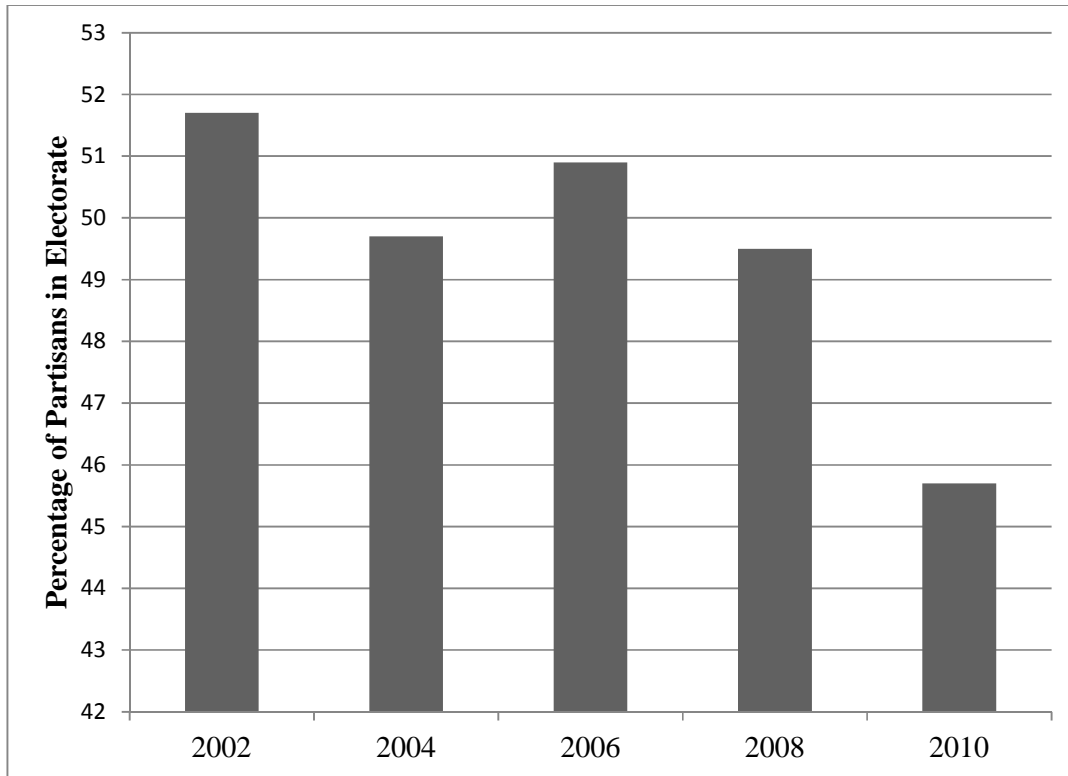
$\gamma_{qj}$  are the coefficients of the aggregate level covariates

$W_{ij}$  are the aggregate level covariates

$u_{qj}$  is an aggregate level error term



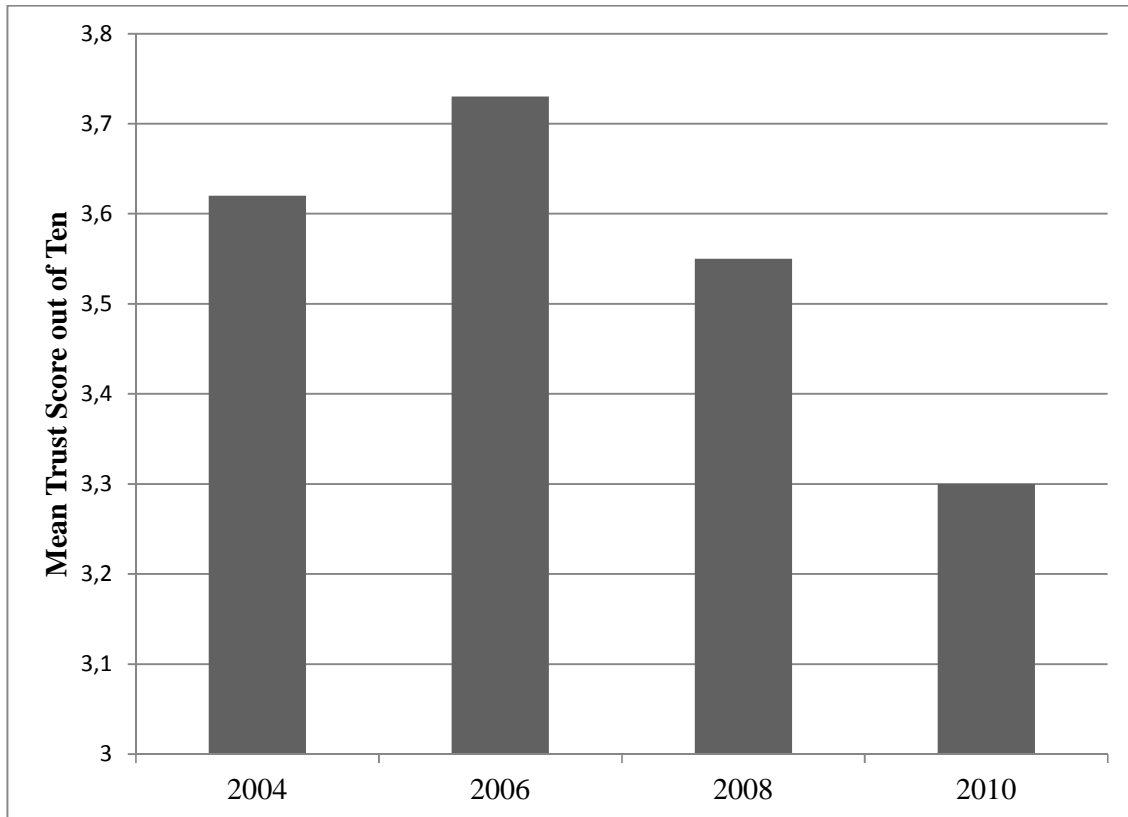
**Figure 1 Changes in Partisanship in Twenty-One European Countries 2002-2010**



Source: European Social Surveys 2002 to 2010.

*(‘Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?’)*

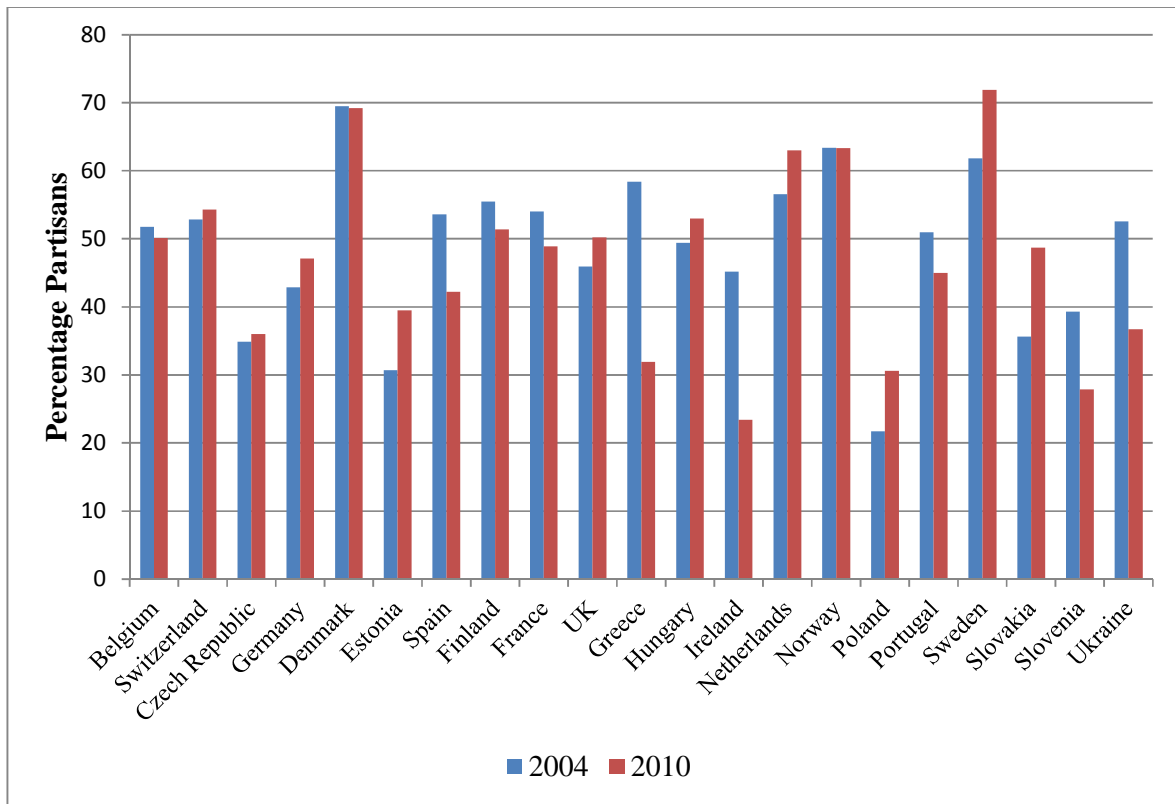
**Figure 2 Changes in Trust in Political Parties in  
Twenty-One European Countries 2004 to 2010**



Source: European Social Surveys 2004 to 2010.

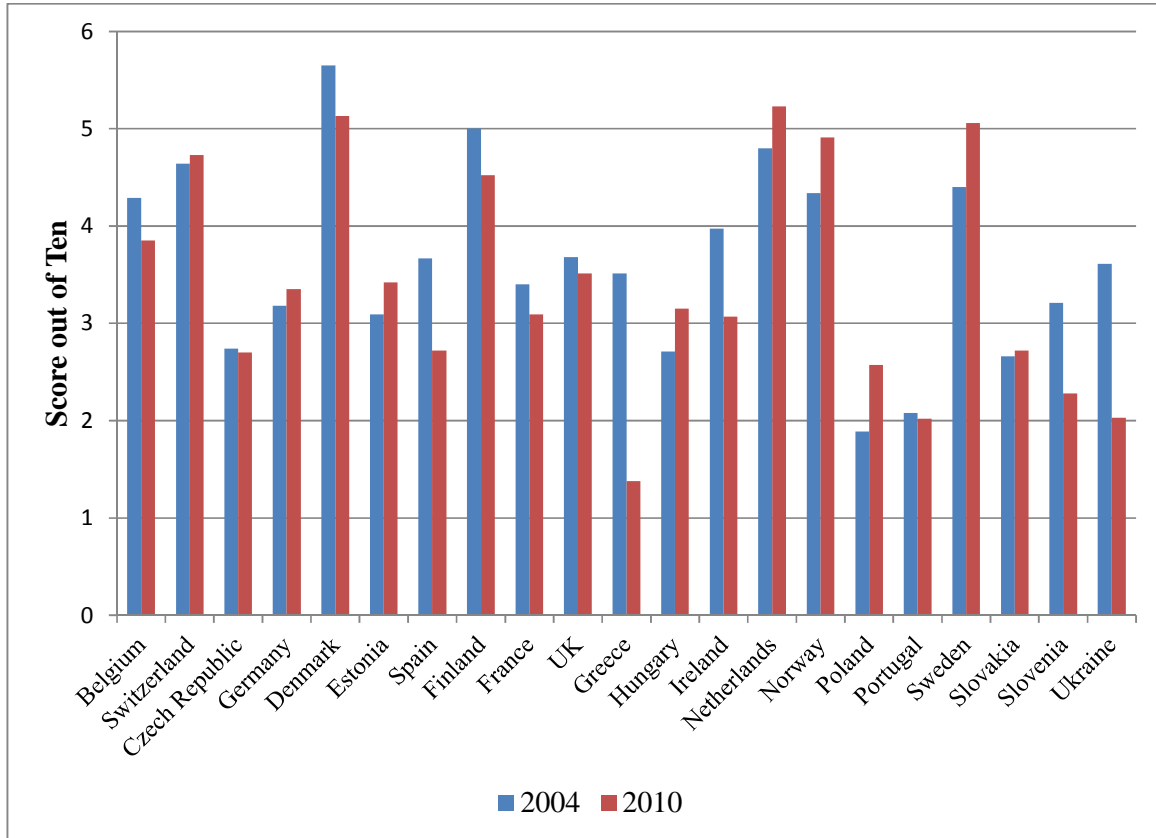
*(Please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust. Do you trust political parties?)*

**Figure 3 Changes in Partisanship in Twenty-One European Countries 2004 to 2010**



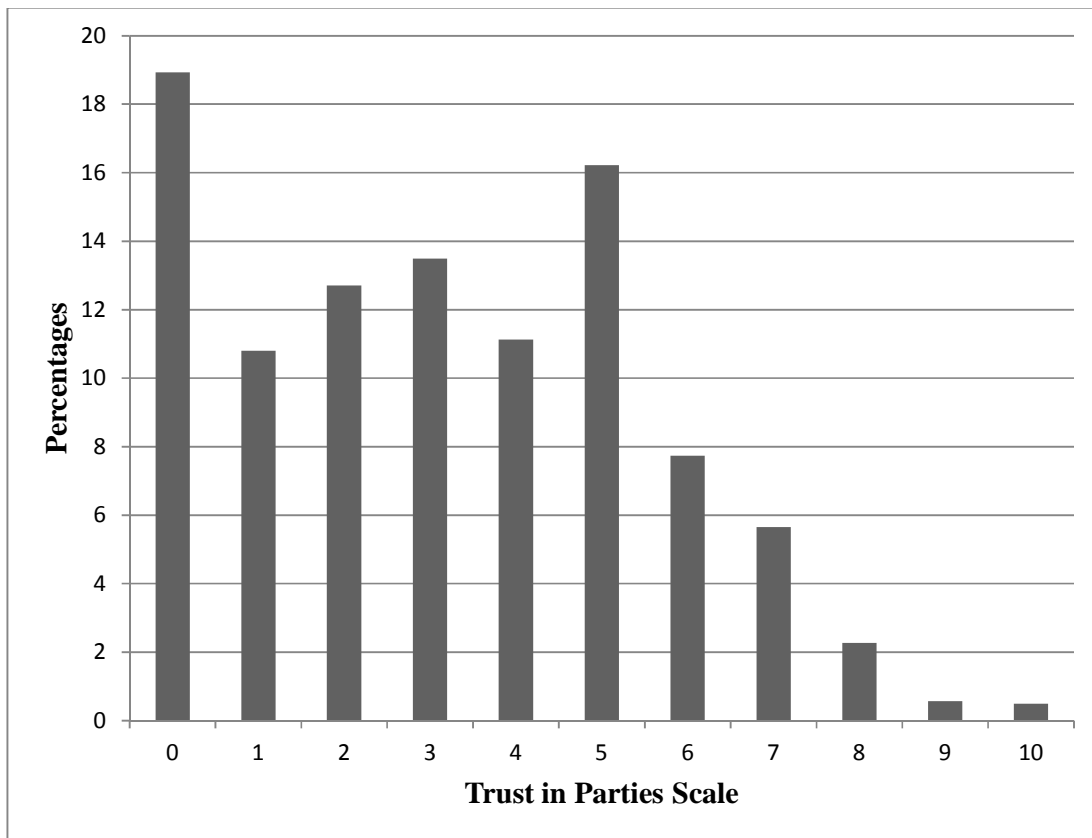
Source: European Social Surveys 2004 and 2010.

**Figure 4 Changes in Levels of Trust in Political Parties in Twenty-One European Countries 2004 to 2010**



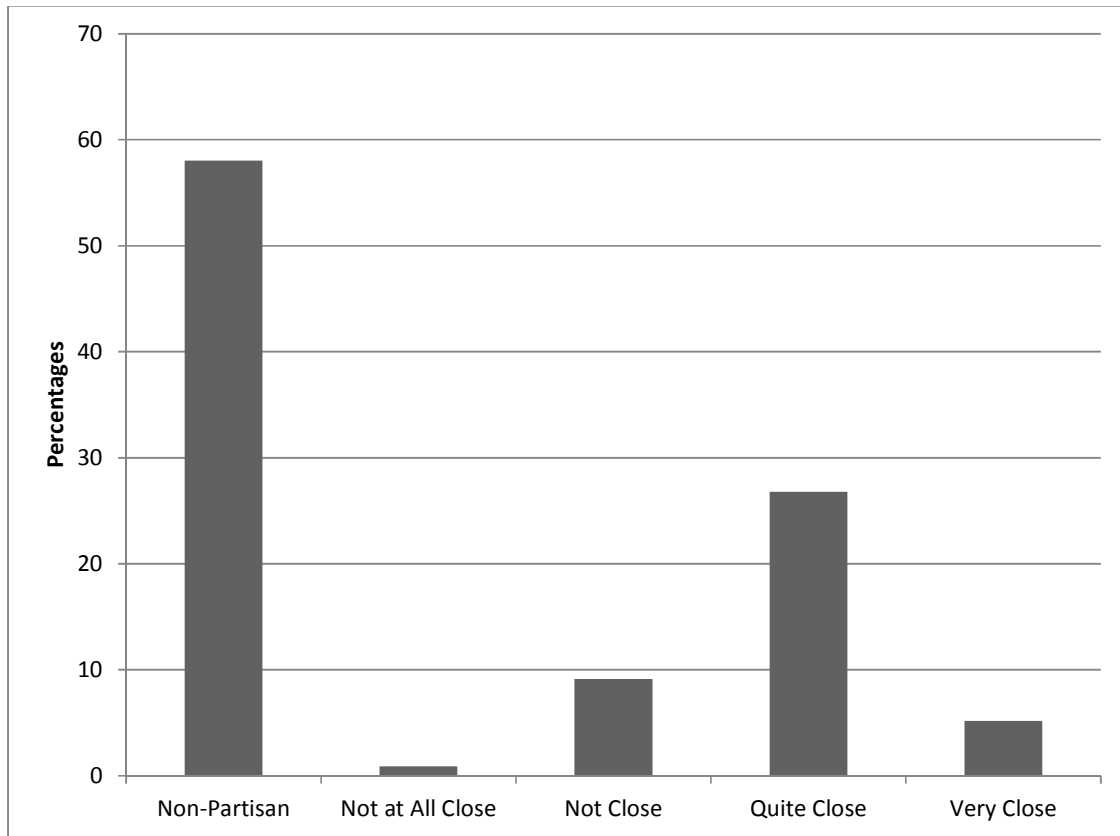
Source: European Social Surveys 2004 and 2010.

**Figure 5 Trust in Political Parties in Twenty-Four Countries in the 2010 European Social Survey**



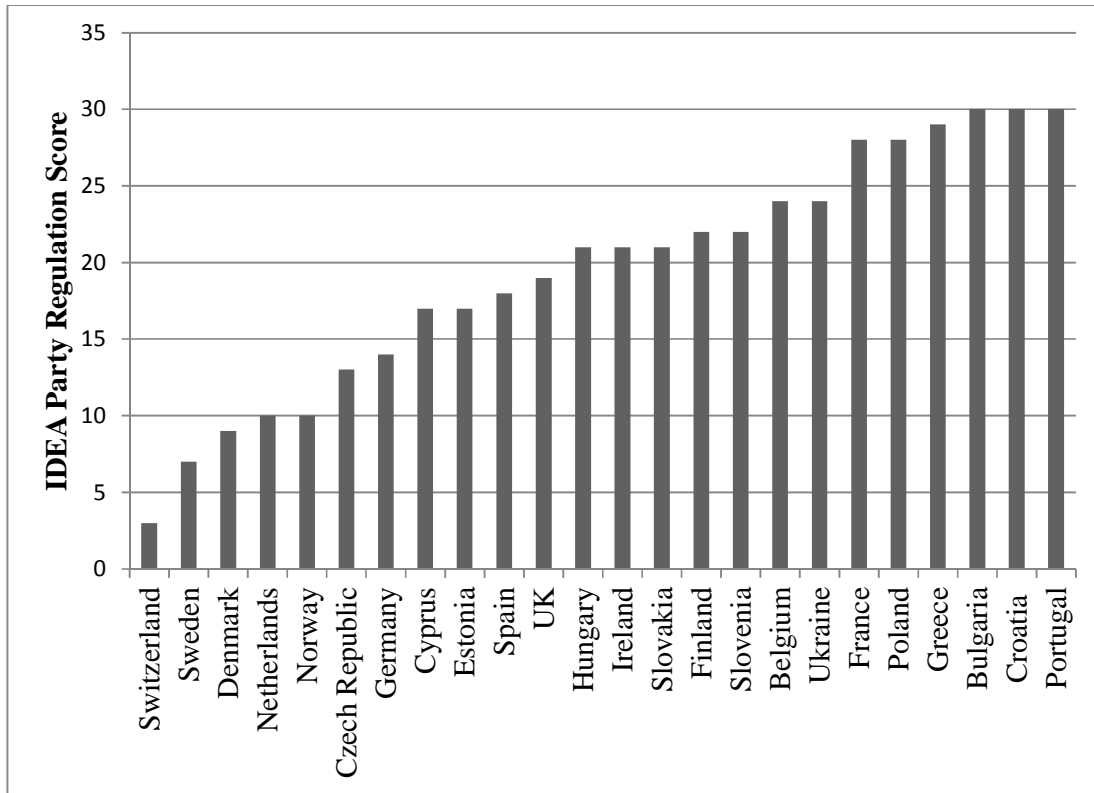
Source: European Social Survey, 2010, Mean = 3.17

**Figure 6 The Strength of Partisanship in Twenty-Four Countries in the European Social Survey, 2010**



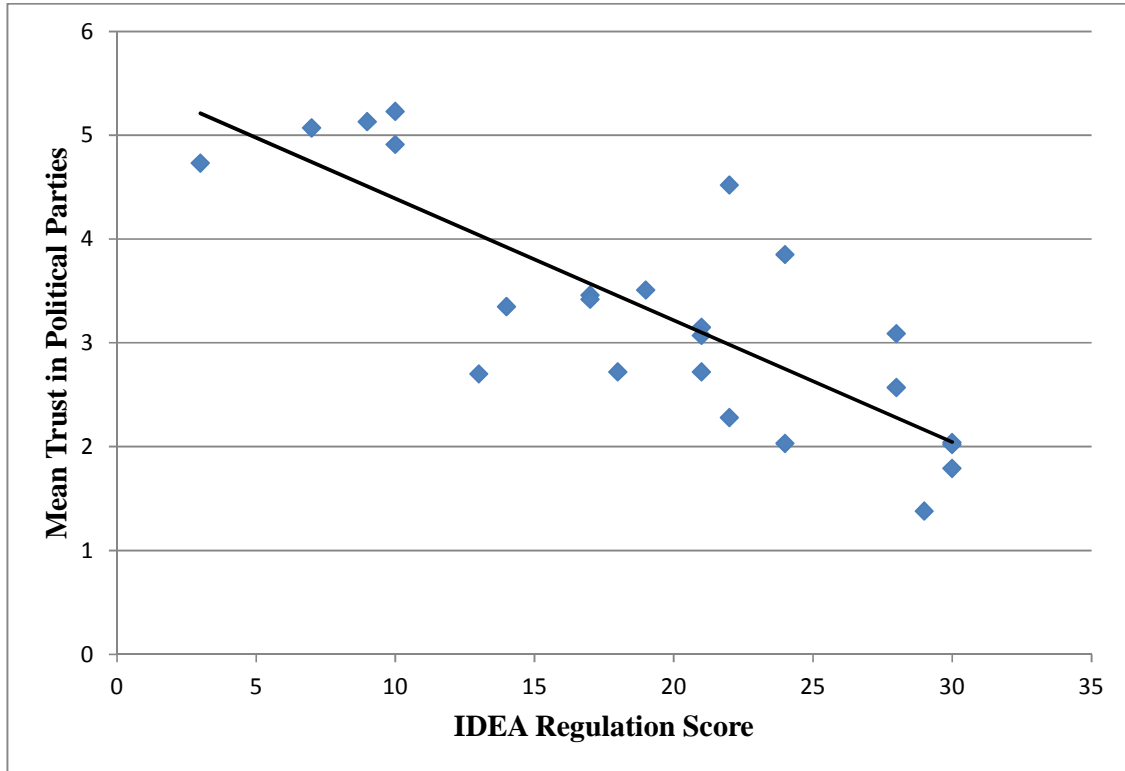
Source: European Social Survey, 2010

**Figure 7 IDEA Party Regulation Scores in Twenty-Four Countries**



Source: IDEA party regulation database

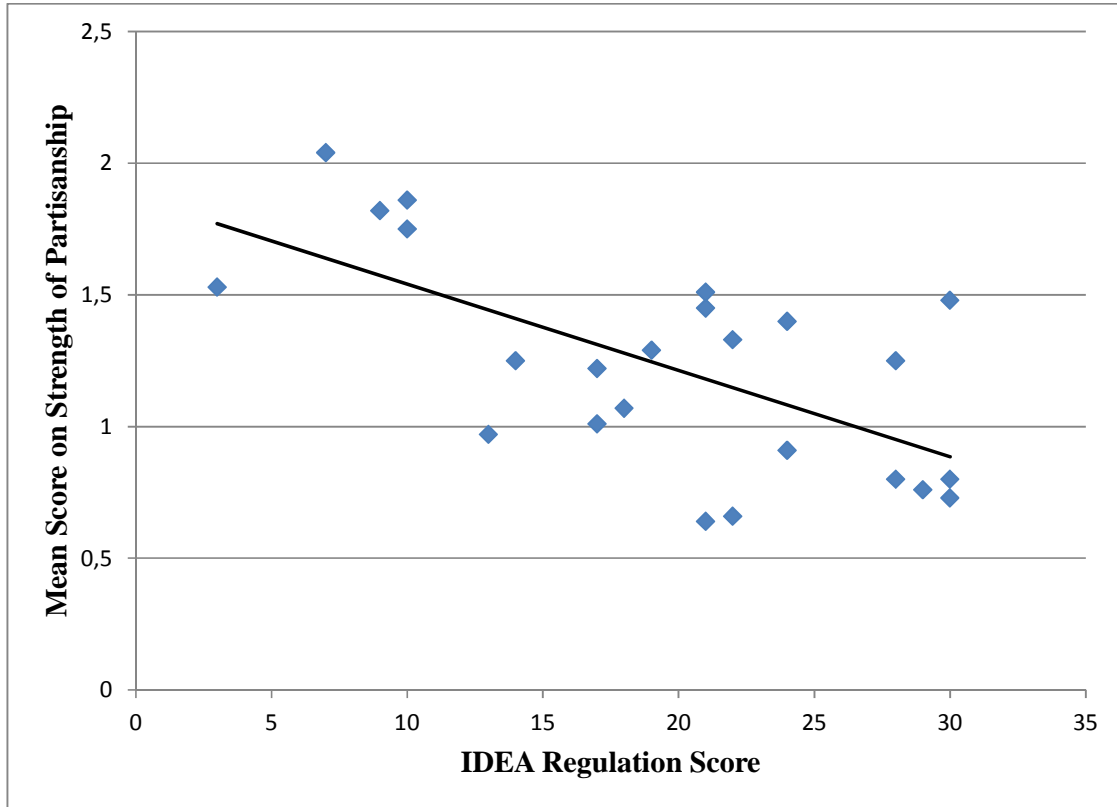
**Figure 8 The Relationship between Trust in Parties and Party Regulation in Twenty-Four Countries, 2010**



Source: European Social Survey in 2010 and IDEA party finance database (r= -0.81)



**Figure 9 The Relationship between the Strength of Partisanship and Party Regulation in Twenty-Four Countries, 2010**



Source: European Social Survey in 2010 and IDEA party finance database ( $r = -0.64$ )

**Table 1 Models of Party Trust and Partisanship in Twenty-Four Countries in 2010**

	Trust in Parties	Standardized Coefficients	Partisanship	Standardized Coefficients
Valence Issues Scale	0.43***	0.18	-0.00	-0.00
Satisfaction with Government	0.29***	0.30	0.04***	0.07
Satisfaction with Democracy	0.14***	0.15	0.03***	0.06
Media Consumption Scale	0.06***	0.02	0.03***	0.02
Interest in Politics	0.41***	0.16	0.46***	0.29
Work in Voluntary Organisation	0.20***	0.03	0.27***	0.06
Interpersonal Trust Scale	0.30***	0.13	0.01	0.01
Social Contacts	0.01	0.01	0.03	0.03
Citizen of Country	-0.04	-0.00	0.39***	0.05
Member of Ethnic Minority	0.13***	0.01	0.13***	0.02
Left-Right Ideology Scale	-0.02***	-0.01	0.00	0.01
Religiosity	0.01***	0.02	-0.00	-0.00
Male	-0.12***	-0.03	0.04***	0.01
Age	-0.02***	-0.19	0.01***	0.13
Age Squared	0.0002***	0.16	-0.00	-0.01
Educational Attainment	-0.01**	-0.01	-0.00	-0.01
Occupational Status	-0.00	-0.00	0.02***	0.03
Hours Working in Week	-0.01***	-0.03	-0.00	-0.01
Income	-0.01***	-0.01	0.02***	0.03
R-Square	<b>0.45</b>		<b>0.17</b>	

Source: European Social Survey, 2010. (N=45,872)

**Table 2 Two-Way Interactions between Trust in Parties and Partisanship in 2010**

	<b>Trust in Parties</b>	<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>	<b>Partisanship</b>	<b>Standardized Coefficients</b>
Strength of Partisanship	0.53***	0.15	-----	
Trust in Parties	-----		0.10***	0.12
Valence Issues Scale	0.43***	0.18	-0.04***	-0.03
Satisfaction with Government	0.26***	0.27	0.02***	0.03
Satisfaction with Democracy	0.12***	0.13	0.02***	0.03
Media Consumption Scale	0.04***	0.02	0.02***	0.02
Interest in Politics	0.17***	0.07	0.42***	0.26
Work in Voluntary Organisation	0.05***	0.01	0.25***	0.06
Interpersonal Trust Scale	0.29***	0.13	-0.02	-0.01
Social Contacts	-0.01	-0.01	0.03***	0.03
Citizen of Country	-0.25***	-0.02	0.40***	0.06
Member of Ethnic Minority	0.06	0.01	0.11***	0.02
Left-Right Ideology Scale	-0.02***	-0.02	0.01	0.01
Religiosity	0.01***	0.02	-0.00	-0.00
Male	-0.14***	-0.03	0.05***	0.02
Age	-0.03***	-0.23	0.01***	0.16
Age Squared	0.0002***	0.16	-0.00	-0.04
Educational Attainment	-0.01**	-0.01	-0.00	-0.01
Occupational Status	-0.01**	-0.01	0.02***	0.03
Hours Working in Week	-0.01***	-0.03	-0.00	-0.00
Income	-0.02***	-0.02	0.02***	0.03
<b>R-Square</b>	<b>0.42</b>		<b>0.19</b>	

Source: European Social Survey, 2010 (Two Stage Least Squares Estimates)

**Table 3 Multi-Level Models of Trust in Parties and Partisanship in 2010**

	<b>Trust in Parties</b>	<b>Partisanship</b>
<i>Aggregate Level Model</i>		
IDEA Regulation Index	-0.03***	-0.01**
Leiden Party Laws Index	-0.01***	-0.00
<b>R-Square</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>0.10</b>
<i>Individual Level Model</i>		
Strength of Partisanship	0.57***	-----
Trust in Parties	-----	0.09***
Valence Issues Scale	0.35***	-0.04***
Satisfaction with Government	0.25***	0.00
Satisfaction with Democracy	0.11***	0.02***
Media Consumption Scale	0.03*	0.03**
Interest in Politics	0.12***	0.41***
Work in Voluntary Organisation	-0.06*	0.24***
Interpersonal Trust Scale	0.24***	-0.01
Social Contacts	-0.02***	0.02***
Citizen of Country	-0.24***	0.32***
Member of Ethnic Minority	0.07	0.02***
Left-Right Ideology Scale	-0.02	0.00
Religiosity	0.03***	0.01**
Male	-0.14***	0.06***
Age	-0.03***	0.01***
Age Squared	0.0002***	-0.00
Educational Attainment	-0.01	-0.00
Occupational Status	-0.03***	0.02***
Hours Working in Week	-0.00	0.00
Income	-0.02***	0.01***
<b>R-Square</b>	<b>0.32</b>	<b>0.14</b>

Source: European Social Survey, 2010 (Two Stage Least Squares Estimates)

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## **Appendix – Variables and Scales used from the 2010 European Social Survey**

The dependent variables in the two models are:

Partisanship - *Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?*

Trust in Political Parties - *Please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust. Do you trust political parties?'*

### **The Valence Model**

*Satisfaction with Government* - Now thinking about the [country] government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?

*Satisfaction with Democracy* - And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?

*Satisfaction with the Economy* - On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?

*Satisfaction with Education* - Now, using this card, please say what you think overall about the state of education in [country] nowadays?

*Satisfaction with health* - Still using this card, please say what you think overall about the state of health services in [country] nowadays?

Satisfaction with the economy, education and health care were combined together with a principal components analysis which explained 63.6 per cent of the variance and returned one significant component.

### **The Cognitive Engagement Model**

The *media consumption scale* combined responses to the following variables:

On an average weekday, how much of your time watching television is spent watching news or programmes about politics and current affairs?

And again on an average weekday, how much of your time listening to the radio is spent listening to news or programmes about politics and current affairs?

And how much of this time is spent reading about politics and current affairs?

The media consumption scale was constructed from a principal components analysis of the three variables which explained 49.2 per cent of the variance and returned once significant component.

*Interest in Politics* - How interested would you say you are in politics?

### **The Social Capital Model**

The *interpersonal trust scale* combined responses from the following variables:

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair?

Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves?

The scale was constructed from a principal components analysis of the three items which explained 69.9 per cent of the variance and returned one significant component.

*Voluntary Activity* – During the last twelve months have you done any of the following? – Worked in another organisation or association?

*Social Contacts* - How often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?

### **The Civic Voluntarism Model**

*Occupational Status* was measured using the iscoco classification of occupations so that:

(2000 thru 2470=6) -- Professionals

(1000 thru 1319=5) – Senior Managers

(3000 thru 3480=4) – Skilled White collar occupations

(100,4000 thru 4223=3) – Semi-Skilled White collar occupations

(5000 thru 8340=2) – Skilled and semi-skilled manual occupations

(9000 thru 9330=1) – Unskilled manual occupations

*Educational Attainment* - About how many years of education have you completed, whether full-time or part-time? Please report these in full-time equivalents and include compulsory years of schooling.

*Ideology* - In politics people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right

*Hours worked* - Regardless of your basic or contracted hours, how many hours do/did you *normally work* a week (in your main job), including any paid or unpaid overtime?

*Income* - Using this card, please tell me which letter describes your household's total income, after tax and compulsory deductions, from all sources?

*Religiosity* - Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are?

## Measures in the IDEA party regulation Scale

1. Is there a ban on donations from foreign interests to political parties?
2. Is there a ban on donations from foreign interests to candidates?
3. Is there a ban on corporate donations to political parties?
4. Is there a ban on corporate donations to candidates?
5. Is there a ban on donations from corporations with government contracts or partial government ownership to political parties?
6. Is there a ban on donations from corporations with government contracts or partial government ownership to candidates?
7. Is there a ban on donations from Trade Unions to political parties?
8. Is there a ban on donations from Trade Unions to candidates?
9. Is there a ban on anonymous donations to political parties?
10. Is there a ban on anonymous donations to candidates?
11. Is there a ban on state resources being given to or received by political parties or candidates (excluding regulated public funding)?
12. Is there a ban on any other form of donation?
13. Is there a limit on the amount a donor can contribute to a political party over a time period (not election specific)?
14. Is there a limit on the amount a donor can contribute to a political party in relation to an election?
15. Is there a limit on the amount a donor can contribute to a candidate?
16. Are there provisions for direct public funding to political parties?
17. If there are provisions for direct public funding to political parties, are there provisions for how it should be used (ear marking)?
18. Are there provisions for free or subsidized access to media for political parties?
19. Are there provisions for any other form of indirect public funding?
20. Is the provision of direct public funding to political parties related to gender equality among candidates?
21. Are there provisions for other financial advantages to encourage gender equality in political parties?
22. Is there a ban on vote buying?
23. Are there bans on state resources being used in favour or against a political party or candidate?
24. Are there limits on the amount a political party can spend?
25. Are there limits on the amount a candidate can spend?
26. Do political parties have to report regularly on their finances?
27. Do political parties have to report on their finances in relation to election campaigns?
28. Do candidates have to report on their campaigns finances?
29. Is information in reports from political parties and/or candidates to be made public?
30. Must reports from political parties and/or candidates reveal the identity of donors?
31. Is it specified that a particular institution(s) is responsible for examining financial reports and/or investigating violations?

32. What sanctions are provided for political finance infractions?

A positive score for each question scores one, so the scale can theoretically range from zero to thirty-two.

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