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Politicizing Corruption

The Electoral Impact of anti-corruption discourse in Europe 1983-2007

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Introduction

Considering the vast amount of research on different aspects of corruption, it is somewhat surprising that scholars have paid so little attention to the politicization of the corruption issue, i.e. the extent to which political representatives and candidates exploit the issue of anti-corruption in order to win votes in elections. Neither have scholars dealing with electoral research studied the electoral impact of corruption allegations other than in single country studies over time (Peters & Welch, 1980; Welch & Hibbing, 1997; Chang & Golden, 2004) or in single elections (Dimock & Jacobson, 1995). The lack of comparative research on this topic is all the more surprising given the fact that several new parties in Europe, focusing on anti-corruption, lately have become extremely successful in their first contested election and that the corruption issue thus seems to play an increasingly important role in election campaigns.¹ Yet, we do not know much about the politicization of anti-corruption in electoral campaigns, e.g. how frequently it appears, whether it has increased over time or remained constant, if it is more common in new democracies than in old ones and which parties that make the most noise about the need to fight corruption.

The objective with this paper is to explore to what extent the issue of anti-corruption has been exploited by political parties in parliamentary election campaigns during 25 years, 1983 – 2007. The aim is primarily descriptive, mapping the frequency over time, between groups of countries and which types of parties that exploit the issue of anti-corruption. However, some effects of the politicization of anti-corruption will also be addressed. Good description is a prerequisite for the mere possibility to explain and as this research is only in its infancy, the focus will naturally increasingly be directed towards the explanatory aspects of this phenomenon.

The specific questions that guide the study are:

- To what extent has political corruption been politicized in Europe?
- Is anti-corruption becoming a more frequent issue in the electoral campaigns in Europe?
- In which countries is political corruption the most politicized?

¹ National Movement Simeon II in Bulgaria 2001, New Era in Latvia 2002, Res Publica in Estonia 2003 and Labour Party in Lithuania 2004 are the most prominent examples of such new parties winning their first election. In Bulgaria, Estonia and Latvia the leaders of the new parties also became prime ministers. For the election results, see table 5.

- What characterizes the parties that are the main advocates for anti-corruption?
- To what extent is anti-corruption rhetoric an extremist or “populist” phenomenon?
- Is anti-corruption over or under politicized?
- What impact does corruption allegation have on the likelihood of governmental survival?
- How successful are parties that promise to fight corruption?

Theoretical underpinnings & previous research

Understanding the relationship between voters and parties has a long history in political science. One of the more well-known hypotheses within this field is the freezing hypothesis, advanced by Lipset and Rokkan in the late 1960s (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Their main observation was that the party systems in Western democracies had more or less remained unchanged from the introduction of universal male suffrage in the early 20th century until the time of their writing in the late 1960s. Stability and predictability were key words, as the electorate tended to vote according to old cleavage structures and return more or less the same parties to parliament.² During the 1970s and 1980s it became obvious that the party systems were becoming less stable, among other things because of changes in the old cleavage structures, leading to a decline in party identification (Mair, Müller & Plasser, 2004: 3-5) and the class based voting (Lane & Ersson, 1994: 94), which was the most prominent voting behaviour in Europe (Lipset, 2001: 5). This in turn affected the behaviour of both the political parties and the voters, changes which came to reinforce these tendencies even stronger. As the political parties changed their strategies to attract voters, which I will return to in a little while, the voters responded by becoming more volatile (Pennings & Lane, 1998: 15) and more prone to vote for new parties that tended to focus on single issues rather than offering a wholesale ideology (Hug, 2001: 2). Moreover, as the ideological gap between political parties’ continues to narrow it becomes more difficult for voters to distinguish between the parties, which calls for new party strategies (Mair, 1997: 102-103, 115; Mair, Müller & Plasser, 2004: 5-6).

There are a number of responses parties might take in order to stay competitive in the increasingly unpredictable party systems. Two of them are relevant to this study. The first one concerns changing policy positions on certain issues or look for new issues to politicize (Mair,

² During the last 20 years scholars have started to question the accurateness of the freezing hypothesis (see for example Mair, 1997: 76-90), but whether that critique holds or not is of minor concern for this study.

Müller & Plasser, 2004: 12-13). Politicizing environmental issues in the 1970s and 1980s and immigration in the 1980s and 1990s were two of the most successful single issue strategies (Mair, 1997: 46; Hug, 2001: 1). In most party systems there is not room for more than one major single issue party on each issue, implying that environment and immigration for examples are not longer available to politicize in most countries.³ Anti-corruption is in one sense an example of a potentially new issue to politicize on par with the environment or immigration. However, I would argue that focusing on anti-corruption, let alone accusing other parties for being corrupt, is very different from campaigning on e.g. green issues, less immigrants, lower taxes or increasing welfare spending, even if the verbal exchanges are very harsh. In contrast to other issues, anti-corruption is as much about credibility, moral, ethics, honesty, transparency as it is about the substance of the policy as such, i.e. not about what but how to make policies.

Stressing one's own experience and competence to achieve the things that everyone agrees need to be done and accusing the opponents for incompetence and for being corrupt represents the second type of party strategy which is of relevance here and which concerns the organization of the party, which has been found to put increasing emphasis on professionalism, competence and centralization of power to the party leadership (Mair, Müller & Plasser, 2004: 265-267). This strategy thus implies a redirection of the focus from the substance of the policies proposed (which most parties and voters agree on anyway) to the mode of policy making and the likelihood of the promises being achieved (Welch & Hibbing, 1997: 228). As mentioned in footnote 1, this strategy has been tried out with great results in above all Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, the issue of anti-corruption can be used strategically both to stress the issue as such and in organizational terms.

Politicizing political corruption is assumingly a delicate matter, as it clearly signals to the voters that there are politicians that not only cannot be trusted, but who are in fact criminals. It gives the voters the impression – right or wrong - that politicians need tight monitoring to behave as we expect them to do. This is the main reason why this particular issue is different from other proposals put forward in the political debate.

³ The People's Party in Switzerland, List Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands and Ataka in Bulgaria are all recent examples of successes due to anti-foreigner/immigrant rhetoric, however, and Green parties have seen recent successes in for example in the Czech Republic and Estonia.

Allegations of corruption are certainly a powerful tool if you can credibly pin the accusations on your opponents. Corruption is a real and serious problem in many countries and there is ample evidence of scandals involving high ranking politicians which rightfully could be described in no other terms than corruption and which deserves nothing less but public condemnation. However, it is a two-edged sword, which may benefit the anti-corruption party in the short run, but which put the foundations of representative democracy at risk in the longer perspectives, in case it leads to wide spread voter apathy or, perhaps even worse, to political radicalisation and polarisation. A serious and responsible party should therefore think twice before exploiting the issue, unless there is undisputable evidence that corruption is a real problem in society and that the evidence that the opponents are corrupt is beyond doubt. Moreover, anti-corruption rhetoric may also back-fire in two ways. Firstly, considering the emphasis on moral and honesty, anti-corruption parties are assumingly more strictly evaluated by the voters and in case it fails to improve the situation or, even worse, pick up the same corrupt behaviour once in office, the peoples' judgement will most likely be harsh. Secondly, unless the anti-corruption party wins an outright majority of the seats, it naturally has to cooperate and bargain with other parties and it is again assumingly much more difficult to bridge differences if harsh accusations of criminal activities have been hurled during the campaign, than if there exist differences in approaches to welfare or taxes. In short, even if a party which uses the "corruption card" makes substantial gains in an election, it may still find it very difficult to obtain sufficient support to form a government. This is of course not to say that parties should refrain from touching the issue, but rather to point to potential negative consequences by letting it be a too dominant and polarising feature in the public debate. On the other hand, if political corruption is to be rooted out, corrupt politicians must be exposed and face the judicial consequences.

Concepts

Corruption can exist and even be rampant in a society, without being politicized. Politicians may turn a blind eye to the problem, knowing that they all benefit from it or that they cannot do anything about it even if they tried. In order to speak of politicization, it is not enough that the problem is of main concern for the citizens and that the media reveals corruption scandals. The issue of corruption must also be brought up on the political agenda by representatives from the political parties and the debate and standpoints taken must moreover be brought to the knowledge of the voters. Politicization of political corruption is thus at hand only when representatives from the political parties bring up the issue on the public agenda.

The politicization of political corruption can be done in two different ways; either in general terms, which means that the parties raise the issue and suggest ways to come to terms with the problem or in specific terms, namely by accusing political adversaries of corruption. This study deals with both types, even though there are very few examples of the first type, implying that politicization of political corruption almost by definition is about accusing other politicians for being corrupt.

Turning to the other main concept, there are many different aspects of corruption. This paper is only concerned with the political corruption, i.e. not the petty corruption in which civil servants for example have to be bribed to carry out their duties nor the elite corruption in the business community. Political corruption is at hand when politicians are taking advantage of their position in order to win financial favours, either personally, for friends and relatives or seeking advantages for the party they represent (Huberts, 1995: 10). Thus, political corruption implies that the people that are supposed to represent the interest of the citizens violate the mandate given to them by furthering their own narrow interests instead. Political corruption is almost by definition morally despicable, even if the activities are not illegal. In this study, however, there are very few examples of exposed corruption that are in accordance with the law. Thus, political corruption is not only morally questionable, but in most cases outright criminal.

Corruption is hence close to and often mentioned together with scandals or affairs. They are not the same, however (Esaiasson & Kumlin, 2008: 5). Whereas scandals can be about adultery or driving drunk, i.e. situations in which there is no personal gain at other's expenses (which nevertheless can be used by politicians to discredit their opponents), political corruption is a more narrow concept which in this paper will denote events where politicians have tried – or have been accused of trying - to gain financially in an inappropriate way and which are revealed to the public. Revelation of corruption is almost by definition always a scandal. However, for politicization to occur, politicians must bring the issue to the voters, in general or in specific terms.

Previous research

The starting point for this study is the almost total void of systematic comparative analyses on the politicization of political corruption. There seems to exist only a few studies that show any

resemblance with this one. The first one actually consists of two studies examining the impact of corruption allegations on the voter behaviour in elections to the US House of Representatives 1968-1978 (Peters & Welch, 1980) and 1982-1990 (Welch & Hibbing, 1997). Corruption charges did not increase over time, but the likelihood for an incumbent to lose his/her seat increased markedly if corruption allegations were made, although the incumbents still retained their seats in 75 per cent of the cases.⁴ Moreover, regardless of winning or losing the seat, a corruption charged incumbent lost on average around ten percentage points depending on the type of charges and the challenger gained on average even more. Thus, the main conclusion reached was that politicizing corruption affects a substantial share of Congressional turnover (Welch & Hibbing, 1997: 233-38). Similar findings were made by Dimock & Jacobson (1995), when analysing the effects of one particular scandal in the 1992 Congressional elections (1157). Another study has shown that members of the Italian parliament were damaged by being put under investigation of criminal activities, but to a surprisingly limited extent (Chang & Golden, 2004: 1). Thus, as expected allegation of corruption affects incumbents negatively, as their re-election rates decrease, but not as dramatically as one may think considering the graveness of the accusations.

Another, more peripheral study analyses how West European countries deal with corruption (Huberts, 1995). Only one of the three parts is concerned with the politicization of political corruption as defined here, the other two trying to determine the actual extent of the problem and suggestions how to resolve it. Huberts found, just like Welch & Hibbing, when analysing the manifesto data set (discussed below) that there was no clear cut pattern when it came to the space devoted to corruption fighting in the party manifestoes between 1945 and 1990 (Huberts, 1995: 11). Moreover, only in Italy the political parties seemed to take the problem seriously, whereas parties in other countries paid relatively little attention to the issue (ibid: 15). Up until 1990 the politicization of political corruption thus seemed to have remained stable or at least not showing any clear up- or downward trends and the frequency of corruption charges and space devoted in party manifestoes were rather limited.⁵ I will return to the question whether this pattern has changed or not in a little while.

⁴ Compared to more than 97 per cent when no corruption allegations were made (Welch & Hibbing, 1997: 233).

⁵ Welch & Hibbing found corruption charges in 116 races to the House of Representatives between 1982 and 1990. Even though they do not give the total number of campaigns analysed, the figure should be around five percent. The space devoted to the issue of corruption in party manifestoes between 1945 and 1990 averaged between 0,02 percent in Norway and 1,9 percent in Italy.

The design, data and method

This study covers the parliamentary elections during the last 25 years, between 1983 and 2007. For the sake of comparison I have chosen not to include presidential elections in this study, but it may be fruitful in future research to contrast the party oriented parliamentary elections with the much more person oriented presidential contest. To be included in the analysis three conditions apply. First, only countries that were considered free by Freedom House the year the election was held have been included.⁶ The reason for not including partly free countries is that in non-competitive elections the possibility for the opposition to get its messages through is much more limited, let alone winning the election. Secondly, I have also excluded the “mini states”, with populations below 100 000, as the party competition works very differently in those countries.⁷ Thirdly, countries with presidential systems have been excluded, as the functioning and influence of the political parties are very different from parliamentary and semi-presidential systems. Only Cyprus was excluded for this reason alone. 32 countries apply to these conditions, although at different points in time, and they have in total held 184 elections⁸ during the quarter century under study.⁹ 124 of the total number of analysed elections were held in the 19 West European countries and 47 in the 13 Central and East European Countries.¹⁰

Two types of data have been used in order to capture the extent of politicization of political corruption. First electoral reports, which among other things assess the importance of different issues in the campaigns and secondly I have analysed the extent of space devoted to anti-corruption in the parties’ election manifestoes.

Information about the electoral campaigns has mainly been collected from the election reports in Electoral Studies. 13 of the elections were not reported on however, in which cases West European Politics was consulted in the first place and which resulted in another eleven

⁶ All West European countries, except for Malta are thereby included from their first election from 1983 on. Malta was considered free only in 1987. See appendix for details on the elections analyzed and the democratic status of the countries included.

⁷ Andorra with 72 000 inhabitants are the biggest country to be excluded (together with Liechtenstein, Monaco and San Marino) whereas Iceland with a population just above 300 000 is the smallest country to be included.

⁸ The total number of parliamentary elections are 184, but electoral reports are missing in 13 cases, which brings the number of analyzed elections down to 171.

⁹ Elections held during the year 2008 have so far been excluded since several election reports have still not been published.

¹⁰ See appendix.

election reports.¹¹ As the last resort the European Journal of Political Research, which publishes annual political updates on a large number of European countries, was consulted adding information on four more elections.¹² Even though the election reports have a common structure (background, electoral system, the contending parties, the electoral campaign, the results and the outcome), the content and extent of the sections vary quite a bit. There is certainly a risk that the issue of anti-corruption has been under reported, in particular if the issue was not central in the campaign and/or advocated by peripheral parties. However, I do think that the risk of missing cases in which corruption has been a prominent feature of the campaign is rather small, i.e. the frequency of the issue is hardly overstated. The problem with selection bias is thus a real one in the sense that the data will most likely show a greater electoral impact of politicizing corruption than would have been the case if the smaller parties, which rarely feature in the reports, would have been included as well.

The data on the content of the party's electoral manifestoes have been collected from the Party Manifesto data set (Budge et al., 2001 and Klingemann et al., 2006), which contains information on the distribution of a large number of policy issues in almost all relevant European parties' electoral manifestoes from 1945 to 2003.¹³ It should be noted that information is lacking for the last four years of this study. Fighting corruption is one of the issues that is coded¹⁴ and the figure given is the percentage of what is called "quasi sentences" that is devoted to anti-corruption defined as in footnote 14. Thus, the manifestoes can be analysed both in terms of whether or not anti-corruption is mentioned in a specific party manifesto and also the extent of space that is allocated to that particular issue. There is no information whether the anti-corruption proposals are directed towards political adversaries or are directed on the problem in general. The content of the electoral manifestoes still provides good information on the extent to which the issue of fighting corruption is politicized or not.

However, the two types of data do not measure exactly the same thing. There can be anti corruption rhetoric in the campaign with no or limited space devoted to the issue in the election manifesto. Conversely, there could be relatively much about the need to fight

¹¹ Austria 1999; Denmark 2007; France and Portugal 2002; Greece 1996; Luxemburg 1999; Malta 1992, 1996, 1998 and 2003 and Switzerland 1991.

¹² Hungary and Latvia 2006; Iceland 2003 and Luxemburg 2004.

¹³ 1034 in total in 30 countries; 755 in 19 West European countries and 279 in 11 Central and East European countries. Ukraine is not covered by the manifesto project and Serbia held its first election as a democracy after 2003.

¹⁴ Political corruption is defined as the "need to eliminate corruption, and associate abuse, in political and public life" (Volkens & Hearl, 1990: 58).

corruption in the manifesto, but with no mentioning of the issue in the campaign. In the former example the level of politicization is considered to be higher, since it could be assumed that more voters get their information mainly from the media reporting about the political debate, rather than from the manifestoes themselves.

In order to capture the extent of corruption rhetoric in the election campaigns I have mainly stuck to coding only instances in which the word “corruption” has been used in the electoral reports and in cases where it is obvious that it concerns political corruption as defined above. In some instances it has been obvious that political corruption has been the issue, even though not spelled out explicitly. In the vast majority of cases corruption scandals have been serious affairs often leading to resignations of ministers and even trials. Some cases have been difficult to assess whether it is about political corruption or not. For instance, there are several cases where scandals have occurred, sometimes with ministers resigning as a consequence, and where it is obvious that the issue has been important in the electoral campaign, but where it is unclear whether any party makes any accusations. My interpretation of those situations is that no party actually has taken advantage of the corruption scandal and that the allegations have been made by the press or by the judicial bodies. Thus, such situations are not coded as examples of politicization of political corruption, regardless of the electoral impact of the scandal. In order to talk about corruption allegations, it must be possible to identify the actor who makes the allegations and also that actor to be a representative of a political party.

The extent of corruption allegation is coded in terms of whether such allegations have been made or not in each election campaign. The manifesto data has been coded both in terms of the percentage of parties in each election that mention anti-corruption in their platform and secondly as the average share of anti-corruption sentences in all parties’ programmes in each election.

Parties that accuse others for being corrupt are categorised as left wing or right wing, incumbent or in opposition, established or new and finally main or peripheral. The left – right dimension is admittedly crude, but gives at least a rough idea of the ideological underpinning of dealing with or at least highlighting the problems with corruption. In the vast majority of cases it is not very difficult to categorise the parties as either left or right wing. The information was mainly provided in the election reports themselves and in the party description in the manifesto data set. To determine whether parties are extreme or not, let

alone whether they are populist (what ever that is) or not is a more delicate matter. The parties labelled extreme right or extreme left in table 6 are either strongly xenophobic, advocate or glorify anti democratic systems and are using or threaten to use violence not achieve their goals. Populism is such a vague concept and I have therefore chosen to mainly use it in terms of unsubstantiated allegations of anti-corruption.

Information on incumbent and opposition parties is found in Woldendorp et al., 1998 and Müller-Rommel et al., 2004. Related to this variable is the “shift in government” variable, which can take one of three values: total, partial or no shift. A shift is coded as total when a new party previously outside government takes over the post of prime minister, even if some parties remain in government. A partial shift is at hand when the post of prime minister changes from one governmental party to another and no shift is at hand when the post of the prime minister remains within the same party, even if changes occur among the junior coalition partners. Thus, a dominant party which chooses a new coalition partner after an election is coded as no shift.

A new party is defined as one which contests their first election under the name in question and is not a direct successor of a previous party or just a merger of pervious parties. However, splinter groups as well as genuinely new parties are considered as new.

Finally it is also of interest to find out whether anti-corruption are championed by the major parties in parliament or mainly by more peripheral forces that may gain parliamentary seats and even enter government, but which have a minor influence and accordingly less responsibility for the policies pursued. Parties with few seats and which neither very often sit in government nor belong to the main opposition forces are considered peripheral, whereas all others are considered to be main contenders.

Data on the actual level of corruption is collected from Transparency International’s widely used Corruption Perception Index, which covers an increasing amount of countries from 1995 (www.transparency.org). The corruption level is measured for each election year, which means that this variable does not remain constant over time. I have categorized countries scoring 8-10 on the ten grade scale as low corrupt, countries scoring between 5 and 7,99 as medium corrupt and countries scoring below 5 as highly corrupt.

Findings

The first question is about the extent of politicization of political corruption in election campaigns in Europe. Table 1 shows that the phenomenon is much more common in Central and Eastern Europe than in the old established democracies in the west. As there are no relevant previous studies to compare with, it is difficult to assess whether 23 per cent is much or little, but compared to the congressional campaigns in the US, Europeans seem to be much more inclined to accuse their opponents of corruption. The comparison is not totally fair however, as there are a substantially higher number of actors in a European election campaign than in the two-actor contest in the US. In my view the findings show that the phenomenon is certainly not a peripheral one in European politics in general and quite prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe. To be able to estimate the level of what should be considered high and low it may also be fruitful to compare anti-corruption with other issues.

Table 1: Share of election campaigns containing corruption allegation

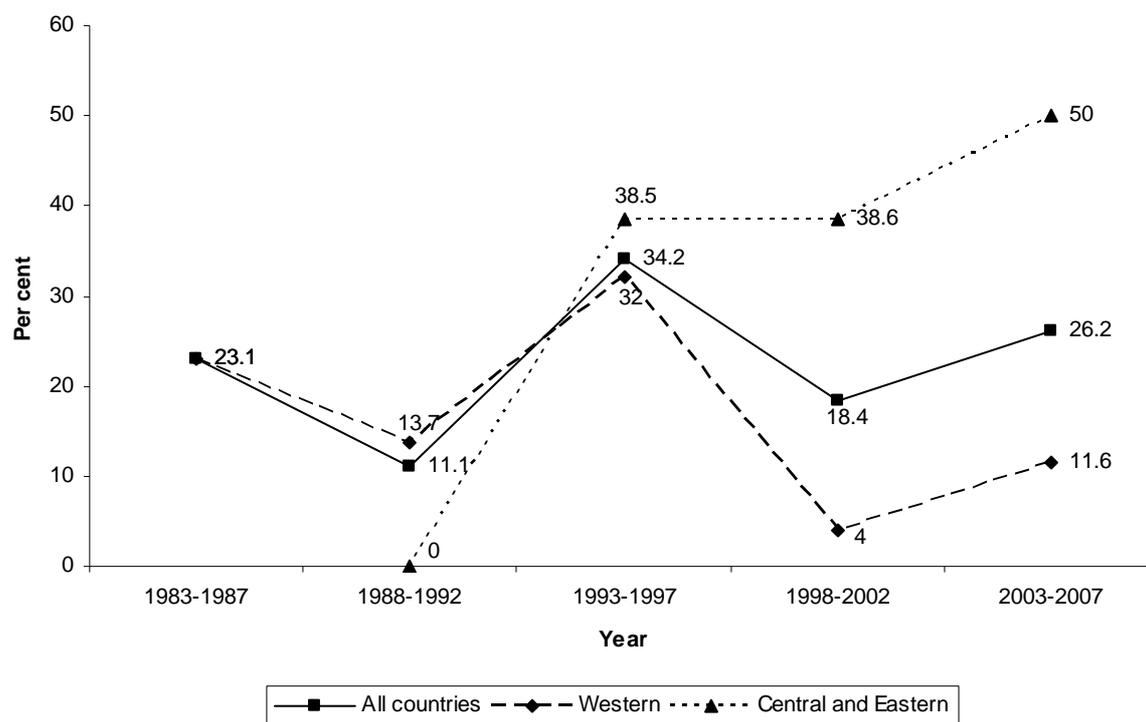
Corruption allegations	Yes		No		N
	%	n	%	n	
All countries	23,4	40	76,6	131	171
Western Europe	16,9	21	83,1	103	124
Central and Eastern Europe	40,4	19	59,6	28	47

Source: Election reports in Electoral Studies, West European Politics and European Journal of Political Research.

Comment: Central and Eastern Europe refers to the former Socialist one party systems.

In figure 1 the distribution of politicized elections over time is displayed. The long term pattern for the whole of Europe is one of increasing politicization. However, the difference between east and west has increased dramatically since the mid 1990s, at which point anti-corruption featured almost as frequently in the West as in the East. During the last five years corruption allegations feature in as much as half of the election campaigns in the new democracies and only in one in ten in the west. The overall trend is thus driven by an increasing amount of election in which corruption allegations are made in Central and Eastern Europe, whereas it is becoming a peripheral issue in the old democracies.

Figure 1: Corruption allegations in election campaigns in Europe 1983-2007 (%)



Source: Election reports in Electoral Studies, West European Politics and European Journal of Political Research.

Comment: The total number of analysed cases is 171 (1983-87: 26; 1988-92: 27; 1993-97: 38; 1998-2002: 38; 2003-07: 42). For Western Europe the total number is 124 (1983-87: 26; 1988-92: 22; 1993-97: 25; 1998-2002: 25; 2003-07: 26). For Central and Eastern Europe the total number is 47 (1983-87: 0; 1988-92: 5; 1993-97:13; 1998-2002: 13; 2003-07: 16).

Also when it comes to anti-corruption in the party manifestoes, the new democracies display a larger share of both parties mentioning anti-corruption and space devoted to anti-corruption. Half the analyzed manifestoes contain sentences on anti-corruption, but the coverage it gets is quite limited, around one per cent of the coded sentences.

Table 2: Anti-corruption in party manifestoes

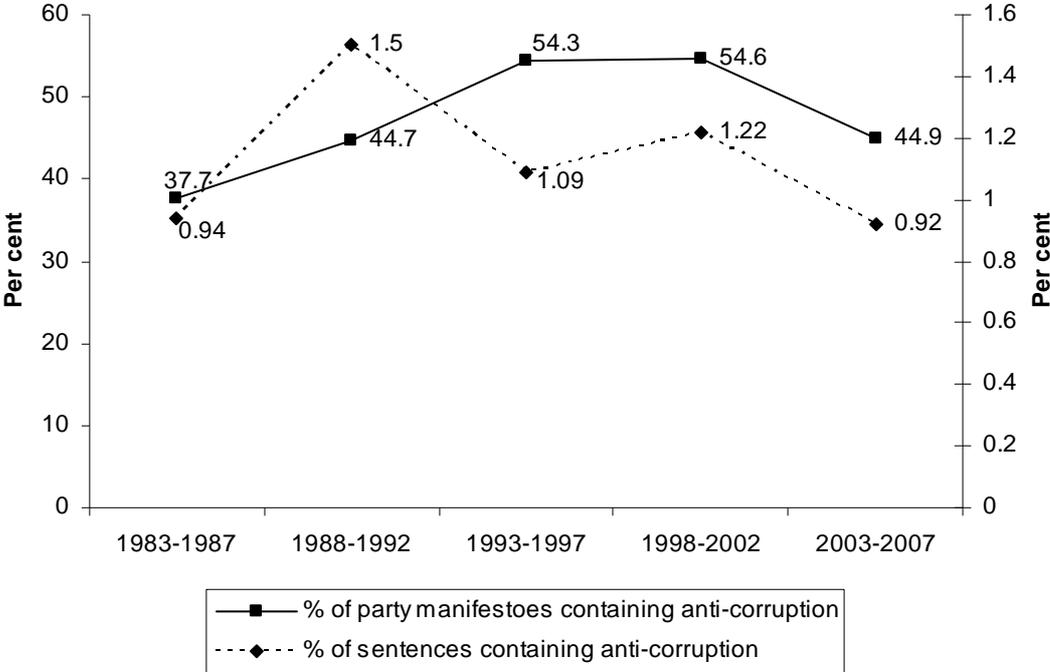
	All countries	Western Europe	Central and Eastern Europe
% of party manifestoes containing anti-corruption	50	45	63
% of sentences containing anti-corruption	1,17	1,07	1,46
Total number of manifestoes	1034	755	279
Total number of elections	146	108	38
Number of countries	30	19	11

Source: Party manifesto data sets in Budge et al., 2001 and Klingemann et al., 2006.

Comment: Manifesto data covers the period 1983-2003 (except for UK for which there is data also for 2005). There is no data on Serbia and Ukraine.

In contrast to corruption allegations, which showed an increase over time, the party manifestoes rather display the opposite tendency, i.e. one of declining focus on anti-corruption, at least during the last 15 year period. It should however be noted that only eight manifestoes are analyzed for the last time period as the project ended in 2003. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that anti-corruption is becoming more frequently mentioned and getting more extensive coverage in the party manifestoes. As shown in figure 2, since the late 1980s about half of the main European parties make references to anti-corruption in their party manifestoes, but as pointed out above, the space devoted to the issue only reaches 1,5 percent at the highest.

Figure 2: Anti-corruption in party manifestoes 1983-2007



Source: Party manifesto data sets in Budge et al., 2001 and Klingemann et al., 2006.
Comment: The left hand scale denotes the percentage of coded party manifestoes that contain references to anti-corruption. The right hand scale denotes the average share of manifesto sentences containing anti-corruption. The total number of coded manifestoes is 1017 (1983-87: 204; 1988-92: 226; 1993-97: 276; 1998-2002: 262; 2003-07: 49) and the total number of elections is 146 (1983-87: 29; 1988-92: 31; 1993-97: 38; 1998-2002: 40; 2003-07: 8).

Not surprisingly there is a marked difference between the European countries in terms of politicization of political corruption. In table 3 the values on each of the three indicators of politicization are displayed.

Table 3: Politicization of political corruption by country

	Corruption allegation in election campaigns (%)	% of party manifestoes containing anti-corruption	% of sentences containing anti-corruption
Ukraine	100	-	-
Bulgaria	75	59	1,44
Lithuania	67	85	1,28
Romania	67	84	1,61
Austria	63	72	2,52
Malta	60	100	3,57
Poland	50	43	1,35
Slovenia	50	26	0,72
Latvia	40	62	1,94
Greece	38	100	4,09
Czech Republic	33	70	1,61
Iceland	33	26	1,04
Italy	29	68	2,30
Portugal	25	76	1,52
Hungary	20	69	2,02
Spain	20	56	0,95
Estonia	20	55	1,19
Ireland	17	51	0,66
Belgium	14	83	1,47
Finland	14	18	0,81
Slovakia	0	64	1,58
Netherlands	0	53	0,15
Croatia	0	50	0,95
France	0	45	0,73
UK	0	39	0,40
Germany	0	35	0,26
Luxemburg	0	27	0,29
Switzerland	0	19	0,18
Norway	0	11	0,03
Denmark	0	8	0,12
Sweden	0	0	0
Serbia	0	-	-
Average	25	50	1,17

Source: Party manifesto data sets in Budge et al., 2001 and Klingemann et al., 2006. Election reports in Electoral Studies, West European Politics and European Journal of Political Research.

The most striking feature in the table is the large number of countries, eleven out of 32, in which corruption allegations did not occur at all during the period under study. Moreover, in only five countries, corruption allegations occur in more than half the elections. Austria and Malta stand out as the only West European countries among the highest ranked. Most countries have a quite high share of parties referring to anti-corruption in their manifestoes. In Malta and Greece, all parties do so and moreover to quite a large extent. It should however be

noted that the number of parties analyzed is low, two in Malta and four in Greece. Only Sweden lacks parties which politicize political corruption.

As shown in table 1, there are 40 elections in which corruption allegations were made. The number of parties is somewhat higher (46), as some elections feature more than one anti-corruption party. Moreover some parties appear more than once, bringing the total number of parties to 55. But, what characterize the parties that use anti-corruption rhetoric in the election campaigns?¹⁵

The short answer to that question is an established, right-wing party in opposition. There is an overwhelming majority of right-wing parties, which indicate that corruption fighting is an issue ideologically closer connected to the right of centre or that left-wing parties are more prone to be corrupt. It may well be the case that right wing parties outnumber left wing ones, but hardly by seven to three. That opposition parties outnumber incumbents by a ratio nine to one is less surprising. The opportunities for corruption are greater when in office and it is therefore much more difficult to accuse the opposition of corruption. Again, it is most likely that there are more parties in opposition than in government, but most likely not at this scale. The final party characteristic is somewhat more difficult to interpret as the total number of new parties in electoral campaign is unknown. A qualified guess would be, however, that new parties are overrepresented among the anti-corruption parties, which implies that politicizing political corruption is a more common strategy for new parties than established ones. In short, a fair guess would be that anti-corruption parties are over represented in the right wing and oppositional categories as indicated in the figure, as well as in the newly established category.

Table 4: Characteristics of parties using corruption allegations

Ideological orientation				Incumbency				Established			
Left		Right		Yes		No		Yes		No	
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
13	28	32	70	6	11	49	89	42	76	12	22

Source: Woldendorp et al. , 1998; Müller-Rommel et al., 2004.

Comment: On the left-right dimension each party is counted only once. As incumbency and newness may change from one election to the next, all parties in all elections are included on these two variables. In one case, Lega Nord, both the ideological belonging and the extent of newness were unclear.

¹⁵ It should be pointed out that the comparison is made among the parties that politicize anti-corruption. As I have not yet analyzed all parties in terms of ideology, incumbency and newness, we still do not know for sure if the anti-corruption parties are over represented in certain categories or not.

We will now turn to the specific parties that politicize political corruption in order to find out to what extent it is a tactic mainly pursued by extremist or populist parties. Table 5 displays all parties using anti-corruption rhetoric as well as the electoral gains and losses and whether they gained or lost seats in government and the parliament and table 6 displays all parties devoting more than seven per cent of their manifestoes to anti-corruption.

The dominating group of parties that use anti-corruption rhetoric are clearly not extremist nor peripheral in the party system. 21 of the parties are rather big, influential and well established and many of them, moreover, represent the top two parties in their country. Only the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) may be considered leaning towards extremism, due to its hostility towards immigration and immigrants, even though most scholars would rather call it right wing populist. None of the other 20 parties have any such leanings. As discussed above, there are also twelve parties which compete for the first time, many of them very successfully, becoming the dominant party over night. Only four parties can be called extremists - Vlaams Bloc and National Front in Belgium, Self Defence in Poland and the Communist Party in Ukraine – and even for these parties that label could be questioned. The remaining nine parties are rather small, quite powerless and mainstream. Thus it seems that the politicization of political corruption is mainly a strategy for either big influential parties or new challengers and above all for ideologically quite mainstream parties.¹⁶

The anti-corruption issue in the manifestoes gives a quite different picture. As table 6 shows the parties allowing the most space for this issue are in contrast, rather small, peripheral *and* extremists. In contrast to the extremist parties discussed in the previous paragraph, there is no question that KPN in Poland, the Republicans in the Czech Republic and the Post-Fascists in Italy are extreme. If treating FPÖ as a borderline case, the first well established mainstream party appears only in seventh place (New Democracy in Greece). On the other hand, only three more parties on the list are considered extremists, which thus leave the impression that extremist parties are not overwhelmingly over represented. It is worth noticing that the parties in table 5 and 6 differ quite a bit, which probably depends on both a selection bias in the election reports, i.e. more focus on the major, established parties, but also to the fact that the

¹⁶ The same caveat as in footnote 15: the extremist parties anti-corruption parties make up about nine percent of all the anti-corruption parties, but as we do not know the total number of extremist parties, we cannot tell whether they are over or under represented.

big parties most likely have longer manifestoes and have to deal with all the policy areas. In sum, it is quite obvious that very few parties can be considered single issue parties in this respect as the share of sentences very rarely exceeds 15 percent.

The conclusion so far is that politicization of political corruption is not a populist phenomenon, at least if judged by the general images of the parties that take advantage of the issue. But parties which are mainstream and well balanced in other respects may turn to populism on specific issues in order to get a few extra votes. The question is thus to what extent there is any substance in the anti-corruption rhetoric. In other words, to what extent does the anti-corruption rhetoric correlate with the actual level of corruption and to what extent have specific scandals been exposed in connection to the elections? If parties charge each other of corruption without any clear evidence of an actual problem, then one may still say that political corruption mainly is politicized in a populist manner.

The results show that the issue of corruption rather is under than over politicized. In 38 elections major corruption scandals were reported in the election reports, but in almost half of these cases (45 %), no parties took advantage of this situation and accused the exposed party of corruption. Moreover, only in 14 elections, i.e. in eight per cent of the cases, corruption allegations were made without any scandals being mentioned. It thus seems that parties are rather reluctant to use the anti corruption weapon, without proof and even in situations in which there were good reasons for it, which strengthens the view that the issue is generally not used in a populist and not even opportunistic manner.

Furthermore, there is a significant, although not extremely strong correlation between the level of corruption and each of the three indicators on politicization of political corruption. The three bivariate analyses show correlations at .572 (share of anti-corruption in manifestoes), .465 (the share of manifestoes in each election including anti-corruption) and .309 (corruption rhetoric).¹⁷ Even if the correlations are not strikingly strong, a look at tables 5 and 6 clearly shows that highly and medium corrupt countries totally dominate. Finland and Iceland are the only stable low corrupt countries, of approximately ten, that appear in the tables, whereas ten of twelve high corrupt countries are represented, the exceptions being Croatia and Serbia.

¹⁷ The first two correlations are significant at the .000 level and the third at .006.

I will now turn to the effects of politicizing anti-corruption. Firstly, the likelihood of government turnover is analysed and secondly whether the anti-corruption parties tend to gain or lose in elections. In all elections studied, the governments have fallen in 42 per cent of the cases and remained in office in 49 per cent. In the remaining nine per cent of the elections there has been a partial shift in government. Thus, relative stability is the prevailing pattern.

When corruption allegations are made, however, there is a shift in government in 65 per cent of the cases, a partial one in eight per cent and no change in 27 per cent, whereas only governmental changes occur in 35 per cent of the cases when no allegations are made. Bringing up corruption in the election campaign thus seems to increase the likelihood of governmental turnover quite substantially. However, we must also take the actual level of corruption into account, as it may well be the case that the level of corruption rather than the politicization of the issue is the main determinant.

Table 7 shows the effects of corruption allegation on governmental change under control for actual corruption level. The analysis shows that the more corrupt a country is, the more likely it is that the government falls. But it also shows that politicizing corruption further diminishes the governments' chances to be reelected. In highly corrupt countries, governments fall in 64 per cent of the cases, but when corruption charges are made they always fall, totally in 92 per cent of the cases and partially in the remaining eight. If no allegation is made, the turnover rate is only 44 per cent. The medium corrupt countries show a similar pattern. In 57 percent of the cases do the governments fall in this category. However, when corruption allegations are made, the figure rises to 78 per cent and only 16 per cent of the governments in this category have survived when facing corruption charges. The most striking feature in the last columns are the almost total absence, and hence variation, of corruption allegations. In only one instance has allegations been made and in that single case led to an otherwise fairly rare shift in government within this category. Thus, politicizing political corruption in countries where corruption obviously is a problem is a safe way to get rid of the government.

Table 7: Shift in government and corruption allegation

Corruption allegation Shift in government	High corruption				Medium corruption				Low corruption			
	Yes		No		Yes		No		Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	11	92	7	44	14	78	19	48	1	100	9	29
Partly	1	8	2	12	1	6	3	7	0	0	3	10
No	0	0	7	44	3	16	18	45	0	0	19	91
Total	12	100	16	100	18	100	40	100	1	100	31	100

Source: Election reports in Electoral Studies, West European Politics and European Journal of Political Research.
Comment: The results are significant for the high and medium corrupt cases, whereas the results for the low corruption countries are not. The number of elections in high corrupt countries is 28, in medium corrupt countries 58 and in low corrupt countries 33.

Moreover, when corruption allegations are not made but when corruption scandals have erupted, shifts in government have occurred in only seven out of 17 cases (41 %), which is only slightly above the 35 percent average turnover in cases when no allegations are made. Thus, corruption scandals do only marginally increase the likelihood of governmental shifts, unless they are politicized in the campaign.

Finally we will return to the parties in table 5 and discuss the electoral outcome and the potential effects of politicizing political corruption. The majority of parties have gained votes in the election. In only 16 elections (29 %) have an anti-corruption party lost votes, of which four were incumbents. As there are no data as yet on the fate of the parties not using corruption, it naturally impossible to assess the independent effect of anti-corruption rhetoric on the parties’ election results. A fair guess would be that oppositional parties in general gain votes in an election and it would therefore be interesting to see whether politicizing corruption adds to those gains. I will here only draw attention to one striking feature, namely the fact the most successful new parties in the table, also are among the most successful new parties in general since 1945 (see Bågenholm & Johansson Heinö, 2008). Even in seemingly modest success cases, such as Political Spring in Greece, one should remember that they obtained the highest share a new party has ever got since democracy was restored in 1974. That implies that the recipe to become immediately very successful proscribes a fairly high dose of anti-corruption rhetoric.

Concluding remarks

This initial exploration of politicization of political corruption has resulted in a number of interesting findings. First, it appears rather frequent in European elections and above all in the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, with an increasing trend when it comes to anti-corruption rhetoric. The difference between the east and the west seem to be widening. Thus it seems to support the argument that the parties are responding to changes in the relationship between the voters and the parties, by using slightly different strategies than before, namely exploiting an issue which is not so much about the content of the policies as the mode of policy making. Secondly, there is a large variation in politicizing political corruption among the countries studied. In more than one third of the countries, corruption allegations do not occur at all, which can mainly be explained by the fact that the level of corruption in these countries in general is low, which is the third conclusion. Fourth, politicizing political corruption does not seem to be an extremist or populist phenomenon at all, as the majority of anti-corruption parties are established, rather influential and mainstream. Only in exceptional cases do extremist, or even populist parties, exploit the issue of corruption. The issue appears to be under rather than over politicized, which means that anti-corruption rhetoric in general is used only, but not always, when there is strong evidence of corrupt behavior. Fifth, and perhaps most interestingly, corruption allegations make a difference for the outcome of elections, as governments tend to fall much more often when facing corruption charges, whereas “unpoliticized” scandals do not seem to affect the outcome at all. Lastly, it seems that new parties are more inclined to use anti-corruption rhetoric than new ones and with at least a number of astonishing results. Thus, by politicizing corruption, new parties have found an effective way not only to enter parliament but also government and for established parties in opposition it increases the chances of toppling the government. But this is only true in countries in which corruption is big problem. In low corrupt countries, the issue is not yet politicized.

Table 5: The electoral fate of parties using anti-corruption rhetoric

Party	Country	Year	+/-	Inc. 1	Inc. 2	Parl. 1	Parl. 2
Rural Party	Finland	1983	5,1	0	1	1	1
Radical Party	Italy	1983	-1,3	0	0	1	1
Freedom Party	Austria	1983	-0,9	0	1	1	1
Democratic Renewal Party	Portugal	1985	17,9	0	0	0	1
Freedom Party	Austria	1986	4,7	1	0	1	1
National Party	Malta	1987	0	0	1	1	1
Labour Party	Malta	1987	-0,2	1	0	1	1
New Democracy	Greece	1989	3,4	0	1	1	1
Progressive Left	Greece	1989	4,0	0	0	1	1
Lega Nord	Italy	1992	7,7	0	0	2	1
Labour Party	Malta	1992	-2,4	0	0	1	1
Political Spring	Greece	1993	4,9	0	0	0	1
Popular Party	Spain	1993	9,0	0	0	1	1
Socialist Party	Bulgaria	1994	10,4	0	1	1	1
Union of Democratic Forces	Bulgaria	1994	-10,2	1	0	1	1
Rights and Freedom	Bulgaria	1994	-2,1	0	0	1	1
Freedom Party	Austria	1994	5,9	0	0	1	1
People's Movement	Iceland	1995	7,2	0	0	0	1
Popular Party	Portugal	1995	4,7	0	0	1	1
Vlaams Bloc	Belgium	1995	1,2	0	0	1	1
National Front	Belgium	1995	1,2	0	0	1	1
Work and Justice	Latvia	1995	3,0	0	0	0	0
Freedom Party	Austria	1995	-0,6	0	0	1	1
Homeland Union	Lithuania	1996	9,3	0	1	1	1
Labour Party	Malta	1996	4,2	0	1	1	1
Democratic Convention	Romania	1996	10,2	0	1	1	1
Union of Democratic Forces	Bulgaria	1997	28,1	0	1	1	1
Freedom Union	Czech Republic	1998	8,6	0	0	0	1
Party of Democratic Socialism	Romania	2000	15,1	0	1	1	1
National Movement Simon II	Bulgaria	2001	42,7	0	1	0	1
Law and Justice	Poland	2001	9,5	0	0	0	1
Socialist Party	Hungary	2002	9,2	0	1	1	1
Free Democrats	Hungary	2002	-2,0	0	1	1	1
Fine Gael	Ireland	2002	-5,0	0	0	1	1
Labour Party	Ireland	2002	-2,0	0	0	1	1
New Era	Latvia	2002	23,9	0	1	0	1
Res Publica	Estonia	2003	24,6	0	1	0	1
Independence Party	Iceland	2003	-7,0	1	1	1	1
New Democracy	Greece	2004	2,7	0	1	1	1
Labour Party	Lithuania	2004	28,4	0	1	0	1
Liberal Democratic Party	Lithuania	2004	11,4	0	0	0	1
Peasants' and New Democratic Party Union	Lithuania	2004	6,6	0	0	0	1
Democratic Party	Slovenia	2004	13,3	0	1	1	1
National Party	Slovenia	2004	1,9	0	0	1	1
People's Party	Slovenia	2004	-2,7	0	1	1	1
New Slovenia	Slovenia	2004	0,4	0	1	1	1
Law and Justice	Poland	2005	17,5	0	1	1	1
Self Defence	Poland	2005	1,2	0	1	1	1

People's Party	Austria	2006	-8,0	1	1	1	1
Civic Democratic Party	Czech Republic	2006	10,9	0	1	1	1
Socialist Party	Ukraine	2006	-1,2	0	0	1	1
Communist Party	Ukraine	2007	-16,3	0	0	1	0
Law and Justice	Poland	2007	5,1	1	0	1	1
Civic Platform	Poland	2007	17,4	0	1	1	1
Our Ukraine	Ukraine	2007	-9,4	0	1	1	1

Source: Election reports in Electoral Studies, West European Politics and European Journal of Political Research. Woldendrop et al. , 1998; Müller-Rommel et al., 2004.

Comment: In the +/- column the gains and losses in percentage points in relation to the previous election is shown. Inc.1 and Inc.2 denote the incumbency status before and after the election. 0=opposition and 1=in government. Parl.1 and Parl.2 denote the status of parliamentary representation before and after the election respectively. 0=outside parliament; 1=in parliament.

Table 6: Top ranking parties in terms of anti-corruption in party manifestoes

Party	Country	Year	% anti-corruption sentences in manifesto	Comment
Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN)	Poland	1991	27,37	Established; Extreme right
Republicans (SPR-RSC)	Czechosl.	1992	22,45	Established; Extreme right
Freedom Party (FPÖ)	Austria	1994	21,11	Established; Populist right
Social Movement-Right National (MSI-DN)	Italy	1992	18,37	Established; Extreme right
Democratic Renewal Party (PRD)	Portugal	1985	16,07	New; Centre-left
Party of Democratic Left (PDS)	Italy	1992	12,59	Reestablished/Left-wing
New Democracy (ND)	Greece	1989:1	12,03	Established; Right-wing
Coalition Left and Progress (SAP)	Greece	1989:1	11,86	New/Established; Left-wing
Coalition Left and Progress (SAP)	Greece	1989:2	11,86	New/Established; Left-wing
National Party (SNS)	Slovenia	2000	10,53	Established; Right-wing
New Democracy (ND),	Greece	1989:2	10,29	Established; Right-wing
Freedom Party (FPÖ)	Austria	1986	9,80	Established; Populist right
Republican Party (PRI)	Italy	1987	9,32	Established; Liberal
Liberal People's Party (LKP)	Finland	1991	9,00	Established; Liberal
Trade Union Solidarity (NSZZ)	Poland	1991	8,94	Established; Right-wing
Popular Movement (TKL)	Latvia	1995	8,89	New; Extreme right
New Democracy (ND)	Greece	1990	8,56	Established; Right-wing
Workers' Association (ZRS)	Slovakia	1994	8,51	New; Extreme left
Res Publica (ResP)	Estonia	2003	8,19	New; Right-wing
Republican Party (PRI)	Italy	1992	8,16	Established; Liberal
Citizen Coalition (EK)	Estonia	1992	8,00	New; Extreme right
Union of Democratic Forces (SDS)	Bulgaria	1994	7,57	Established; Right-wing
New Era (JL)	Latvia	2002	7,46	New; Right-wing

Source: Party manifesto data sets in Budge et al. (2001) and Klingemann et al. 2006.

Comment: The table contain all parties devoting more than seven percent of their manifestoes to anti-corruption.

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Appendix

Country ¹⁸	Democratic ¹⁹	First election analysed ²⁰	No of elections analysed ²¹
Austria		1983	8
Belgium		1985	7
Bulgaria	1991	1994	4
Croatia	2000	2007	1
Czech Republic	1990	1990	6
Denmark		1984	8
Estonia	1991	1992	5
Finland		1983	7
France		1986	6
Germany		1983	7
Greece		1985	8
Hungary	1990	1990	5
Iceland		1987	6
Ireland		1987	6
Italy		1983	7
Latvia	1991	1993	5
Lithuania	1991	1996	3
Luxemburg		1989	4
Malta	1987	1987	5
Netherlands		1986	7
Norway		1985	6
Poland	1990	1991	6
Portugal		1983	8
Romania	1996	2000	2
Serbia ²²	2002	2007	1
Slovakia	1993 ²³	1994	4

¹⁸ The free election in East Germany in 1990 is omitted since that country ceased to exist less than seven months later. The two elections held in Czechoslovakia on the other hand are included in the Czech Republic as they represent the origins for the party systems in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

¹⁹ When considered "Free" by Freedom House (www.freedomhouse.org). Years missing indicates that the countries were already considered Free from the starting point of the period under study, i.e. in 1983.

²⁰ Electoral reports are missing for the first election in eight cases (Bulgaria 1991; Iceland 1983; Lithuania 1992; Luxemburg 1984; Romania 1996; Serbia 2003, Spain 1986 and Switzerland 1983) and for the first two elections in Croatia (2000 & 2003).

²¹ Apart for the ten missing elections mentioned in footnote four, electoral reports are also missing for Denmark 1988; Greece 1990 and Slovenia 2000. Thus, the total number of missing cases is 13.

²² In 2002 Yugoslavia was still in existence. It consisted of two federal subjects, Serbia and Montenegro. Between 2003 and 2005 the federation had loosed and the country was called Serbia & Montenegro. In 2006 Montenegro became independent.

Slovenia	1991	1992	3
Spain		1989	5
Sweden		1985	7
Switzerland		1987	6
UK		1983	6
Ukraine	2005	2006	2
Total			171

²³ Slovakia was rated "partly free" in 1996 and 1997 and "free" again in 1998, the during which the elections were held. Slovakia has been rated as "Free" since then.