

STATIC AND DYNAMIC PROPERTIES OF THE KAZAKHSTANI PARTY SYSTEM

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Abstract: The purpose of the present article is to analyze the electoral returns of the Kazakhstani elections held in the 1995-2021 period to estimate both the static (such as fragmentation) and the dynamic properties (fluidity) of the Kazakhstani party system. In addition to estimating the fragmentation and the instability of the party system resulting from parliamentary elections, the paper explores the relationship between the static properties of a party system, such as the level of party system fragmentation, and its dynamic properties, such as the level of fluidity of the party system. By doing so, the article reveals that the decrease in the level of fragmentation, measured on the basis of Rae's index of fractionalization and Laakso and Taagepera's Effective Number of Parties, was responsible for the growing instability (fluidity) of the Kazakhstani party system.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, elections, party system, accountability, fragmentation, fluidity

Introduction

On March 19, 2023 Kazakhstani voters will go to the polls to vote in the parliamentary elections. The party system resulting from parliamentary elections has traditionally been quite different from the party system emerging from the Presidential elections.

The purpose of the present article is to analyze the electoral returns of the elections held in the 1995-2021 period to estimate both the static and the dynamic properties of the Kazakhstani party system. More importantly, the paper explores the relationship between the static properties of a party system, such as the level of party system fragmentation, and its dynamic properties, such as the level of fluidity of the party system.

The analysis may be of interest for both scholars interested in the Kazakhstani elections and in the way in which the Kazakhstani party system has evolved over the years and in how it may change in the March 19 elections, but it may

also be of interest for party system scholars who work in a more comparative perspective.

In 2016, Pelizzo and Nwokora (2016) assembled a comprehensive dataset on the fluidity of the African party systems. The dataset covered each and every elections held in 48 countries (plus Somaliland) from the moment these countries achieved independence to what was then the most recent election. The dataset covered 396 elections and in only 18 of them, the party system that emerged from the ballot box was atomized (4.54 per cent). By contrast, in the Pacific Island States, the party system displays remarkably low levels of fluidity but high levels of fragmentation – as evidenced by the fact that the party system resulting from 20 of the 33 elections for which data were collected (see appendix) was atomized and atomization represents the highest level of fragmentation that a party system can experience. In Kazakhstan, 2 of the 8 legislative elections for which data were analyzed produced an atomized party system in combination with a fairly high level of party system instability (fluidity). While this evidence suggests, however superficially, that there are regional trends or region-specific party system configurations (low fragmentation and high fluidity in Sub-Saharan Africa; high fragmentation and low fluidity in the Pacific Island States), it does not provide much of an indication of whether and how fragmentation and party system instability relate to one another – which is exactly what I will explore on the basis of the Kazakhstani data.

The remainder of this article is structured in a fairly straightforward way. In the first section I will discuss the literature on party systems and party system change, in the second I will analyze the Kazakhstani case, while in the third and final section I will try to formulate some conclusions.

Literature Review

Bartolini (1993, 2003) noted that the study of party systems has generally been conducted by adopting one of two main frameworks of analyses or approaches. The genetic approach, pioneered by Duverger (1951) and eventually refined by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) was concerned, as the name of the approach suggests, with the genesis of party systems, that it is with the historical process through which a party system acquires its distinctive features. By contrast, the functional approach, pioneered by Sartori (1976), was primarily concerned with the functioning of party systems, that is with the relationship between the format of party systems, its functioning and their political consequences.

The two approaches, in spite of the differences in the focus of their investigations, were complementary to one another. Sartori identified in the fragmentation of the party system, measured on the basis of the number of relevant parties, one of the defining features of a party system, and identified in the ideological polarization of the party system the second most important defining feature of a party

system. In fact, when proposing his well known typology of party systems, Sartori distinguished the moderate pluralist party system, that functions like a two party system in spite of the fact that the number of relevant parties is greater than two, from the polarized pluralist party system (which functions in a rather different way) precisely on the basis of the fragmentation and the ideological polarization of the party system. In polarized pluralist party system, there was a higher number of relevant parties (more than 5) and there was more ideological polarization, that is a greater ideological distance between the parties located at the extreme ends of the political spectrum.

The work of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) explained quite clearly why the number of (relevant) parties was higher in some party systems than in others. According to Lipset and Rokkan (1967), in the course of its historical development, a country goes at specific historical junctures through a series of transformations (revolutions) that segment or divide society. These divisions were called ‘cleavages’, by which Lipset and Rokkan (1967) meant a social division that is politically relevant or salient. The fragmentation of the party system reflects the number of party systems that were still relevant when universal suffrage was granted in a country. So countries, where only one cleavage was salient when the universal suffrage was granted, ended up with a two-party system, while countries where more cleavages had remained salient would end up having a more fragmented party system. The implication is that the origins of the fragmentation of a party system, that is so important for the functional approach is explained, is explained by scholars working in the tradition of the genetic approach.

With regard to ideological polarization, Sartori (1976) was very clear: the polarization of a party systems reflected the number and the depth of the cleaves. In other words, even Sartori in order to explain why some party systems were more ideologically polarized than others had to adopt the genetic approach.

Yet, the study of the party systems has come to represent a very diversified field of inquiry not only because scholars have over the years adopted different frameworks for analysis, but also because they have adopted fundamentally different methodologies. In fact, while some scholars have employed primarily qualitative methods in the study of party systems and, specifically, have employed qualitatively-informed taxonomies (Sartori, 1976; Bogaards, 2004; Ware, 2009) to identify the key characteristics of a party system, other have preferred instead to rely upon and employ quantitative methods and metrics. Rae proposed his index of fractionalization to capture the fragmentation of a party system (1967), several scholars have proposed several solutions to measure the ideological polarization of a party system, while Pedersen (1979) has proposed the adoption of the index of volatility to capture the (in)stability of the electoral returns (and of a party system over time).

Given the growing interest in party system change (CasalBertoa and Enyedi, 2017), party system scholars have started paying attention not only to the static

properties of party systems (fragmentation, polarization) but also to their dynamic properties, such as the fluidity of party systems and their implications.

The notion of fluidity was initially conceived by Sartori (1976) who argued that the patterns of inter-party competition can be either structured and stable or they can be instead unstable and fluid. The fundamental theoretical disagreement between Sartori and the scholars working on party system fluidity centered on what provides the best indication of whether a pattern of inter-party competition is fluid or not. For Sartori (1976), and more recently for Bogaards (2004, 2008), the best indication of whether a pattern of inter-party competition is fluid is given by the presence of a mass party. For the proponents of the index of fluidity, a better indication of the fluidity of a party system was provided by how often, how much and in what ways a party system, in a given polity, would change over time. This disagreement was motivated by the fact that the proponents of the index of fluidity could not take a static property (the presence of a mass party) as a proper indication of something that is inherently dynamic as the changeability of a party system. And just as the attempt to refine the notion of predominant party systems was regarded by its proponents as an effort to be more Sartorian than Sartori (and take more seriously than Sartori had actually done some his claims), the attempt to consider fluidity in dynamic rather than static terms represented an effort to take seriously Sartori's claim that the structuring of a party system is that condition that makes it resilient to change, while fluidity is that condition that is associated with high level of change and/or high propensity to change (or changeability).

Building on Sartori's notion, Nwokora and Pelizzo (2018) developed the index of fluidity. This index is computed by taking into consideration the frequency of the party system change, the scope of the change (which is the difference between the new party system and the previous one) and the variety of change –because a party system that in the course of its historical development takes many different formats/mechanisms (one party, hegemonic, predominant, two party, moderate pluralist, polarized pluralist and atomized) is more unstable than a party system in which the pattern of inter-party competition is either that of a two-party or moderate pluralist party system.

This index has been used to assess the political consequences of party system change (Nwokora and Pelizzo, 2015), the quality of democracy (Pelizzo and Nwokora, 2018), the level of good governance (Pelizzo, 2020), and the level/effectiveness of legislative oversight (Mukhtarova, 2020). While a growing body of research has explained what is the fluidity of a party system and why it matters, much less attention has been paid to whether and how the static properties (fragmentation) of a party system relate to its dynamic properties (fluidity)—which is precisely what will be explored in the rest of this article in the context of Kazakhstan.

The Kazakhstani Party System

In analyzing the Kazakhstani party system, it is essential to distinguish the party system that emerges from the presidential elections from the party system that emerges from the legislative (or parliamentary) elections.

Turganov (2022) has shown that the party system resulting from the presidential elections has remained fairly stable and was consistently characterized by a low level of fragmentation. By contrast, Pelizzo (2022) has shown that the Kazakhstani party system resulting from the legislative elections was initially characterized by high levels of fragmentation, that fragmentation consistently decreased to reach its lowest level in the aftermath of the 2007 elections and has increased since.

No study has so far attempted to compute the level of fluidity of the Kazakhstani party system resulting from parliamentary elections and to assess whether and to what extent it relates to its static properties such as fragmentation.

In computing the index of fluidity, I will employ the formula proposed by Nwokora and Pelizzo (2018).

$$\text{Fluidity} = \text{Frequency} * \text{Scope} * \text{Variety}$$

Where frequency is estimated by dividing the number of party system changes by the number of elections; scope refers to the distance between the two most different party system types emerging in a country's electoral history, while variety refer to the number of party system types that emerge in the course of a country's electoral history (Nwokora and Pelizzo, 2018). For example, if there is a one party system change in 2 consecutive elections, from two party to moderate pluralism, the index of fluidity takes the following value:

$$\text{Fluidity} = 5 * 1 * 2 = 1.$$

By performing these computations, we generate the results presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Fluidity of the Kazakhstani party system

Year	Party system	Party System C	Frequency of PSC	Variety	Scope	Fluidity
1994	Atomized			1		
1995	Moderate Pluralist	1	.5	2	2	2
1999	Atomized	2	.66	2	2	2.64
2004	Two party	3	.75	3	3	6.75
2007	Hegemonic	4	.80	4	5	16
2012	Hegemonic		.66	4	5	13.2
2016	Hegemonic		.57	4	5	11.4
2021	Hegemonic		.5	4	5	10

The Kazakhstani party system, resulting from the parliamentary elections, is and has been for several years an incredibly fluid party system. It experienced four party system changes, it has come to exemplify at least four different types of party system (atomized, moderate pluralist, two party, hegemonic), it has been characterized by high level of scope (the atomized party system of 1994 is the most fragmented of all known party system types and the hegemonic party system is one of the least fragmented party system types – which is why the Kazakhstani party system has been remarkably fluid.

The question is whether the fluidity of the Kazakhstani party system (dynamic property) was in any way related to the level of party system fragmentation (static property). To assess whether fluidity relates or not to the Kazakhstani party system properties, we correlate the index of fluidity (as shown in table 1) with the Rae’s Index of fractionalization and Laakso and Taagepera’s Effective Number of Parties as computed by Pelizzo (2022). See table 2.

Table 2. Fluidity, Fractionalization and Effective Number of Partie

Year	fluidity	fractionalization	Effective number of parties (ENP)
1995	2	.808	5.2
1999	2.64	.780	4.54
2004	6.75	.651	2.86
2007	16	.156	1.18
2012	13.2	.388	1.63
2016	11.4	.375	1.6
2021	10	.479	1.9

The correlation of these three variables yields the correlation coefficients presented in table 3.

Table 3. Correlations. Fluidity and Fragmentation Sig.)

	fluidity	ENP	Fractionalization
Fluidity	1	-.961** (.001)	-.987** (.000)
ENP		1	.933** (.002)
fractionalization			1

The correlation analysis reveals, as visual inspection of figures 1 and 2 also confirms, that in the Kazakhstani case there is a strong, negative relationship between the fluidity and the fragmentation of the party system – the party system

became more fluid because of a reduction in the fragmentation of the party system—that occurred as Nur Otan established itself as the major political party in the country.

Figure 1. Fluidity and the Effective Number of Parties

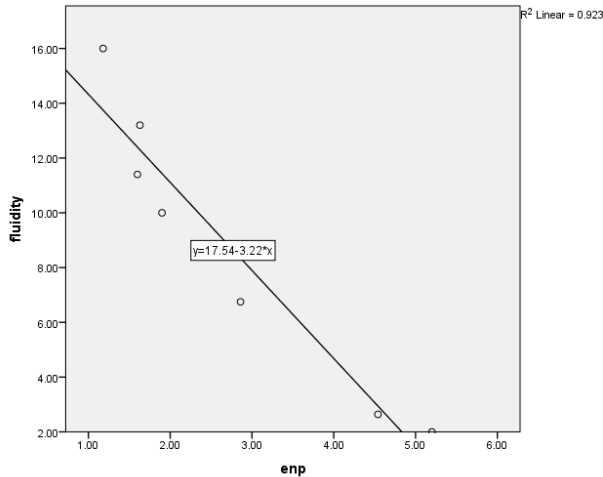
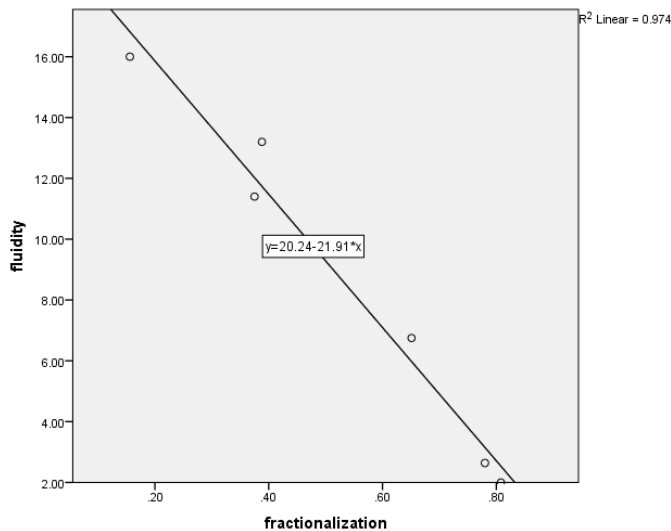


Figure 2. Fluidity and Fractionalization



As noted before the fragmentation of the Kazakhstani party, still relatively low, has been increasing from 2012 onward. Several reforms introduced by President Tokayev were designed to increase the competitiveness of the electoral process and to provide voters with a wider political offer/supply – which, in its turn,

could transform the pattern of inter-party competition and induce/produce a party system change.

To know whether and how much the Kazakhstani party system will change in the wake of the 2023 elections, it is necessary to see the electoral returns. To the best of my knowledge two polls of the Kazakhstani electorate have been conducted – one at the end of January 2023 and one in the first half of February. The polls are quite interesting for various reasons.

First, the polls make clear that while a sizeable portion of the Kazakhstani electorate is still undecided, the percentage of undecided voters is declining as the election nears. Second, the polls make it quite clear that Amanat is very likely to win a majority of the parliamentary votes/seats, though not as many as it won in the 2021 elections. Third, the data presented in table 4 suggest that as a growing percentage of voters decides for which party to vote, Amanat is more successful than other parties in capturing the vote of the previously undecided voters. The poll conducted in January 2023 revealed that only 48.6 per cent of the Kazakhstani voters had at that point decided to vote for Amanat, while 22.8 per cent of them was still undecided. When the February 2023 poll was conducted, the percentage of undecided had dropped to 13.8 per cent, while the percentage of voters willing to vote for Amanat had increased to 58.4 per cent. Between the January and the February poll only QHP, Respublika, JSDP had managed to increase (very marginally) their electoral appeal, Aq Jol experienced no change in its expected electoral fortunes, while Auyl and Baytaq became slightly less appealing. Fourth, given the trend that I just described, it is not impossible for Amanat to replicate the electoral success that it enjoyed, as Nur Otan, in the 2021 elections. Even if Amanat were not able to win as many votes/seats as Nur Otan did in 2021, the party system would at most change from hegemonic to predominant – a change that would considerably enhance the (electoral) accountability of the Kazakhstani political system without jeopardizing the government effectiveness.

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to show that the relationship between the static and dynamic properties of the Kazakhstani party system are somewhat different from what one could observe in other regions. In Sub-Saharan Africa party system instability (high levels of fluidity) goes hand in hand with relatively low levels of fragmentation, in the Pacific Island States party system stability (low levels of fluidity) goes hand in hand with remarkably high levels of fragmentation, while in Kazakhstan fairly high levels of party system instability were associated with both high and low levels of party system fragmentation.

Interesting as this evidence may be, it does not provide any indication of how static and dynamic party system properties such as, respectively, fragmentation and fluidity, relate to one another. The analysis of the Kazakhstani data reveals that

the growing levels of fluidity were associated with a steady decline in the level of party system fragmentation.

If the March 19, 2023 elections produce a party system change, it'd be the first time in the history of the Kazakhstani party system in which simultaneously an increase in the level of fragmentation and in the level of fluidity occur.

The question that may, however, be more relevant to Kazakhstani scholars and policy makers is how much the party system may change in the forthcoming elections and what the consequences of a party system change may be.

If the results of the polls conducted by the Democratic Institute and discussed in the Kazakhstani press are correct, there is every indication that the ruling party Amanat will be able to win a majority of votes and seats and will be able to preserve its predominant status.* This means that the party system will undergo only a relatively minor change, which will increase however sensibly the accountability of the political system without compromising the government effectiveness**.

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* *Fora discussion of the results of the pollsee* Большинство избирателей считают голосование своим гражданским долгом - исследование: 25 февраля 2023, 21:12 - новости на Tengrinews.kz

** *I make this claim because previous research (Pelizzo, 2022) had shown that the reduction in the fragmentation of the Kazakhstani party system had gone hand in hand with and was possibly responsible for a reduction in the level of accountability (Pasquino and Pelizzo, 2022).*

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Appendix. Fluidity in the Pacific Island States

A1. Fluidity in the Cook Islands

Year	Party system type	Party system change	Frequency of party system change	Scope	Variety	Fluidity
1999	Moderate pluralism	No				
2004	Two party	Yes	.5	1	2	1
2006	Two party	No	.33	1	2	.66
2010	Two party	No	.25	1	2	.50
2014	Two party	No	.20	1	2	.40
2018	Moderate pluralism	Yes	.33	1	2	.66

A2. Fluidity in Fiji Islands

Year	Party system type	Party system change	Frequency of party system change	Scope	Variety	Fluidity
1999	Two party					
2001	Moderate pluralism	Yes	.5	1	2	1
2006	Two party	Yes	.66	1	2	1.32
2014	Two party	No	.50	1	2	1
2018	Two party	No	.40	1	2	.80

A3. Fluidity in Palau

Year	Party system type	Party system change	Frequency of party system change	Scope	Variety	Fluidity
2000	Atomized	0	0	0	0	0
2004	Atomized	0	0	0	0	0
2008	Atomized	0	0	0	0	0
2012	Atomized	0	0	0	0	0

2016	Atomized	0	0	0	0	0
2020	Atomized	0	0	0	0	0

A4. Fluidity in Papua New Guinea

Year	Party system type	Party system change	Frequency of party system change	Scope	Variety	Fluidity
2002	Atomized	0	0	0	0	0
2007	Atomized	0	0	0	0	0
2012	Atomized	0	0	0	0	0
2017	Atomized	0	0	0	0	0

A5. Fluidity in Samoa

Year	Party system type	Party system change	Frequency of party system change	Scope	Variety	Fluidity
2001	Moderate pluralist	0	0	0	1	0
2006	Two party	1	.5	1	2	1
2011	Two Party		.33	1	2	.66
2016	Predominant	2	.5	2	3	3
2021	Two party	3	.6	2	3	3.6

A6. Fluidity in Solomon Islands

Year	Party system type	Party system change	Frequency of party system change	Scope	Variety	Fluidity
1997	Moderate pluralism	No				
2001	Moderate pluralism	No	0			0
2006	Atomized	Yes	.33	2	2	1.32
2010	Atomized	No	.25	2	2	1
2014	Atomized	No	.20	2	2	.80
2019	Atomized	No	.16	2	2	.66

A7. Fluidity in Vanuatu

Year	Party system type	Party system change	Frequency of party system change	Scope	Variety	fluidity
2002	Atomized	No	0	0	0	0
2004	Atomized	No	0	0	0	0
2008	Atomized	No	0	0	0	0
2012	Atomized	No	0	0	0	0
2016	Atomized	No	0	0	0	0
2020	Atomized	No	0	0	0	0

Пелиццо Р.

Қазақстандық партия жүйесінің статикалық және динамикалық ерекшеліктері

Аннотация: Бұл мақаланың мақсаты – 1995-2021 жылдар аралығында өткізілген қазақстандық партия жүйесінің статикалық (фрагменттілігі) және динамикалық сипатын (өтімділігі/өзгергіштігі) бағалау үшін қазақстандық сайлаудың нәтижелерін талдау болып табылады. Парламенттік сайлау нәтижесінде партиялық жүйенің фрагменттілігі мен тұрақсыздығын бағалаудан басқа, мақалада партиялық жүйенің фрагменттілік деңгейі сияқты партиялық жүйенің статикалық және айналымдылық/өзгергіштік деңгейі сияқты динамикалық ерекшеліктері арасындағы байланыс қарастырылады. Осылайша, мақалада Раэ фракцияландыру индексі және Лааксо мен Таагепер партияларының тиімді саны негізінде өлшенген фрагментация деңгейінің төмендеуі қазақстандық партиялық жүйенің тұрақсыздығының (өтімділігінің) өсуіне себеп болғандығы көрсетілген.

Түйін сөздер: Қазақстан, сайлау, партиялық жүйелер, есеп берушілік, бөлшектену, өтімділік/құбылмалылық

Пелиццо Р.

Статические и динамические свойства казахстанской партийной системы

Аннотация: Целью настоящей статьи является анализ электоральных результатов казахстанских выборов, проведенных в период 1995-2021 гг., для оценки как статических (фрагментарность), так и динамических свойств (текучесть/изменчивость) казахстанской партийной системы. Помимо оценки фрагментарности и нестабильности партийной системы в результате парламентских выборов, в статье исследуется взаимосвязь между статическими свойствами партийной системы, такими как уровень фрагментарности партийной системы, и ее динамическими свойствами, такими как уровень текучести/изменчивости партийной системы. Таким образом, в статье показано, что снижение уровня фрагментарности, измеренного на основе индекса фракционализации Раэ и эффективного числа партий Лааксо и Таагепера, было причиной растущей нестабильности (текучести) казахстанской партийной системы.

Ключевые слова: Казахстан, выборы, партийные системы, подотчетность, фрагментарность, текучесть/изменчивость.