

LEGISLATIVE TURNOVER IN THE BALTICS AFTER 1990: WHY IS IT SO HIGH AND WHAT ARE ITS IMPLICATIONS?

Mindaugas Kuklys

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the causes and potential consequences of the high legislative turnover in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the period from 1990 onwards. The main findings from the subject-related literature are being confronted with the data on the Baltic parliamentary recruitment. The analysis leads to the conclusion that the path dependence (length of the previous non-democratic regime) and the supply-side volatility are the most convincing explanations for the high turnover among Baltic legislators.

The personnel turnover of the formal governmental institutions (circulation of elites) is often seen as an explanatory variable for the change and stability of a political order (Bottomore 1993: 44). Democratic elitists claim that liberal democracy has elitist foundations (Higley and Burton 2006) and provide evidence that consolidated democracy, differently from other types of political regimes, is related to “classic elite circulation” (Higley and Lengyel 2000: 7).

The concern of Pareto as well as of the current scholars working on western democracies¹ seems to be a low individual turnover of elites. We can find a passage where the circulation of elites is compared with “the river flooding and breaking its banks”, but this happens because of the too slow elite circulation, which causes revolutions (Pareto 1966: 250).

The primary concern of this article, as well as of the studies on Eastern European democracies (Best and Edinger 2003; Crowther and Matonyte 2007), however, is about the high individual turnover of parliamentary elites and its potential consequences. In order to say whether the elite turnover is high or low and what it indicates, a more precise scale of measurement is required. To measure individual turnover among parliamentary elites, I will use the benchmark based on the empirical longitudinal data from many European democracies (Figure 1).

MINDAUGAS KUKLYS, Institute of Sociology, University of Jena, Carl-Zeiss-Str. 2, D-07740, Jena, Germany, M. Kuklys.99@cantab.net.

¹ See Matland and Studlar 2004; Somit et al. 1994.

EXTENT OF ELITE CIRCULATION	INDICATION OF
95%	Complete or near to complete changes of political order (regime discontinuity)
40%–60%	(1) Restricted systemic changes (e.g., changes of the electoral system) (2) Volatile elite structures linked to the transformation of the party system at large
20%–40%	Normal level of exchange
< 20%	Trend towards development of oligarchical structures

FIGURE 1. Levels of elite circulation

Source: adapted from Best, Hausmann and Schmitt (2000: 184–185).

From 1990 onwards, the turnover of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian parliamentary representatives declines², and each consecutive parliamentary election brings more experienced MPs. However, the general level of legislative turnover, like in other countries of Eastern Europe,³ remains high for each election taken separately and amounts to 55.5% of newcomers for the last six terms in Estonia, 54.5% in Latvia,⁴ and 52.8% on average in Lithuania. The mean number of successive mandates – another indicator for elite circulation; – rises in all three countries, however, the average of 1.6 for Estonia and Latvia and 1.7 for Lithuania is significantly lower than the western European average of 2.5 mandates (Cotta and Best 2000: 505).

Since the table in Fig. 1 suggests that the most normal level of elite change is between 20% and 40%, it is clear that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as other Eastern European countries with their higher elite turnover do not fall into this category.

The main question is: How could this high turnover be explained? How long could it continue? What does it indicate? What are its causes and potential consequences?

The literature suggests that a high elite circulation indicates (1) restricted systemic changes, (2) volatile elite structures (Best, Hausmann, Schmitt 2000: 184–185), and (3) signifies a political crisis (Putnam 1976: 65). A high legislative turnover could be caused by (4) electoral system, (5) electoral volatility, (6) double listing of candidates, (7) frequency of elections, and (8) voluntary exits such as dissatisfaction with being a legislator, desire to retire or pursue a private career (Matland and Studlar 2004: 87). On the side of potential consequences, a high circulation of MPs might be interpreted as (9) greater chances for a system's innovativeness

² Exceptions: the Estonian Riigikogu of 1999 and 2003, the Latvian Saeima of 1998 and 2010, and the Lithuanian Seimas of 2000.

³ Legislative turnover in post-communist Eastern Europe fluctuates at the level between 50% and 75% which is almost two times higher than in most democracies of Western Europe (Best and Edinger 2003: 6).

⁴ If the parliament of 1990 with the 92.5% rate of newcomers (Dreifelds 1996: 66) is included, the average for all seven terms would be 59.9%. In case we treat absolutely all MPs elected in 1990 as newcomers, the turnover reaches the level of 61%.

and flexibility in terms of policy, (10) greater opportunities in attaining elite status, and (11) the lower average level of elite experience, expertise, and effectiveness (Putnam 1976: 65-67).

1. LEGISLATIVE TURNOVER IN THE BALTICS

The legislative turnover indicates to what extent we observe a renewal or continuity of legislative elites and – in case of political party families – whether some party families bring more parliamentary newcomers than others.⁵

Estonia

The average share of parliamentary newcomers in Estonia for the last six elections is 55.5%, i.e. slightly below the Eastern European average (57.8%) for the last four parliaments: there were 68.8% of parliamentary newcomers in the second, 54.1% in the third, 53.9% in the fourth, and 54.3% in the fifth post-communist parliaments of Eastern Europe on the average (Edinger 2010: 145). If we look for incumbency rates, we see that only 37.3% of the Riigikogu members on average get re-elected. Surprisingly enough, the share of Estonian

TABLE 1. Parliamentary newcomers: Estonia

ELECTION	1992		1995		1999		2003		2007		2011	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Party Families												
Communists	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Social Dem.	8	66.7	2	33.3	10	58.8	4	66.7	2	20	9	47.4
Greens	0	0	---	---	---	---	---	---	6	100	---	---
Agrarians	---	---	---	---	2	28.6	7	53.8	1	16.7	---	---
Left Liberals	14	82.4	29	50.9	22	78.6	14	50	16	55.2	10	38.5
Right Liberals	0	0	11	57.9	6	24	11	57.9	19	61.3	14	42.4
Conservatives	23	79.3	2	15.4	10	55.6	29	82.9	5	26.3	5	21.7
Extreme Right	18	100	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Ethnic Minority	---	---	5	83.3	4	66.7	---	---	---	---	---	---
Other	8	100	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
No Party	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Liberals	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Christian Dem.	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Popular Front	10	66.7	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
TOTAL	81	80.2	49	48.5	54	53.5	65	64.4	49	48.5	38	37.6

Source: Own calculations.

⁵ In order to maximise the comparability, the political parties of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have been classified according to the scheme of Gallagher, Laver, and Mair (2006). The founding (competitive but not multi-party) elections of 1990 are excluded from the subsequent calculations in Tables 1 to 3 since the parliamentary elite change in 1990 by definition amounted to 100%.

newcomers is higher than the average share of newcomers in the Latvian and Lithuanian parliaments, in spite of the fact that the Estonian party system is considered the most stable and consolidated and having the lowest electoral volatility among the Baltic states (see Pettai and Kreuzer 1999; Pettai 2010).

If we move onto the political party family level, the largest shares of parliamentary newcomers are observed among Extreme Right and Other (Independent Royalists) in 1992, Ethnic Minority in 1995, Left Liberals in 1999, Conservatives in 2003, Greens in 2007, and Social Democrats in 2011. The largest absolute numbers of newcomers came with Conservatives in 1992 and 2003, Left Liberals in 1995 and 1999, and Right Liberals in 2007 and 2011. Conservatives, Left and Right Liberals were also electoral winners in the above indicated years. Hence, our data clearly demonstrate that the largest number of newcomers comes with the winners of the parliamentary elections.

If one differentiates between ethnic minority and ethnic majority legislators, one finds that a higher turnover is observed among ethnic minority MPs.

The high legislative turnover in Estonia provides for a higher accessibility of the elite and its permeability by non-elites. In comparison with countries having a low legislative turnover, politicians in Estonia have better chances to acquire the elite status. High legislative turnover can be interpreted as greater chances for political system's innovativeness and flexibility in terms of policy, but also as an indication of the lower average level of elite experience, expertise, and effectiveness and as a sign of political crisis (Putnam 1976: 65–66).

It has been noted, that “turnover within an elite institution tends to decline as the institution ages” (Putnam 1976: 65–66). In comparison with the first post-independence election, legislative turnover rates in Estonia declined indeed, however, they still remain high in comparison with legislative rates in western democracies. Western European countries stabilised their legislative turnover rapidly after the Second World War (Best and Cotta 2000; Cotta and Best 2007), however, Estonia, as well as most of Eastern Europe, twenty years after regime change continues rejecting more than half of its legislators in every election. This makes us wonder what keeps the political system together and whether the political system functions in conditions of a permanent crisis.

Latvia

From 1990 onwards, the turnover of Latvian parliamentary representatives declines, and each consecutive parliamentary election brings more experienced MPs: the share of parliamentary newcomers fell from 68% in 1993 to 58% and 52% in 1998 and 2002, respectively, finally reaching a “western” level of 38% in 2006.

The share of newcomers among Latvian party families is constantly above 40% except for the Liberals in 1995 and 1998, Conservatives and Social Democrats in 1995 and 2006, and Christian Democrats in 2006. The highest percentages of newcomers have been observed among Agrarians, Christian Democrats and Extreme Right in 1993, Agrarians in 1995, Christian Democrats in 1998 and 2002, Agrarians in 2006 and Extreme Right in 2010. The highest absolute

TABLE 2. Parliamentary newcomers: Latvia

ELECTION	1993		1995		1998		2002		2006		2010	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Communists	4	57.1	3	60	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Social Dem.	9	69	1	16.7	21	70	12	48	8	34.8	15	51.7
Agrarians	12	100	13	81.3	---	---	5	41.7	11	61.1	13	59.1
Left Liberals	4	80	13	72.2	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Conservatives	8	53.3	1	12.5	21	51.2	30	56.6	16	32.7	21	51.2
Extreme Right	6	100	22	73.3	---	---	---	---	---	---	5	62.5
Liberals	19	52.8	4	23.5	8	38.1	---	---	---	---	---	---
Christian Dem.	6	100	---	---	7	87.5	6	60	3	30	---	---
TOTAL	68	68	57	57	58	58	52	52	38	38	54	54

Source: own calculations.

numbers of newcomers were brought to the parliament by Liberals in 1993, Extreme Right in 1995, Conservatives and Social Democrats in 1998, and Conservatives in 2002, 2006, and 2010. Most of these party families brought the highest absolute numbers of women to those parliaments as well: Liberals brought 4 female MPs (22.2% of all women in the parliament) in 1993, Extreme Right brought 2 female MPs (25%) in 1995, Conservatives brought 7 women (41.2%) in 1998, 15 women (83.3%) in 2002, and 15 women (78.9%) in 2006. Out of those 4 liberal females, 3 were newcomers. One out of two extreme right women, 4 out of 7 in 1998 and 12 out of 15 conservative women in 2002 were newcomers. This suggests a positive link between a high legislative turnover and a better representation of gender.⁶

Lithuania

The percentage of newcomers among Lithuanian party families is constantly above 30% except for the Christian Democrats and Ethnic Minority in 1996, Conservatives in 2000 and 2012, and the Extreme Right in 2004, Socialists/Social Democrats in 2004 and 2008, and Liberals (also Left Liberals) from 2004 to 2012. The highest absolute numbers of newcomers were brought to the parliament by Socialist/Social Democrats (67 MPs) in 1992, Conservatives (43 MPs) in 1996, Liberals (31 MPs) in 2000, by the populist Labour Party and Liberal Democrats (40 MPs, coded as 'Other') in 2004, and by Other in 2008 and 2012. Similarly as in Latvia, many of those party families recruited the highest absolute number of women to the parliament: Popular Front brought 4 female MPs in 1992 (40%), Conservatives brought 14 women (60.9%) in 1996, Socialists/Social Democrats 6 female MPs in 2000 (40% of all female legislators), and the populist Labour party and Liberal Democrats 10 female MPs (43.5%) in 2004 and 12 female MPs (35.3%) in 2012. A half of those women from the families of Conservatives

⁶ The link between legislative turnover and women's access to the parliament has been emphasised by Matland and Studlar (2004: 88) and Schwindt-Bayer (2005).

TABLE 3. Parliamentary newcomers: Lithuania

ELECTION	1992		1996		2000		2004		2008		2012	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Communists	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Social Dem.	67	83.8	10	41.7	26	55.3	4	20	3	11.5	12	32.4
Agrarians	---	---	0	0	3	75	3	50	1	33.3	---	---
Left Liberals	---	---	---	---	25	100	2	18.2	0	0	---	---
Conservatives	---	---	43	61.4	1	10	9	36	15	33.3	6	18.2
Extreme Right	3	75	2	100	1	33.3	0	0	---	---	---	---
Ethnic Minority	3	75	0	0	2	66.7	1	50	2	66.7	6	75
Other	7	77.8	1	33.3	2	66.7	40	90.9	23	56.1	22	46.8
No Party	1	100	3	75	2	66.7	8	57.1	2	100	3	100
Liberals	0	0	12	80	31	86.1	3	16.7	6	30	2	20
Christian Dem.	7	70	4	23.5	2	33.3	---	---	---	---	---	---
Popular Front	13	40.6	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
TOTAL	101	71.6	75	54.7	95	67.4	70	49.7	52	36.9	51	36.7

Source: own calculations.

and Socialists/Social Democrats were newcomers, and all female legislators from the populist Labour party and Liberal Democrats were for the first time elected to the Lithuanian parliament.

2. SEARCHING FOR EXPLANATIONS OF HIGH LEGISLATIVE TURNOVER

The turnover of newcomers and incumbency turnover can be to some extent explained by the electoral turnout (see Tables 4 and 5). The highest correlation between electoral turnout and the turnover of newcomers is noted in Lithuania (for all seven legislative terms) and somewhat lower (and not significant) in Estonia and Latvia.

Incumbency turnover, which is not exactly the opposite of the turnover of newcomers, could be considered a complementary perspective in studying elite circulation. The Baltic

TABLE 4. Electoral turnout in the Baltic States (per cent)

Estonia	1990	1992	1995	1999	2003	2007	2011
Turnout	78.2	67.8	68.9	57.4	58.2	61.0	62.9
Latvia	1990	1993	1995	1998	2002	2006	2010
Turnout	81.3	89.9	71.9	71.9	71.2	62.3	62.6
Lithuania	1990	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012
Turnout	71.7	75.2	52.9	58.2	45.9	48.6	52.9

Source: Wolfram Nordsieck.

TABLE 5. Electoral turnout and turnover of newcomers and incumbents

PEARSON CORRELATION	TURNOVER OF NEWCOMERS, ALL SEVEN TERMS	TURNOVER OF INCUMBENTS, LAST SIX TERMS
Estonia	0.687	-0.154
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.088	0.771
Latvia	0.685	-0.715
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.090	0.111
Lithuania	0.813*	-0.669
Sig. (two-tailed)	0.026	0.146

* Significant at 0.05 level.

Source: own data and calculation.

States, differently from some countries or political parties⁷, do not make any legal barriers for re-election of parliamentary incumbents; nevertheless, only less than a half of incumbents get re-elected. This is much below the incumbency levels in many Western democracies (see Matland und Studlar 2004: 93).

TABLE 6. Incumbency turnover in the Baltic parliaments (per cent)

PARLIAMENT	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
Estonia	19.8	43.6	40.6	28.7	44.6	46.5
Latvia	32.0	38.0	33.0	39.0	53.0	40.0
Lithuania	28.4	36.5	26.2	41.1	52.5	49.6

Source: own calculation.

As Table 5 shows, parliamentary incumbency correlates negatively with electoral turnout in all Baltic countries (especially in Latvia and Lithuania).

The other possible explanations have been mentioned in the literature cited above, and I would like to check to what extent they are plausible.

Restricted systemic changes

The first turnover thesis states that restricted systemic changes, such as transformation of the electoral systems, account for a high turnover of parliamentary representatives. There were substantial changes in the electoral systems of the Baltic States in the period before 1993, indeed: in 1992 Estonia and in 1993 Latvia introduced the PR system, in 1992

⁷ Since 1949, the Constitution of Costa Rica prevents deputies from serving two successive terms; an MP may run again for an Assembly seat after sitting out one term. Political party examples include the German Greens rotating their members of Bundestag from 1983 to 1987, the Italian Communist Party replacing most of its legislators after two or three terms, and the British Labour party in 1980s practising mandatory reselection of sitting MPs (Matland and Studlar 2004: 98–99).

Lithuania introduced a mixed electoral system (70 seats in the PR segment and 71 seats in the SMD). However, in the period since 1993 onwards, no substantial changes were observed.⁸ Nevertheless, the stability of electoral systems in the Baltic States did not result in stabilisation of elite turnover and a notable decrease of parliamentary newcomers.

Volatile elite structures (supply-side volatility)

According to the data on Eastern European democracies by Richard Rose (2009: 51), “of the total volatility, more than five-sixths has been due to the actions of party elites creating, abandoning, or merging parties”. Among Eastern European countries in the period from 1993 to 2007, Latvia had the highest electoral volatility which was up to 100%⁹ explained by the behaviour of political elites creating new parliamentary parties before each legislative election; Lithuania with its 97% was not far from Latvia; Estonia with 66 per cent was below not only the Baltic, but also the Eastern European average (Rose 2009: 52)¹⁰.

The seemingly chaotic behaviour of the Baltic party elites, sometimes labelled ‘political tourism’, has its rather clear organisational patterns. The analysis by Pettai (2010), Pettai, Auers and Ramonaitė (2011) distinguishes six types of political parties according to their organizational behaviour and origins: (1) unchanged, (2) alliance, (3) merger, (4) post-alliance, (5) fission, and (6) brand-new. The first type refers to the situation where politicians remain affiliated with their current party. Types two, three, and four refer to different situations of party reconfiguration involving the majority of politicians from certain parties. Type five is called fission, “a collective affiliation strategy in which a minority group of politicians breaks away from an established party to form a new party”, and type six is labelled a brand-new party, the strategy which “involves previously unaffiliated individuals creating a brand-new party” (Kreuzer and Pettai 2003: 79).

Using the analytical distinctions in party behaviour, we can observe that the Estonian party elites, distinguished for their practices of party mergers, show over time an increasing trend in party loyalty which in 2011 reached 100%, meaning that no changes in party restructuring have taken place. The Latvian party elites, having a reputation for preference in creating brand-new parties, slowed down this strategy and in the 2010 election opted overwhelmingly for alliances. The Lithuanian party elites, characterised by alliances and post-alliances and the absence of mergers and fissions in the beginning of the transition period, started increasingly practising party mergers and creating brand-new parties (see Pettai, Auers, and Ramonaitė 2011: 153). These trends allow to conclude that the Estonian elites have reached party consolidation, whereas the Lithuanian elites have clearly increased their party de-consolidation; the volatility of the Latvian party elite structure continues to remain high. A partial explanation for the behaviour of Baltic party elites is suggested by Allan

⁸ Some changes to report were the abolishment of a lower threshold for ethnic minority parties since 1996 in the PR segment and the introduction of plurality in the SMD segment for the 2000 election in Lithuania.

⁹ On average, 60 to 72% of electoral volatility in Eastern Europe is attributed to the elite behaviour; the rest is explained by the changing preferences of voters (Rose 2009: 52).

¹⁰ I have divided the figures of Rose (2009: 52) on Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – 200%, 193% and 132% respectively – by two.

Sikk: “The principle of modern representative democracy is largely based on the principle of electoral accountability – the parties in power have to act in line with the will of people because otherwise they will be voted out of office. However, if the stakes in politics are high but steadily declining, the power holders may be tempted to make maximum use of their time in office by pursuing unaccountable or outright corrupt policies and not care too much for the negative electoral effects resulting from it. The maximum achievable utility from one term in office can even outweigh the expected total utility of future terms” (Sikk 2006: 166).

The Crisis

The third statement (see above) reveals that a high elite turnover signifies a political crisis. Although an increased legislative turnover might mean a simple generational change (one generation of legislators leaving and the other coming) and should not be necessarily regarded as a trigger causing a political crisis or regime change, in many cases a rising parliamentary turnover follows and accompanies a political crisis or regime change. Hence, legislative turnover may serve as a kind of ‘seismometer’. This approach finds a sufficient empirical support in the data on regime changes in Germany and France: the Nazi takeover in 1933 and return to power of Charles de Gaulle in 1958 go together with a highly increased parliamentary turnover. Our Latvian and Lithuanian data on the First Republic confirm the crisis/regime change thesis as well: parliamentary democracy in Latvia and Lithuania ends up with the Seimas or Saeima in which the number of newcomers rises after the gradual decline in previous legislatures. Parliaments of both Latvia and Lithuania serve as good predictors of the regime change: the increased numbers of newcomers finish their activities with a coup d’état in 1934 and 1926, respectively, signifying the replacement of democratic regimes with authoritarian ones in the Baltic States.

The data on Estonian parliaments, however, do not support the proposed hypothesis: the last Riigikogu before the coup d’état in 1934 has 26.1% of parliamentary newcomers, which is the lowest legislative turnover rate of all Estonian parliaments in the First Republic ever. In other words, it does not predict a switch from democracy to authoritarianism in Estonia. A partial explanation could be that the regime change in Estonia, differently from Lithuania and

TABLE 7. Newcomers in the Baltic parliaments of the First Republics

Estonia	1919	1920	1923	1926	1929	1932
Newcomers, %	100	66.1	63.8	43.4	34.9	26.1
Latvia	1920	1922	1925	1928	1931	
Newcomers, %	100	45	33	29	37	
Lithuania	1920	1922	1923	1926		
Newcomers, %	100	46.7	31.6	53.3		

Source: Toomla 1999, www.saeima.lv, www.lrs.lt, and own calculations.

Note. The Constitutional Assembly of 1919 in Estonia and the Constitutional Assemblies of 1920 in Latvia and Lithuania were treated as consisting of parliamentary newcomers only.

Latvia, was introduced by constitutional means (Taagepera 1974: 408): in October 1933, 72.7% of voters participating in the referendum voted for the new constitution transforming the head of the state from a servant of parliament into a powerful and independent executive having the right to issue laws by decree (Raun 2001: 117). It was a pre-emptive authoritarianism that “did not result from a direct take-over by rightist forces” (Parming 1975: 5). The Estonian authoritarianism was mild not only in the Baltic but also in the European context of that time (Raun 2001: 122; Raun 1997: 340).

What strikes in the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian data is the relatively normal level of parliamentary elite circulation in the First Republic in comparison with the generally high level of circulation in the Second Republic: the level between 30 and 40% fits into the normal pattern of most Western European democracies after 1945 and would be desirable for the regimes of the Baltic States after 1990. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Baltic States produce almost 60% of new parliamentary representatives on average. Since “high turnover is associated with periods of crisis, while low turnover is associated with institutional stability and political tranquillity” (Putnam 1976: 65), we arrive at a valid question: are Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as other Eastern European countries, in the state of a permanent crisis? If yes, which mechanism then keeps the state and society together? This is not an exceptionally Baltic phenomenon: “paradoxical configurations like regime stability without elite consolidation” (Best 2007: 24) perfectly fit the patterns of developments among Eastern European parliamentary elites. Still, a satisfactory explanation is to be found.

Electoral system: SMD vs PR

The fourth thesis explains a high legislative turnover by the type of electoral system. The literature suggests that turnover in majoritarian systems is lower than in a proportional representation (Matland and Studlar 2004: 107). Our Baltic data do not allow for a cross-country comparison because both Estonia and Latvia have PR systems and Lithuania conducts its parliamentary elections in a mixed system. Hence, the PR and SMD segments can be compared only in the case of Lithuania.

TABLE 8. Election of Parliamentary Newcomers in Lithuania (N)

ELECTION	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012
PR list	52	43	49	33	27	26
SMD	49	32	47	37	28	25

Source: own calculations.

Although the differences between results in the PR and SMD segments are negligible, the Lithuanian data clearly show that in many (four out of six) cases the legislative turnover is higher in the PR segment. This suggests that SMD provides for a lower legislative turnover.

Electoral volatility

The fifth thesis attributes the high legislative turnover to a high electoral volatility, meaning that voters change their preferences radically from election to election.

The figures on electoral volatility in the Baltic countries differ depending on the sources and method of calculation¹¹ (Tables 9); however, it is obvious from all three sources that Estonia has the lowest electoral volatility and that Latvia and Lithuania have the most similar levels of electoral volatility.

TABLE 9. Electoral Volatility (%) in the Baltic States

COUNTRIES	CALCULATED BY:	KREUZER & PETTAI 2003	ROSE 2009	KUKLYS*
Estonia		40.4	150	33.1
Latvia		74.2	200	40.8
Lithuania		72.9	195	47.5

* Calculations are based on Table 10 and Annex Tables 1, 2, and 3.

To continue the further analysis with our own data, one can conclude that electoral volatility accounts for the half of parliamentary newcomers (the total average of 47.5% in Lithuania, the results for Latvia and Estonia being 40.8 and 33.1%, respectively). This means that a high legislative turnover in the Baltic States by 52.5% to 66.9% is caused by other factors than electoral volatility. Estonia has the highest legislative turnover, even though its electoral volatility is the lowest among the Baltic States.

TABLE 10. Electoral Volatility (%), based on Political Party Families in Parliaments

Estonia	1990–1992	1992–1995	1995–1999	1999–2003	2003–2007	2007–2011
Volatility	49	63.4	28.7	22.9	22.9	11.9
Latvia	1990–1993	1993–1995	1995–1998	1998–2002	2002–2006	2006–2010
Volatility	93	37.5	69	26	6	13
Lithuania	1990–1992	1992–1996	1996–2000	2000–2004	2004–2008	2008–2012
Volatility	78.7	65.9	53.8	50.4	19.2	16.7

Source: own calculations based on the Annex Tables 1, 2, and 3.

¹¹ Firstly, calculations by Rose, Kreuzer, and Pettai are based on the political parties, whereas the figures by Kuklys rely upon political party families. Secondly, the number of legislative terms covered is different in all three sources. Thirdly, Rose refuses to divide his percentages by two, which is rather a standard (see Bartolini and Mair 1990) in volatility calculation.

Double listing of candidates

The Latvian and Lithuanian electoral systems allow a double listing of candidates: Latvian candidates may run in all five constituencies simultaneously, Lithuanian candidates may be placed on the nation-wide party list in a multi-member district and run in a single member district at the same time. The opportunities for double listing are worst in Estonia: there, nominated candidates, on the contrary, are allowed to run in one electoral district only; however, some candidates put on the nation-wide list have a chance to get elected in the third round of election. Following this logic, the legislative turnover should be lower in Estonia than in the other two Baltic countries; however, Estonia has the highest legislative turnover of all three Baltic States.

Frequency of elections

Parliamentary elections in the Baltic States are held every four years.¹² Since 1993, Estonia and Latvia had one premature election (in 1995)¹³, and Lithuania so far held elections regularly every four years. If we distribute legislative turnover not per term but per year, the annual legislative turnover in Lithuania would be 13.2%, in Estonia 15% and in Latvia 17.3%.

Greater opportunities for attaining elite status

A higher legislative turnover provides greater opportunities in attaining the elite status and thus better prospects for democracy (see Somit et al. 1994). Paradoxically, a high turnover was seen as politically stabilising not only by Marvick (1968), but also by Pareto and Mosca who “believed that, within limits, high turnover prevents the build-up of frustration among potential challengers of the regime by allowing them to be co-opted, however briefly, into positions of leadership” (Putnam 1976: 67).

The elite status thesis, with a modifying inclusion of gender perspective, is confirmed by the Baltic data: the highest numbers of female legislators in Latvia and Lithuania have been brought by the parties with the highest numbers of legislative newcomers (Kuklys 2008: 45).

The lower average level of elite experience, expertise, and effectiveness

This explanation connects a high legislative turnover with the lower average level of elite experience, expertise, and effectiveness. Our data do not provide with measurements of expertise and effectiveness¹⁴ of MPs; however, if we take the mean number of elections as a proxy for legislative experience, we can observe a relationship between legislative turnover and elite experience. The Baltic data, indeed, confirm that, except for Estonia in 1995 and Latvia in 1998, the high legislative turnover goes together with the low level of parliamentary experience (mean number of elections at which MPs stood successfully).

¹² In Lithuania since 1992, in Estonia since 1995 and in Latvia since 1998.

¹³ The second premature parliamentary election took place in Latvia in 2011; however, these data are not included in our analysis.

¹⁴ A possible proxy for the legislative effectiveness could be the percentage of passed laws of the total number of law drafts proposed by an MP; however, we have this type of data only for Lithuania.

TABLE 11. Legislative Experience of Baltic MPs: Mean Number of Successful Elections

Estonia	1990	1992	1995	1999	2003	2007	2011
Elections	1	1.2	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.9	2.1
Latvia	1990	1993	1995	1998	2002	2006	2010
Elections	1	1.3	1.6	1.8	1.9	2.1	1.9
Lithuania	1990	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012
Elections	1	1.3	1.6	1.5	1.8	2.2	2.5

Source: own data and calculations.

Turnover among ethnic minorities

If one compares the shares of newcomers among ethnic minority and MPs belonging to the titular nation, implications for stability are more visible among ethnic minority representatives in Latvia: in four out of six Latvian Saeimas, the share of newcomers among ethnic majority legislators has been higher than among ethnic minority MPs. In Estonia, we observe the opposite trend: in five out of six Riigikogu, the share of newcomers is higher among ethnic minority than ethnic majority MPs. The Lithuanian data show a situation in-between: in a half (three of six) of parliaments, a higher legislative turnover is found among ethnic Lithuanian legislators.

Path dependence

In spite of the obvious differences in turnover between MPs in Eastern and Western Europe, there are a couple of striking similarities on a less aggregate level. A comparison between post-1945 Western and post-1989 Eastern European countries makes it clear that Eastern European countries follow the political development pattern of some consolidated democracies in Western Europe. This is recorded by the political development of the third wave democracies Portugal and Spain after 1975, having 64.1 and 57.8% (the EurElite data, Best and Cotta 2000) of parliamentary newcomers for the first five terms, respectively. In addition, the difference in the age of all MPs and parliamentary newcomers in Portugal – a rather exceptional Western European case – is 1.9 years, which coincides with the Eastern European average. Portugal and Spain are similar to Eastern European countries in a long survival of post-war authoritarian political regimes as well. None of the Western European countries of the twentieth century, except Portugal and Spain, could be compared with Eastern European societies in this respect. This evidence allows to conclude that the longer the period of regime discontinuity (length of the non-democratic regime), the longer it will take to stabilise the parliamentary turnover in the new democracy.¹⁵

¹⁵ Cotta and Verzichelli (2007: 471) argue that “the crucial factor is probably the quality of discontinuity more than its length”. For the Baltic countries, this would mean a more precise differentiation among authoritarian regimes in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania before the Soviet occupation in 1940.

CONCLUSIONS

Out of a variety of explanations, the path dependence and the supply-side volatility seem to provide the most convincing explanations for the high turnover among Baltic legislators. This means that the long previous period of a non-democratic regime will keep the legislative turnover in new Baltic democracies at a relatively high level for some time till they reach the 'western' levels of parliamentary turnover¹⁶, and the volatile elite structures (party elites switching, abandoning, and creating new political parties) will continue contributing to the high legislative turnover as well.

On the other hand, it may be that the Baltic states, which are no exception from Eastern Europe in terms of legislative turnover, provide the established democracies of Western Europe with a perspective of their near future: "Insofar, Eastern and Central Europe provides the West with an image of its own future, including the corrupting consequences of political career insecurity, such as tendency towards to a 'grab and run' mentality" (Best 2007: 30–31). The transformation of the political party systems in Italy, Austria, the Netherlands¹⁷ and some other countries of Western Europe after 1990 could point to this direction and provide with the thesis of a convergence between European East and West.

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¹⁶ We have to note that legislative turnover was already below 40% in Estonia in 2011, in Latvia in 2006 and in Lithuania in 2008 and 2012; however, it is to be seen whether these are events by chance or a start of the long-term trends.

¹⁷ The most obvious examples would include the rise of the *Forza Italia* party led by Silvio Berlusconi, the Freedom Party of Austria led by Jörg Haider, and Pim Fortuyn List in the Netherlands.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX TABLE 1. Electoral volatility in Estonia (%) by political party families

	1990–1992	1992–1995	1995–1999	1999–2003	2003–2007	2007–2011	
Communists	6.7	0	0	0	0	0	
Social Dem.	3.3	6	10.9	10.9	4	8.9	
Greens	4.7	1	0	0	5.9	5.9	
Agrarians	13.3	0	6.9	6	7	0	
Left Liberals	1.6	39.6	28.7	0	1	3	
Right Liberals	1	17.8	6	6	11.9	2	
Conservatives	28.7	15.8	4.9	16.9	15.9	4	
Extreme Right	17.8	17.8	0	0	0	0	
Ethnic Minority	6.7	5.9	0	5.9	0	0	
Other	3.5	7.9	0	0	0	0	
No Party	7.6	0	0	0	0	0	
Liberals	5.7	0	0	0	0	0	
Christian Dem.	5.7	0	0	0	0	0	
Popular Front	1.6	14.9	---	---	---	---	
SUM	97.9	126.7	57.4	45.7	45.7	23.8	Average
VOLATILITY	49	63.4	28.7	22.9	22.9	11.9	33.1

ANNEX TABLE 2. Electoral volatility in Latvia (%) by political party families

	1990–1993	1993–1995	1995–1998	1998–2002	2002–2006	2006–2010	
Communists	21.9	2	5	0	0	0	
Social Dem.	13	7	24	5	2	6	
Agrarians	12	4	16	12	6	4	
Left Liberals	5	13	18	0	0	0	
Conservatives	15	7	33	12	4	8	
Extreme Right	6	24	30	0	0	8	
Ethnic Minority	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Christian Dem.	6	6	8	2	0	0	
Liberals	36	19	4	21	0	0	
Other	5.9	0	0	0	0	0	
Popular Front	65.2	---	---	---	---	---	
SUM	186	75	138	52	12	26	Average
VOLATILITY	93	37.5	69	26	6	13	40.8

ANNEX TABLE 3. Electoral volatility in Lithuania (%) by political party families

	1990–1992	1992–1996	1996–2000	2000–2004	2004–2008	2008–2012	
Communists	4.5	0	0	0	0	0	
Social Dem.	57.4	39.9	16.5	19.8	3.5	8.9	
Agrarians	0	0.7	2.1	4.3	5	1.4	
Left Liberals	0	0	19.9	12.1	7.1	0.7	
Conservatives	0	51.1	44	10.6	14.9	8.9	
Extreme Right	2.8	1.3	0.1	1.4	0	0	
Ethnic Minority	2.8	2.1	0.7	0	0.7	3.7	
Other/Independents	6.4	1.3	1.6	35.5	7.1	4.1	
Liberals	1.4	9.5	14.6	12.7	0	5.6	
Christian Dem.	7.8	4.6	8.1	4.3	0	0	
Popular Front	74.2	21.3	---	---	---	---	
SUM	157.3	131.8	107.6	100.7	38.3	33.3	Average
VOLATILITY	78.7	65.9	53.8	50.4	19.2	16.7	47.5

ANNEX TABLE 4. Estonian parliamentary parties/electoral coalitions^a by the party families and years of successful election, 1990–2011

CODED AS	ESTONIAN NAME (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	ELECTIONS
Communists	Communist Faction	1990
Socialists/Social Democrats	Social Democratic Faction	1990
Socialists/Social Democrats	Mõõdukad (Moderates)	1992, 1995, 1999, 2003
Socialists/Social Democrats	Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond (Social Democratic Party)	2007, 2011
Greens	Green Faction	1990
Greens	Eesti Rohelised, Erakond Eestimaa Rohelised (Estonian Greens)	1992, 2007
Agrarians	Rural Deputies and Rural Centre Party	1990
Agrarians	Eesti Maarahva Erakond (Estonian Rural People's Party)	1999
Agrarians	Eestimaa Rahvaliit (People's Union of Estonia)	2003, 2007
Left Liberals	Kindel Kodu (Secure Home)	1992
Left Liberals	Eesti Keskerakond (Estonian Centre Party)	1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011
Left Liberals	Koonderakond ja Maarahva Ühendus (Coalition Party and Rural Union)	1995
Right Liberals	Koonderakond (Coalition Party)	1999
Right Liberals	Eesti Ettevõtjate Erakond (Estonian Entrepreneurs' Party)	1992

Right Liberals	Eesti Reformierakond (Estonian Reform Party)	1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011
Conservatives	Isamaa (Pro Patria)	1992
Conservatives	Rahvuslik Koonderakond ,Isamaa' ja Eesti Rahvusliku Sõltumatuse Partei (Coalition of ,Pro Patria' and ERSP)	1995
Conservatives	Parempoolsed (Right-Wingers)	1995
Conservatives	Isamaaliit (Pro Patria Union)	1999, 2003
Conservatives	Ühendus Vabariigi Eest-Res Publica (Union for the Republic-Res Publica)	2003
Conservatives	Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit (Union of Pro Patria & Res Publica)	2007, 2011
Extreme Right	Eesti Rahvusliku Sõltumatuse Partei (Estonian National Independence Party)	1992
Extreme Right	Eesti Kodanik (Estonian Citizen)	1992
Ethnic Minority	Virumaa	1990
Ethnic Minority	Meie Kodu on Eestimaa (Our Home is Estonia)	1995
Ethnic Minority	Eestimaa Ühendatud Rahvapartei (Estonian United People's Party)	1999
Ethnic Minority	Cooperation	1990
Other	Equal Rights	1990
Other	Sõltumatud Kuningriiklased (Independent Royalists)	1992
Liberals	Liberal Democratic Faction	1990
Christian Democrats	Christian Democratic Faction	1990
Umbrella Movement	People's Centre Group	1990
Umbrella Movement	Rahvarinne (Popular Front of Estonia)	1992

^a Because of multiple political affiliations of electoral candidates for the 1990 Supreme Council, it was impossible to determine their ideological orientation; therefore, I chose the parliamentary factions that were built shortly after election.

ANNEX TABLE 5. Latvian parliamentary parties/electoral coalitions by the party families and years of successful election, 1990–2010

CODED AS	LATVIAN NAME (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	ELECTIONS
Communists	Līdztiesība (Equal Rights)	1990, 1993
Communists	Latvijas sociālistiskā partija (Latvian Socialist Party)	1995
Socialists/Social Democrats	Saskaņa Latvijai – atdzimšana tautsaimniecībai (Harmony for Latvia – Revival for Economy)	1993
Socialists/Social Democrats	Tautas saskaņas partija (National Harmony Party)	1995, 1998
Socialists/Social Democrats	“Saskaņas centrs” (“Harmony Centre”)	2006, 2010

Socialists/Social Democrats	Latvijas sociāldemokrātu apvienība (Alliance of Latvian Social Democrats)	1998
Socialists/Social Democrats	Politisko organizāciju apvienība "Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā (Union of Political Organisations "For Human Rights in the United Latvia")	2002, 2006
Agrarians	Latvijas zemnieku savienība (Latvian Farmers' Union)	1993
Agrarians	Latvijas zemnieku savienības, Kristīgo demokrātu savienības un Latgales demokrātiskās partijas apvienotais saraksts (A United List of Latvian Farmers' Union, Union of Christian Democrats and Democratic Party of Latgale)	1995
Agrarians	Latvijas vienības partija (Latvian Unity Party)	1995
Agrarians	Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība (Union of Greens and Farmers)	2002, 2006, 2010
Left Liberals	Demokrātiskā centra partija (Democratic Centre Party)	1993
Left Liberals	Demokrātiskā partija "Saimnieks" (Democratic Party "Master")	1995
Conservatives	Latvijas nacionālās neatkarības kustība (Latvian National Independence Movement)	1993
Conservatives	Latvijas nacionālās neatkarības kustība un Latvijas zaļā partija (Latvian National Independence Movement & Green Party)	1995
Conservatives	Apvienība "Tēvzemei un brīvībai"/LNNK (Union "For Fatherland and Freedom"/LNNK)	1998, 2002, 2006
Conservatives	Tautas partija (People's Party)	1998, 2002, 2006
Conservatives	Jaunais laiks (New Era)	2002, 2006
Conservatives	Vienotība (Unity)	2010
Conservatives	Par Labu Latviju (For a Good Latvia)	2010
Extreme Right	Nacionālā apvienība "Visu Latvijai!" - "Tēvzemei un brīvībai"/LNNK (National Alliance "Everything for Latvia!" - "For Fatherland and Freedom"/LNNK)	2010
Extreme Right	Apvienība "Tēvzemei un brīvībai" (Union "For Fatherland and Freedom")	1993, 1995
Extreme Right	Tautas kustība Latvijai – Zīģerista partija (Popular Movement for Latvia – Siegerist's Party)	1995
Liberals	Savienība "Latvijas ceļš" (Union "Latvia's Way")	1993, 1995, 1998
Christian Democrats	Kristīgo demokrātu savienība (Union of Christian Democrats)	1993
Christian Democrats	Jaunā partija (New Party)	1998
Christian Democrats	Latvijas pirmā partija (Latvia's First Party)	2002
Christian Democrats	Latvijas pirmā partija/ Savienība "Latvijas ceļš" (Coalition of Latvia's First Party and Union "Latvia's Way")	2006
Umbrella Movement	Latvijas tautas fronte (Latvian Popular Front)	1990

ANNEX TABLE 6. Lithuanian parliamentary parties/electoral coalitions by the party families and years of successful election, 1990–2012

CODED AS	LITHUANIAN NAME (ENGLISH TRANSLATION)	ELECTIONS
Communists	Lietuvos komunistų partija (Lithuanian Communist Party)	1990
Socialists/ Social Democrats	Lietuvos demokratinė darbo partija (Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party)	1992, 1996, 2000
Socialists/ Social Democrats	Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija (Lithuanian Social Democratic Party)	1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012
Agrarians	Lietuvos valstiečių partija (Lithuanian Peasants' Party)	1996, 2000
Agrarians	Valstiečių ir naujosios demokratijos partijų sąjunga (Union of Peasants' Party and New Democracy Party)	2004
Agrarians	Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga (Union of Peasants and Greens)	2008, 2012
Left Liberals	Naujoji sąjunga – socialliberalai (New Union – Social Liberals)	2000, 2004, 2008
Liberals	Lietuvos centro judėjimas (Lithuanian Centre Movement)	1992
Liberals	Lietuvos centro sąjunga (Lithuanian Centre Union)	1996, 2000
Liberals	Lietuvos liberalų sąjunga (Lithuanian Liberal Union)	1996, 2000
Liberals	Liberalų ir centro sąjunga (Liberal and Centre Union)	2004, 2008
Liberals	Lietuvos liberalų sąjūdis (Movement of Lithuanian Liberals)	2008, 2012
Christian Democrats	Lietuvos krikščionių demokratų partija (Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party)	1992, 1996, 2000
Christian Democrats	Lietuvos krikščionių demokratų sąjunga (Christian Democratic Union)	1992, 1996, 2000
Christian Democrats	Modernių krikščionių demokratų sąjunga (Union of Modern Christian Democrats)	2000
Conservatives	Tėvynės sąjunga – Lietuvos konservatoriai (Fatherland Union – Lithuanian Conservatives)	1996, 2000, 2004
Conservatives	Tėvynės sąjunga – Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai (Fatherland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats)	2008, 2012
Conservatives	Nuosaičių konservatorių sąjunga (Union of Moderate Conservatives)	2000
Extreme Right	Nepriklausomybės partija (Independence Party)	1992
Extreme Right	Lietuvių nacionalinė partija "Jaunoji Letuva" (Lithuanian National Party "Young Lithuania")	1996, 2000
Extreme Right	Lietuvos tautininkų sąjunga (Lithuanian Nationalist Union)	1992, 1996
Extreme Right	Lietuvos laisvės sąjunga (Lithuanian Liberty Union)	2000
Ethnic Minority	Lietuvos lenkų sąjunga (Union of Lithuanian Poles)	1992
Ethnic Minority	Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija (Electoral Action of Lithuanian Poles)	1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012
Ethnic Minority	Lietuvos rusų sąjunga (Union of Lithuanian Russians)	2000
Other	Lietuvos moterų partija (Lithuanian Women's Party)	1996
Other	Lietuvos demokratų partija (Lithuanian Democratic Party)	1996

Other	Lietuvos politinių kalinių ir tremtinių sąjunga (Lithuanian Union of Political Prisoners and Deportees)	1992, 1996
Other	Naujosios demokratijos partija (Party of New Democracy)	2000
Other	Darbo partija (Labour Party)	2004, 2008, 2012
Other	Liberalų demokratų partija (Liberal Democratic Party)	2004
Other	Partija "Tvarka ir teisingumas" (Party "Order & Justice")	2008, 2012
Other	Tautos prisikėlimo partija (Party of National Revival)	2008
Other	Politinė partija "Drąsos kelias" (Political Party "Way of Courage")	2012
Umbrella Movement	Lietuvos sąjūdis (Lithuanian Movement)	1990, 1992