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**INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN ADVANCED EUROPEAN
DEMOCRACIES: AN EXPLORATORY ASSESSMENT**

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EUDO - EUROPEAN UNION DEMOCRACY OBSERVATORY

*Institutional Change in Advanced European Democracies:
an exploratory assessment*

CAMILLE BEDOCK, PETER MAIR AND ALEX WILSON

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Abstract

Recent decades have seen a wave of institutional changes of the core democratic rules in advanced democracies. These changes include reforms of electoral systems; decentralization of power to sub-national governments; the creation or enhancement of direct-democratic institutions; a rise in public subsidies to political parties; and shifts in the balance of power between executive and legislature. Nevertheless, political science has developed a limited understanding of what explains institutional change in democracies that are already consolidated. This is partly due to the lack of comparative data on the subject, with most studies of institutional change focusing on a single country, or on a single type of reform (e.g. electoral system change). Our paper seeks to bridge this gap by presenting the preliminary findings of an international research project that compared seven dimensions of institutional change in 18 consolidated European democracies between 1990 and 2008, producing a unique dataset whose content has been fully verified by national experts. This dataset provides the empirical basis for evaluating the type and extent of institutional change in consolidated European democracies, as well as developing hypotheses about the motivations and calculations behind these reforms.

Keywords

Institutional reforms; democratic disengagement; European democracies

Introduction*

Over the past few years, substantial attention has been devoted to the problems of citizenship and democracy in the European Union and to possible ways in which the European democratic deficit might be countered or alleviated. One recent set of arguments lays stress on the potential benefits to be achieved through the politicisation of the Union, while from the Commission itself the emphasis has often been laid on the need to open up to civil society and on the need to improve communication between those who govern and those who are governed. Either way, the sense is that dealing with the democracy problem in the EU involves bringing processes of representation and accountability in the European polity more closely in line with those operating in the typical European national polity. As the European level of governance grows in competences and authority, and as it begins to look more like a conventional political system, it is argued that its modes of decision-making need to approximate to those normally associated with the processes of representative government at the national level.

At the same time, however, it has become increasingly clear that many of the member states of the Union, in common with many democracies world-wide, are facing their own domestic difficulties with democracy and citizenship. In other words, the conventional model of representative government at the national level, to which the EU might supposedly approximate, is also beginning to prove problematic. Turnout at national elections has fallen, particularly since the end of the 1980s; levels of party membership have sunk to record lows; and both the stability and strength of levels of partisan identity have become considerably weakened. In many of the European polities, electoral outcomes are becoming less and less predictable, and across the EU as a whole, a variety of new anti-establishment populist parties of both the right and the left prove increasingly popular at the polls. More generally, popular confidence in politics and politicians has fallen to the virtual bottom of the scale, with various data from the Eurobarometer series suggesting that national political parties are trusted less than any comparable social or political institution, including large companies, trade unions, the press, the police, or even the EU institutions themselves. As Robert Dahl, one of the most important democratic theorists of the twentieth century, already noted more than a decade ago, “in a disturbing number of the advanced democratic countries citizens’ confidence in several major democratic institutions has undergone a significant decline since the 1980s or earlier” (Dahl 2000: 36). All of this suggests that if there is indeed a problem in the growing gap that exists between the citizen and the European Union government, it is also one that is compounded by the many other gaps that are growing between the citizens and all forms of government, including their national systems of government.

It is therefore tempting to view the recent waves of institutional change and reform in the national polities of modern Europe as being part of an elite response to popular withdrawal and disengagement. Indeed, it is precisely in such terms that many of the recent proponents of reform have couched their arguments. The extent of the wave of reform in recent years is certainly clear. Within the member states, regional levels of government are being invested with new powers and political authority; proposals for the reform of electoral systems are being discussed with much greater frequency than before and are sometimes being implemented; referendums and various forms of plebiscitary instruments are being introduced for issues that prove contentious but that often cut across traditional partisan divides, as well as for the election of party leaders; within national parliaments, committee structures are being reformed, with new and more specialised committees being introduced, often with

* Peter Mair was Professor in Comparative Politics at the European University Institute. He died unexpectedly on 15 August 2011, shortly before the first version of this paper was presented at the ECPR General Conference in Reykjavik. It is in his honour that we chose to publish this Working Paper, which is based on the preliminary findings of a research project that he directed at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.

substantially enhanced autonomy; and throughout Europe, more and more policy-making capacities have been delegated to non-majoritarian institutions and various other independent agencies.

In fact, we can see here two contrasting developments that together challenge the traditional democratic settlement in contemporary Europe. On the one hand, key political decision-makers are increasingly ‘sealed off’ from their wider constituencies, and, indeed from the rank-and-file of elected politicians. This is not only the result of party organizational change, and of the ascendancy of the party in public office (Katz and Mair 2002), but also follows from an increased reliance on the mechanisms of the regulatory state, and from the development of a growing number of depoliticised and often scarcely accountable non-partisan agencies (Thatcher and Stone Sweet 2002; Vibert 2007). It is further reinforced by the strengthening and autonomisation of the core executive and by the presidentialisation and personalisation of party government (Poguntke and Webb 2005). On the other hand, and seemingly paradoxically, we are also witnessing multiple and diffuse attempts at a radical opening-up of democratic decision-making that invokes direct-democratic procedures and enhanced contacts with civil society, and that appears to establish direct links between the governors and the governed. These two processes may not only be observed at the EU level, in terms of the spreading fast-track legislation of the Council and Parliament and the increasing resort to delegation instead of legislation, but also at the level of many of the individual member states.¹

These two contrasting developments can also prove mutually reinforcing. Thus, the opening-up to wide consultation with civil society and the insistence on transparency and access can also lead to information overload, confusion and, paradoxically, to a deepening of the insulation of key political decision-makers by shifting the crucial decision-making into the corridors and out of the limelight of increasingly transparent political arenas. Equally importantly, the simultaneous processes of sealing off and diffuse democratic opening at the European and national level may tend to strengthen each other. The greater the insulation of decision-making at the European level, the fewer incentives there are for developing *organized* political representation at the national level, whether this seeks to mould European policies as such, or to mould national policies that are subject to European constraints, and hence the fewer incentives there are to sustain the classic European models of party democracy in the face of other participatory possibilities.

Although there are many overlapping and inter-related reasons why conventional models of political representation might now appear less robust than they were in the 1980s and earlier (see Pharr and Putnam 2000), and although these are deserving of greater attention (e.g., Mair 2006), our intention in this particular paper is more modest and more introductory: it is to look at the different ways and processes in which political institutions at national level are being reformed. Later, in subsequent work, it is hoped to trace the links, if any, between these reforms and the perceptions and practices of citizenship. The first section presents the SIEPOL research project, as well as some descriptive hypotheses about institutional reforms in Western European democracies. The second section will summarize some of the key findings for each of the seven indicators investigated, while the subsequent section will attempt a more general comparison of the patterns of institutional change we found.

SIEPOL project and hypotheses about patterns of institutional reform

The aim of the SIEPOL research project (Seclusion and Inclusion in the European Polity: Institutional Change and Democratic Practices), in the context of which our dataset was developed, is, precisely, to address and assess the two contrasting developments of “closing-off” and “opening-up” of the democratic and political processes in advanced European democracies.

¹ On the EU level see various forthcoming publications by Adrienne Heritier and her colleagues, with whom this wider SIEPOL project was initially developed

Our particular study compares institutional change in advanced European democracies where such changes are not part of the initial process of democratic consolidation and institution building. In consolidated democracies, institutional change is more likely to emerge in response to pressures from citizens or interest groups, or because of a shift in attitudes among political elites. Our analysis covers 18 European countries that democratised before 1989: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom. We adopt a common timeframe (1990-2010) that allows us to focus on recent trends and emerging patterns in countries where democratic institutions were already well established before these institutional changes took place.

Since institutional change is a broad concept, sometimes used to encompass administrative reform or even changes in the processes of government policy-making, we decided to focus our research on key types of change of the core democratic rules, defined as changes that affect the *direct* relationship between elites, parties, citizens, governments and parliaments. To facilitate cross-country and cross-time comparisons, the study used indicators that were naturally and directly comparable. These were electoral system reform; parliamentary reform; federal reform or state decentralisation; direct public subsidies to political parties; direct election of the executive head or president at the national or local level; referendums and citizens initiatives at national level; and regulations of access to suffrage (alternative methods of voting, age required to vote). The first four categories encompass reforms of what is generally understood as “representative democracy” (the rules regulating the repartition of power, the process of selection of political elites and the modes of decision-making and policy implementation). The last three categories correspond to all forms of democratic institutions intending to go “beyond” traditional representative democracy, by providing alternative modes of democratic involvement in decision-making and/or alternative tools of democratic participation in the “traditional” political process.

Data collection required access to a series of primary sources and key secondary literature, as well as the use of existing datasets, whether publicly available or obtained directly from scholars². In all cases, existing datasets were supplemented and updated by our own data collection, carried out by a team of political scientists with diverse linguistic expertise. Each national data file was sent for verification to (at least one) national expert. The national expert was invited to highlight any mistakes and suggest corrections, a process that ensured a high level of accuracy for our findings.

In this paper, we are primarily concerned with building a systematic inventory and analysis of the various reforms to the core political institutions that have been carried out since 1990.³ We focus exclusively on the long-established democracies in Europe, since the potential institutional reforms in which we are interested may be driven by quite a different logic in more recently established democracies. Following the example of Arend Lijphart’s major study of *Patterns of Democracy*, we regard the experience of at least twenty years continuous democracy as being necessary to include a polity in this analysis (Lijphart 1999:53).

Secondly, this study deliberately adopts a long-needed multidimensional approach of institutional change. Lijphart, through his seminal analysis of “Patterns of democracy” (Lijphart 1984, 1999) provided empirical evidence for how political institutions tend to be clustered in several dimensions. As a consequence, they form a system, and so it makes sense to study institutional change

² Key sources included the EJPR Political Data Yearbook; the dataset on Regional Authority by Gary Marks et al. (2008); the Committee of the Regions (2008) dataset on local and regional governments; the study by Magre and Bertana (2007) on direct election of mayors; the comparative study of electoral systems by Gallagher and Mitchell (2005); the online IDEA dataset on alternative forms of voting (ACE) project; the IDEA dataset, Nassmacher (2009), and Bischoff (2006) on public funding of political parties.

³ It is worth noting that what counts as a “case” of reform is the modification of the formal rules on one of the seven dimensions. This means that if a single law reforms three different institutional dimensions at once, we consider that three reforms took place.

systemically. In this regard, our approach also seeks to extend and deepen an analysis conducted on the OECD polities through to the end of the 1990s by Cain et al (2003). Although this paper is concerned only with the European polities, we bring two elements of added value to that earlier analysis. First, we aim to conduct a much more systematic and comprehensive inventory of the various reforms involved, looking at a wider range of institutions and programmes; and second, we carry the analysis through to at 2010, thus including some of the years of most active reformism. Although we focus in this paper on the process and types of reform, our background hypothesis, and hence the argument that we wish to test in the wider project, is that it is in those polities in which citizen dissatisfaction, discontent and disengagement are more pronounced that institutional change is more extensive. In other words, as suggested above, our assumption is that the recent waves of institutional change and reform in the national polities of modern Europe are part of an elite response to popular withdrawal and disengagement. Note that we are not suggesting that there is any particular *direction* in the form of institutional response involved here. On the one hand, institutional change may be intended to *counter* democratic discontent by encouraging greater engagement and affording more opportunities for citizens to involve themselves in decision-making processes. But change might also be intended to *adapt* to disengagement by lowering the costs of involvement and by demanding of citizens less time and effort. After all, as Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002: 232) have suggested, and as also holds true in reverse, “a passive democracy can settle for a passive citizenry.”

Typically, institutional reforms are presented in the existing literature as exceptional events, or as purely redistributive games, and as occurring as singular instances. This schematic vision of institutional change is the consequence of an overwhelming focus either on major reforms of institutions in single countries, or on single dimensions of reform across various countries (most often electoral system change). Indeed, the renewed focus on institutional change began in the 1990s, when major reforms to electoral systems were introduced almost concurrently in Italy, New Zealand and Japan, and when many EU countries resorted to referendums in an effort to solve or circumvent problematic issues (Schmitter and Trechsel 2004). The analysis of electoral reforms in particular has set the tone for most of the successive studies on electoral system change specifically and institutional change in general: reforms tend to be analyzed through country case-studies, and the focus tends to be, explicitly or implicitly, on major reforms happening at the national level. While these studies undoubtedly constituted a milestone in building a literature on institutional change, particularly as they studied the causes, processes and consequences of reform,⁴ they are also marked by three important and often unstated assumptions. That is, they often assume that such reforms are rare, that they can (or are intended to) produce winners and losers, and that they are isolated events. These assumptions continue to mark the wider literature on institutional change, not least because of an absence of comparative cross-national data on the topic. There are some exceptions, such as the study of Armingeon (2004) dealing with institutional change in OECD countries from 1970 to 2000. However, he uses derived measures of institutional change and proxies, examines a wide range of countries that are not fully comparable in terms of democratic experience, and adopts a very wide definition of political institutions, including the welfare state and corporatism. By contrast, the SIEPOL dataset relies on direct observations of institutional change, focusing on range of institutional reforms that look at the relationship between citizens and elites, and on a range of West European systems that are consolidated in a similar geopolitical area.

The assumptions of rarity, redistributivism and singularity are in fact intrinsically linked, and develop from the following starting point: institutional reforms are by nature paradoxical⁵ because the

⁴ There are now countless bibliographical references dealing with electoral system change. The three most comprehensive syntheses are the following: Shugart and Wattenberg 2003, Gallagher and Mitchell 2005, Renwick 2010, Hazan and Leyenaar 2011.

⁵ Katz has addressed this paradox dealing with electoral reforms with the following interrogation: “Why are there so many – or so few – electoral reforms”? showing that, when one considers only major electoral reforms, it is puzzling to see that they are so frequent, since the parties who have been winning under certain rules should not in theory change them. On

same political actors who have the capacity to make the change are those who have most immediately benefited from the status quo. Reform will therefore occur rarely, and will require an exceptional conjuncture of contingent events (Shugart 2003). It also follows that such reforms will tend to be seen in largely redistributive terms, implying winners and losers (Tsebelis 1990). This encourages scholars to focus mainly on questions relating to the rationality of political elites in which they could seek to overcome the apparent paradox, and to develop models that could explain the behaviour of those elites who, seemingly against their own interests, proposed and enacted electoral system reforms (Benoit 2004, Boix 1999, Colomer 2005).⁶ Finally, the literature on electoral system change has tended to present reforms as single-shot occurrences, neglecting to consider whether they might be part of a bigger package of change.⁷

Despite some exceptions in the literature, we are therefore in the dark about the patterns that occur when the reforms are relatively minor, or when other dimensions of reform are also involved in a single process. Indeed, when looked at with such a wider focus, it is not at all clear that we can continue to assume that reforms are rare and exceptional, or that they are all equally redistributive. In the case of minor reforms, for example, the calculations of the actors in terms of redistribution of power lose a great part of their explanatory power, since parties do not perceive minor reforms as potentially impacting on the current balance of powers⁸. Moreover, some institutional reforms that effectively change the nature of the relationship between the citizen and the political system, such as the introduction of the citizens' initiative, are not always best framed through models dealing with winners and losers. What may matter here instead is the direction of a given reform: does it open-up the process of decision-making to the citizen, and is it in this sense inclusive, or does it close-off this decision-making arena from influence by the citizenry, helping to seclude elites from popular scrutiny or control? By focusing on the rationality of the actors involved, we tend to neglect this crucial aspect of the reform process. Finally, by analyzing institutional reforms on several dimensions, it becomes easier to find out whether any particular reform is part of a bigger package rather than an isolated event, offering trade-offs between actors that might not always be apparent to scholars focusing only on the individual reforms themselves.

As the aim of this study is exploratory, we will not be able to fully test the general background assumption behind the SIEPOL project, i.e. the notion that a strong link exists between a changing environment in which parties are delegitimized and challenged and institutional reforms in established democracies. The hypotheses tested are more modest:

H1. Elites in established democracies have frequent recourse to institutional reform.

We believe that the amount of change has been considerably overlooked by the tendency of existing literature to dismiss minor reforms and to focus on single dimensions of reforms. Our first hypothesis is therefore that change is relatively commonplace in advanced European democracies as soon as the focus is widened to a bigger set of dimensions of reforms.

(Contd.) _____

the other hand, when one includes in the analysis minor reforms, they appear surprisingly infrequent since one could expect actors to constantly adapt the rules to give themselves an advantage. Katz was one of the first to point out the issue of *minor* electoral reforms.

⁶ A recent special issue of *West European Politics* (June 2011) provides a good account of the current state of the art on electoral system change and goes some way to developing new research tracks, including minor reforms and an emphasis on the role of the citizens in the processes of reforms.

⁷ One of the authors who went further on the consideration of reforms as package deals is Rahat (2004, 2008), who showed how complex electoral and parliamentary reforms can be thought as a series of games, rather than a single game, in which parties negotiate ambiguous trade-offs enabling reforms to take place even in contexts where power is very dispersed.

⁸ Jackson and Leyenaar (2011), who tried to apply a purely self-interested model to account for the 1997 electoral reform in Holland, falling on the category of minor reforms, showed that it failed to provide a satisfactory explanation, since parties perceived that reform would only affect very marginally the repartition of the seats.

H2. There is a general convergence of Western European democracies towards the adoption of more inclusive institutional reforms.

As the main background hypothesis of this study is that political elites use reforms as a reaction to a more uncertain and more hostile political environment, one could have competing expectations: either elites try to depoliticize certain issues and to avoid blame (Weaver 1986) by closing the process of decision-making to citizens, or they try to spread blame and re-legitimize themselves through institutional change. We tend to favour the latter argument, as political elites experience more difficulties than ever to achieve “output-oriented legitimacy” based notably on substantial policy outcomes (Scharpf 1999). Consequently, and concurrently to the already well-documented trend towards delegation of competences to non-majoritarian institutions, elites should have more incentives to try to achieve “input-based legitimacy”, based on the inclusion of more citizens in the process of decision-making in the core democratic institutions.

H3. Institutional reforms happen in bundles.

Since institutions tend to be “clustered” in several dimensions, it is reasonable to expect that when elites decide to put the topic of institutional reforms on the table, they do not limit themselves to a single aspect, but on the contrary discuss several aspects concomitantly. Therefore, we expect that change itself tends to be “clustered”, or “bundled”.

The following section analyses the main cross-national patterns that emerge with respect to the seven categories outlined at the start of this paper. These institutional changes either involve a reform of existing representative democratic institutions, or an extension of decision-making capacity to citizens through direct democratic mechanisms. Annex 2 contains a summary of the main institutional changes in each country between 1990 and 2010. Where the data allowed this, our researchers also looked at the motivations behind these reforms, allowing a more dynamic analysis of processes of institutional change, and complementing the more definitive analysis of the content of the reforms enacted.

Electoral System Reform

Most countries in our study pursued some reform of their electoral systems. This occurred in response to very different national pressures, including referendum campaigns, perceived voter dissatisfaction, the rise of extremist parties, population imbalances between constituencies, and of course partisan calculations. Although the nature and scope of these reforms varied considerably, a series of (fragmented) patterns still emerge. There is a general tendency towards more proportional systems of election, although a few countries with highly proportional systems introduced legal thresholds to reduce parliamentary fragmentation (Belgium, Iceland, Italy). Some countries sought to rebalance territorial differences in voter representation, by reducing the over-representation of rural areas or increasing the representation of urban areas. A few countries also introduced binding gender quotas to address the imbalance in the proportion of male and female legislators (Belgium, France). Countries with consensual models of democracy increased the weight of preference voting (Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden), largely as a response to perceived voter disillusionment with established political parties. Yet due to high thresholds, it remains very difficult for candidates to “jump the list” in these countries, reflecting the ambivalent attitude of party elites towards allowing voters a free hand at choosing their political representatives, particularly if this risks undermining internal party cohesion. Initial voter enthusiasm for preference voting often waned after these reforms had little effect on parliamentary representation, so now preference voting contributes more to enhancing the status of individual politicians. Only Italy has clearly reversed the trend towards greater preference voting, initially by eroding the weight of preference voting through abrogative referendums (over voter concerns that it fuelled party clientelism), and then by imposing closed lists in the last electoral reform (over party concerns that voter preferences undermined their internal cohesion).

Parliamentary Reform

Major parliamentary reforms in our timeframe have tended to facilitate processes of decision-making, by reducing the veto power or delaying capacity of institutional actors that are not directly controlled by the government. Depending on the political system, these actors may be presidents, opposition parties, or second chambers. Several countries sought to reduce the number of parliamentarians (not all succeeded), while a few increased their number (slightly) to address population imbalances in seat distribution. Long mandates have generally been reduced, while very short legislative terms have been extended, so all countries now converge on 4 or 5 year terms. Although there is strong evidence for processes of *de facto* presidentialisation in advanced democracies (Poguntke and Webb, 2005), these processes are not matched by institutional changes in this direction. If anything, the tendency has been for governments and parliaments to rein in the excessive protagonism of presidents, whether as veto players or in foreign policy, most notably in Finland and Portugal. In France the presidential term was shortened from 7 to 5 years, in response to concerns that such a long term was somewhat undemocratic. The main effect of this change has been to further empower French presidents, by aligning their term of office more closely with that of the parliament, allowing the same party to control both government and parliament since 2002.

State Decentralisation and Federal Reform

Several countries have undergone major decentralising reforms during our timeframe, resulting in the creation of newly federalised political systems (Belgium, Spain) or decentralised unitary states (i.a. France and Italy). The process of devolution in the UK has been highly asymmetrical, excluding the territory of England (which accounts for 80% of the UK population), while granting substantial regional autonomy to the smaller territories of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Asymmetrical arrangements can also be found in France (special regime for Corsica), Finland (special regime for Aland Island), Portugal (strong regional governments in Azores and Madeira) and Italy (5 Special Status regions). Other countries are experimenting with different forms of regional self-government, reflecting a move towards functional decentralisation whereby complex policy areas (e.g. healthcare or EU funds) are managed at a “meso” level more appropriate for planning than small municipalities or the central bureaucracy (Marks et al, 2009). This tendency is most pronounced in the Nordic Countries, where several “pilot schemes” for regional government are being tested with a view to implementation across the country. Many states have sought to rationalise their fabric of municipalities, either through mergers or mechanisms of inter-municipal cooperation. In some cases this process has been forced from above, while in others it is characterised by bottom-up consolidation, although often facilitated by central funds. This rather nuanced picture nevertheless confirms the general pattern outlined by Gary Marks et al (2009), who noted a substantial and unidirectional pattern of decentralisation in established democracies.

Public Funding of Political Parties

A very strong and consistent pattern that emerges from our data is the substantial increase in direct public funding of political parties in Europe, usually accompanied by increased party regulation, limits on private donations, and greater disclosure of party accounts. However, levels of public funding are not converging. Some countries have moved from a *laissez faire* system with little or no public funding and party regulation, towards a system characterised by limited public funding and greater regulation. Other countries, where public funding and regulation were already extensive, have proceeded to make parties dependent on the state for an overwhelming majority of their resources. This may reflect the view of modern parties as “cartel” organisations that rely on the state for both resources and legitimacy (Katz and Mair, 1995), or as “public utilities” that require both funding and regulation (van Biezen, 2004; 2008). In several countries, party reliance on public funding has been strongly opposed by the public, yet supported by political elites as a convenient alternative to

plutocratic funding or declining membership dues. So far there are a few signs of a reversal in this process. The 2008 cut in public funding of Dutch parties constitutes a rare exception, which only occurred after a series of poorly justified and very substantial increases over fifteen years, so cannot be seen as the start of a generalised reverse in public funding. In Italy, public funding for political parties returned on an even greater scale through the back door (as inflated reimbursements for electoral campaigns), despite a successful national referendum that abolished direct state funding (Pacini, 2009). This reflects the difficulties of reconciling elite and citizens views and interests on this issue.

Direct Election of executive heads at the national or local level

A general trend towards the direct election of the head of the local executive (mayors, presidents of regions or provinces) has gathered pace in many European states, particularly since the 1990s. This may be a response to citizen disengagement from municipal party politics, or may reflect an assumption among political elites that citizens want more personalised politics and accountability at local levels. In some countries, the introduction of directly elected mayors has proven popular (i.a. Germany, Italy), becoming an integral part of the political landscape. In other countries, a form of *de facto* direct election occurs without institutional change, as the main parties put forward their candidates for mayor (i.a. Spain, France), and the winner is rarely challenged by the legislature. In a few countries, direct election has proved somewhat unsuccessful and been partially reversed, notably in the Netherlands and the UK (with the exception of the London mayor). This reflects the uneasy interaction between distinctive municipal traditions and a single model of personalised electoral accountability. In several countries that were recently decentralised, new or reformed electoral systems also provide for the direct election of regional presidents (France, Greece, Italy). However, consolidated federal countries (Germany, Austria) and newly federalised ones (Belgium, Spain) maintain parliamentary systems at regional level. Institutional changes providing for the direct election of mayors (or regional presidents) have gained ground in response to the perceived performance deficit or weak democratic accountability of local (or regional) governments. Similar changes have not been enacted at national level, except for Finland where the president is now directly elected, perhaps because direct election of executive leaders would clash with the core interests of national parliamentarians, or due to concerns about the potential for “elected dictators”.

Access to suffrage

Several European states have sought to adopt or enhance the use of alternative voting mechanisms, or extend suffrage to new categories of the population (foreigners or younger citizens). Many countries have introduced postal voting, either to boost turnout at home or to allow voters overseas to cast a ballot. Most countries have greatly facilitated voting for citizens overseas, either by proxy or by postal voting, in addition to the option of a consular vote. A few countries have even set up constituencies for overseas voters (e.g. Italy, France), despite concerns over voter fraud. Cases of extensive electronic voting are limited to Belgium, while internet voting remains largely untested among the countries we analysed. Increases in the use of alternative forms of voting can be seen as a response to the challenge of declining turnout in elections, and as a way to facilitate participation in the electoral process for increasingly mobile voters. Through such institutional changes, political elites can open up decision-making without the risk of highly disruptive consequences, since these changes rarely shift the balance of power in general elections. An interesting exception to this rule is the 2006 Italian election, where the narrow centre-left majority in the Senate was only secured through the votes of Italians that resided overseas in newly created constituencies.

Mechanisms of Direct Democracy

Despite much discussion over the idea of opening up decision-making to the public through participatory mechanisms, we find a decline in the use of classic tools of direct democracy at national

level (referendums, citizens initiatives). Citizens initiatives exist in few countries, mainly due to much earlier Constitutional provisions. Where these take the form of popular petitions (Austria, Italy, Spain), they are widely ignored by national legislators (Rehmet, 2003; Cuesta Lopez, 2008). Where these lead to popular or abrogative referendums, they tend to have greater effects but political elites often find ways to disrupt or undermine the process, by mounting legal challenges, pushing for abstention to prevent the quorum being reached, finding ways to bypass the outcome, or simply choosing to ignore the outcome (Uleri, 2002). In other cases, political parties have tended to monopolise the referendum process and used it as a mechanism for political mobilisation (Freire and Baum, 2003). This raises questions about the extent to which direct democratic mechanisms are effective tools for citizen engagement rather than instruments for partisan mobilisation. Although many states have mechanisms for governments to propose consultative referendums, these are rarely held in the countries we analysed, except on issues linked to European integration. After the failure of the Dutch and French referendums on the EU Constitution (2005), this type of referendum became confined to Ireland (where it is a Constitutional requirement) and countries joining the EU, with other states unwilling to hold further referendums on issues of European integration. This has contributed to a general decline in the use of national referendums outside of Switzerland, which still accounts for the overwhelming majority of cases. The only other countries where more than 3 national referendums took place during our timeframe were Italy and Ireland, and in both cases there was a notable decline in recent years after a peak in the 1990s. There is some evidence of greater direct democracy at regional or local levels, particularly in Germany (Scarrow, 1997; Eder et al. 2009) and Spain (Cuesta-Lopez, 2008), perhaps because sub-national levels and issues are more suited to the use of such democratic instruments (Scarrow, 2001). But even here the application of direct democratic instruments has been limited in scope and patchy in coverage.

Contrasts and common trends in institutional change in Western Europe

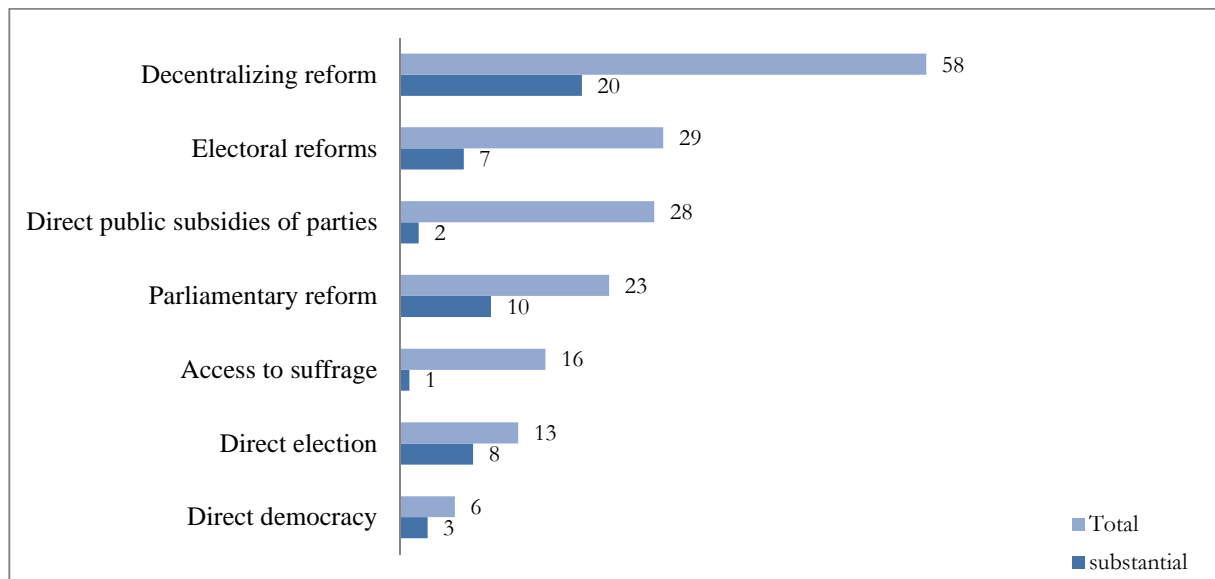
Moving on from our analysis of individual reform indicators, the following section seeks to compare the overall process of institutional change, with a view to understanding the scope, possible factors, direction and processes of reforms adopted in consolidated West European democracies between 1990 and 2010.

Scope and factors of change

Our data suggests there have been a large number of institutional reforms overall, with no fewer than 171 reforms from 1990 to 2010 in the 18 countries included in the analysis, i.e. an average of 9,5 reforms per country (See Figure 1), and of almost 3 substantial reforms per country. Slightly less than a third of the reforms adopted (50 reforms) can be classified as substantial reforms, defined as one that significantly alters the balance of power and/or the nature of the relationship between parties, executive and legislative, citizens and elites.⁹ The assumption that institutional reforms are rare is therefore clearly misleading. Even when only substantial reforms are considered, the record is higher than expected, with almost all of the countries included in the analysis (except for Netherlands) adopting one or more substantial reforms in the last 20 years.

⁹ For each of the seven categories, a classification into major and minor reforms has been established, using the “20% threshold” of Lijphart when possible, and specific criteria widespread and well accepted in the literature for each of the types of reforms.

Figure 1. Number of institutional reforms adopted between 1990 and 2010 for each of the seven categories

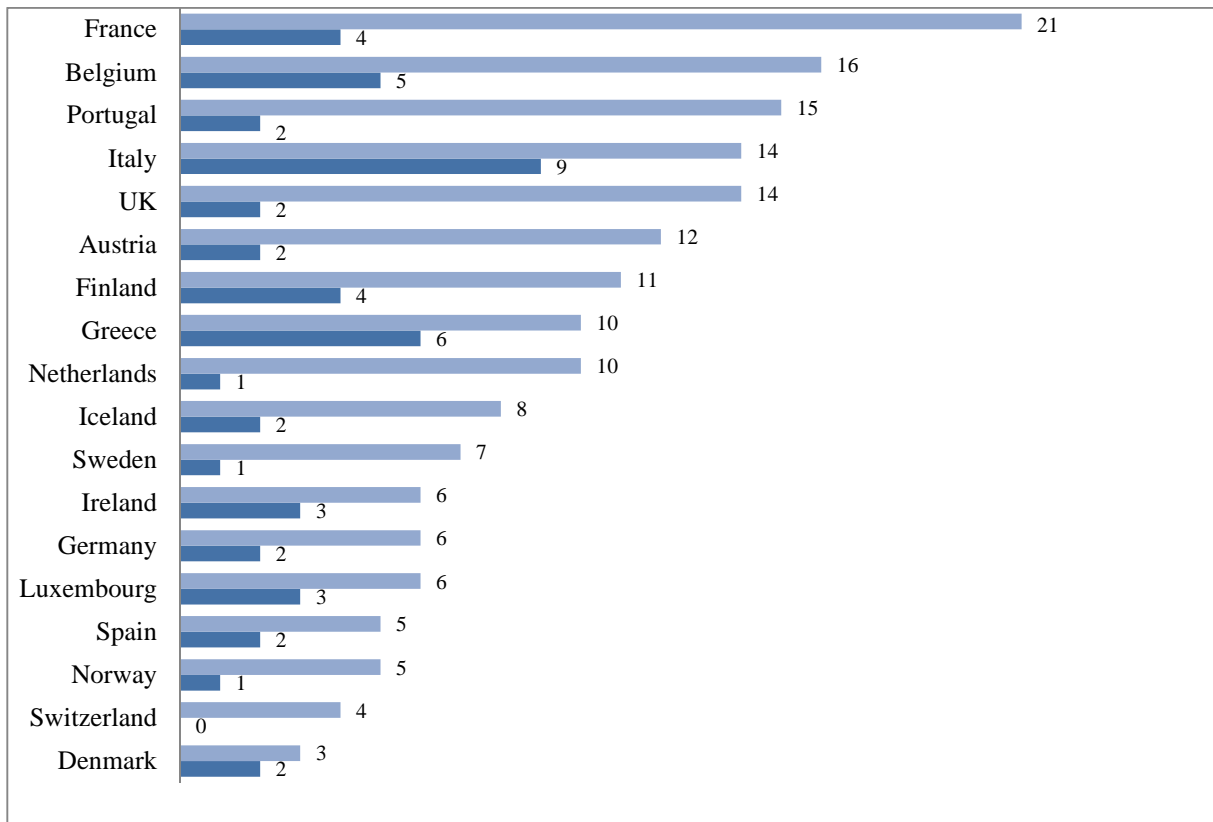


Second, there is a wide discrepancy in the number of reforms that have been adopted in each of the categories we are employing in this paper. The most common reforms concerned decentralization and federalization, with no fewer than 58 cases. The data also confirms that electoral reforms are not uncommon once account is also taken of minor reforms, with 29 cases across the 18 democracies (Figure 1). The introduction or modification of public subsidies for political parties has also been very commonplace (28 cases). There have been 23 cases of parliamentary reforms, modifying parliamentary procedure, the number of chambers or their composition, with again potentially important implications for the balance of power between parties, between executive and legislative power, and within parties. Finally, there have been only a small number of reforms reinforcing direct democracy at national level. The expansion of access to suffrage, through alternative forms of voting or other mechanisms, has been implemented in 16 cases. There is a strong tendency towards the direct election of municipal and regional executives (13 cases), all the more as some countries, such as France and Spain, already had *de facto* directly elected mayors or presidents of regions. The fact that the vast majority of countries adopted federalizing or decentralizing reforms, and that most increased public funding of political parties,¹⁰ could imply that some policy diffusion mechanisms are operating across European countries, and that the institutional discrepancies between Western European democracies tend to fade on certain dimensions.

The differences across countries in the use of institutional engineering also appear to be very large (Figure 2), both considering the overall number of reforms and the number of substantial reforms adopted: France, the most “active” country in terms of institutional reforms of the sample, reformed seven times as often as Denmark (21 reforms vs. 3). On the other hand, Italy has adopted no less than 9 extensive institutional reforms, while Switzerland did not adopt any substantial institutional reform in the last two decades.

¹⁰ See Annex 2: Complete list of the reforms adopted in the 18 Western European democracies, 1990-2010.

Figure 2. Number of institutional reforms adopted between 1990 and 2010 for each country



Note: The lighter bar expresses the total number of reforms, and the darker bar the number of substantial reforms.

Some countries seem to be characterized by a limited use of institutional engineering – engaging in few reforms along a limited set of dimensions¹¹: Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland. Reforms here tend to be focused on very specific dimensions, although these can involve major changes, such as decentralising reforms in Spain, Germany, Ireland and Denmark. Luxembourg and Norway failed to adopt many reforms, but those that were enacted were substantial, albeit limited to one or two dimensions – the introduction of the citizens’ initiative and national referendum in Luxembourg and the introduction of public party funding and a substantial reform in the functioning of the parliament in Norway. In both countries, the reforms were scarcely contentious and won widespread cross-party agreement. They share two things in common: a high trust in their institutions and the way democracy works in general (figures), and/or proportional electoral systems as well as relatively consensus institutions as defined by Lijphart (1984, 1999).

A second set of countries adopted only few substantial reforms, but did so relatively frequently: Austria, Iceland, Portugal, Netherlands, and Sweden. This suggests a more or less ongoing process of institutional adaptation, but also a concern to preserve the “core” of the institutional architecture by adopting minor modifications concerning several, if not most, of the dimensions of the institutional system.¹² These countries have also been characterized by important political shifts. In Austria and Sweden, the historical domination of the established parties (ÖVP and SPÖ in Austria and the Social Democrats in Sweden) was eroded by the advent to power of conservative parties. In both Austria and Netherlands, radical right parties came into government and eroded the power of the traditional

¹¹ See Annex 2. Complete list of the reforms adopted in the 18 Western European democracies, 1990-2010.

¹² In Netherlands, though, most of the reforms have dealt with the developments of extensive public funding for political parties, although many more ambitious reforms were attempted but failed to pass the upper house.

governing parties. In Iceland, despite the fact the Independence party remained in power from 1991 to 2009, the structure of the opposition and of political alliances evolved rapidly. All of this suggests that electoral shifts, and more particularly shifts in government, facilitates patterns of institutional change.

This idea could be confirmed by the third categories of countries, i.e. countries that were characterized by substantial modifications of the institutional architecture, and both by many reforms and/or many substantial reforms: Belgium, Finland, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and UK. These countries can either be classified as majoritarian democracies (Greece, France, and UK), or they have experienced a major restructuring of their party systems, intense popular dissatisfaction, or changes of governing majorities in a context of bipolar political competition. For instance, in Portugal, the Socialists came back into power after more than 12 years of domination of the PSD, while the UK Labour Party returned to power in 1997 after 17 years in opposition. France, Greece, and Italy (since 1994) are also characterized by bipolar competition, although the change in governing majorities has been even more frequent than in the UK. Finland suffered severe economic turmoil at the beginning of the 1990s which prompted an intense political debate, which suggests that the difficulties that political parties faced in dealing with policy issues also contaminated the debate about constitutional and institutional issues (this may also prove to be the case in Ireland after the recent economic crisis). Belgium and Italy were both characterized by an intense restructuring of their party systems in recent decades. Therefore, it seems that party systems characterized by (frequent) alternations in power, and opposition between two parties or two blocks, are more prone to adopt institutional reforms than others. Moreover, shifts in political competition as well as economic difficulties and popular dissatisfaction with the current democratic process, appear to have been strong incentives for a substantial redesigning of the institutions in some of these countries.

Direction of change

Institutional reforms tell us something about the shifting relationship between elites, citizens and institutions. Therefore, it is essential to understand the direction of an institutional reform and to know if elites try to build more inclusive institutions, enabling a larger range of actors and citizens to directly participate in the democratic process, or, on the contrary, try to limit access to processes of decision-making. As noted above, both hypotheses – the one suggesting inclusion, the other seclusion – have been defended in the literature and developed within a context where citizens become more critical of political parties and elites.

Since the database provides a description of each reform, all of them were classified to assess to what extent they opened-up or closed-off the process of decision-making to citizens or to new political actors. This general criterion was further delineated with several sub-criteria for each type of reform.¹³ Three categories were considered: inclusive reforms, opening-up decision-making, reforms with multiple logics, containing elements both opening up and closing off decision-making, and exclusive reforms that close off decision-making. In Table 1 the two last categories were collapsed to give a clearer picture¹⁴.

¹³ See Annex 1. Detailed classification of the reforms in the inclusiveness/exclusiveness dimension.

¹⁴ For the sake of comparability, results are expressed in percentage, although the number of reforms ranges from 3 to 19.

Table 1. Direction of the institutional reforms by country (in %)

	Inclusive reforms	Mixed logic and exclusive reforms	Total	N
Denmark	33	67		3
Iceland	38	62		8
Netherlands	40	60		10
Ireland	50	50		6
Sweden	57	43		7
Portugal	60	40		15
Norway	60	40		5
Italy	65	35		14
Germany	67	33		6
France	67	33		21
Finland	73	27		11
Austria	75	25		12
Greece	80	20		10
Spain	80	20		5
Belgium	81	19		16
Luxembourg	100	0		6
Switzerland	100	0		4
All	67	33	100%	173

The general picture suggests a strong predilection for inclusive reforms as against exclusive reforms or those with multiple logics. In other words, the general tendency in institutional reform of west European democracies has been towards a greater involvement of ordinary citizens, taking different forms: more proportional electoral system, new alternatives to vote and greater access to the electoral process, etc. It is important to remember that we are only covering core democratic institutions in our analysis, so our data does not include any shift of power from these to non-majoritarian institutions, which is another phenomenon that has been noted across consolidated democracies in Europe (Mair, 2005).¹⁵ As the number of reforms is low in some countries, one should also be cautious in interpreting cross-country differences. Overall, there is certainly no clear association between low numbers of reforms, on the one hand, and a low proportion of inclusive reforms, on the other. While this is characteristic of Denmark, Iceland and the Netherlands, the opposite is the case in Spain, Greece, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Germany. No clear patterns to differentiate among countries appear, suggesting that the shift towards more inclusive political institutions is relatively general to all of the consolidated European democracies.

¹⁵ We excluded delegation to non-majoritarian institutions as a category in our analysis because of the current difficulty in obtaining complete and fully comparable data on this phenomenon across 18 European countries over a period of 20 years. We recognise that this is an important aspect of institutional change and would be keen to incorporate this information into our dataset should it become publicly available at a later stage. Beyond the difficulty of obtaining complete cross-national data on this, there is also the tricky question of defining exactly what constitutes a non-majoritarian institution for the purposes of our analysis.

Table 2. Direction of the institutional reforms by dimension (in %)

	Inclusive reforms	Mixed logics and exclusive reforms	Total	N
Electoral reforms	48	52		29
Parliamentary reforms	61	39		23
Public funding of political parties	61	39		28
Federal and decentralization reforms	67	33		58
Direct democracy mechanisms	83	17		6
Access to suffrage	87	13		16
Direct election of executive head	92	8		13
All	67	33	100%	173

Table 2 presents a clearer picture by showing that the proportion of inclusive reforms varies greatly among categories. While only less than half of electoral reforms aimed at opening the processes of decision making to citizens, more than two thirds of federal and decentralization reforms did so, as well as almost all of the reforms concerning the access to suffrage or the direct election of executive heads. The fact that electoral reforms, and to a certain extent parliamentary reforms, long considered by the literature as the “most manipulative instrument of politics” (Sartori 1968, 273), display a less clear tendency towards inclusiveness is interesting, as it shows they probably obey a more competitive and self-interested logic than other types of reforms, in which questions of institutional legitimation may loom larger.

Form of Change

Most of the existing literature on institutional change assumes implicitly that reforms are one-off occurrences. Yet each reform can be also considered as a ‘nested game’, in which, as Tsebelis suggests (1990: 5), only an analysis of the wider panoply of reform activities might get to the core of the actors’ motivations and behavioural choices. In some cases the wider panoply of reforms is dealt with more or less simultaneously, with individual reform being part of a package of changes. In other cases, the reforms occur in sequence, with the possibility that reforms further down the line are dependent on the successful passage of prior proposals. For the purposes of this paper, we have considered reforms as being part of a bundle of reforms each time *institutional reforms relating to one or several dimensions of the institutional architecture were adopted in the same legislature* (which could take the form either of a single multi-dimensional reform or of several reforms enacted alongside each other). The very concept of institutional bundling is clearly related to the idea that institutions form coherent systems, and that as a consequence change can and should be studied systemically as well.

Two main insights can be derived from our classification of reforms in bundles. First, as can be seen from Table 3, bundling is by far the most common outcome, with an overwhelming number of reforms being adopted as part of a wider bundle of reforms as against one-off reforms. Among all of the reforms treated by this paper, a full 78% (135 out of 171, see Table 3) were part of a bundle of reforms. The second insight is that certain dimensions seem to be reformed together in several countries, suggesting that specific clusters of reforms are more likely than others. Let us look briefly at both of these patterns.

Table 3. Proportion of bundled reforms adopted by country, 1990-2010 (in %)

	Bundled reforms	Reforms (N)
Spain	40	5
Switzerland	50	4
Iceland	50	8
Ireland	50	6
Germany	67	6
Denmark	67	3
Netherlands	70	10
Finland	73	11
Austria	75	12
Greece	80	10
Portugal	80	15
Norway	80	5
Italy	86	14
Sweden	86	7
Belgium	88	16
UK	93	14
France	100	21
Luxembourg	100	6
All	79%	173

Note. The figures should be read this way: Austria adopted 10 reforms between 1990 and 2010, among which 75% were part of a bundle of reforms.

Although most reforms come in clusters, the actual proportion of these varies quite substantially – not least because of the small N in some of the polities. In a small number of countries (France and Luxembourg), all reforms were bundled, with the overwhelming majority (80% of more) also bundled in Greece, Portugal, Norway, Italy, Sweden, Belgium, and especially, the UK. Bundled reforms tend to be below average in countries in which only few reforms were adopted, suggesting a potential positive relationship between the fact that reforms are part of a bundle and the number of reforms that are adopted, although this will need to be researched more carefully. More generally, these figures underline the relevance of analyzing a series of reforms together rather than separately, as in the overwhelming majority of the cases, at least in Western Europe between 1990 and 2010, the reform of a given institutional dimension appears to occur concurrently with other dimensions. Like Hamlet’s spies, they come not in single file but in battalions.

The second result suggests that some dimensions are frequently reformed together, and this is further detailed in Table 4, which reports all of the incidences of paired combinations found in the empirical data.

Table 4. Combinations of reforms encountered on the seven dimensions in Western Europe, 1990-2010

2x2 encountered combinations	Occurrences (N)
Decentralizing reform + public subsidy	16
Electoral reform + parliamentary reform	13
Electoral reform + decentralizing reform	13
Electoral reform + access to suffrage	11
Electoral reform + public subsidies	9
Parliamentary reform + decentralizing reform	8
Decentralizing reform + access to suffrage	8
Parliamentary reform + public subsidies	7
Electoral reform + direct election	7
Parliamentary reforms + access to suffrage	7
Decentralizing reform + direct election	4
Several decentralizing reforms in one bundle	3
Public subsidies + access to suffrage	3
Parliamentary reform + direct election	3
Electoral reform + direct democracy	3
Public subsidies + direct democracy	3
access to suffrage+ direct democracy	3
Public subsidies + direct election	2
Parliamentary reforms + direct democracy	2
Direct election + access to suffrage	2
Decentralizing reform + direct democracy	1
Several reforms of public subsidies in one bundle	1

In his classic analysis of patterns of democracy, Lijphart (1999) drew a strong connection between electoral system rules and the rules regulating the relationships between executive and legislative powers, with both being clustered together in a distinct executive-parties dimension. This connection is also visible in our data, with electoral reforms often going hand in hand with parliamentary reforms (13 cases). The data also suggests that electoral reforms are often associated with other dimensions that impact on the electoral process and access to the electoral arena more generally, including direct election of executive heads (7 cases), access to suffrage (11 cases), and public funding of political parties (9 cases). It is also interesting to observe that electoral reforms are often linked to federal or decentralizing reforms, a combination which occurs in thirteen cases. There are also eight cases of parliamentary reforms being linked to federal change. This may suggest that Lijphart’s particular clustering of institutions into two broad dimensions is less visible when it comes to institutional reform as such, with political actors tending to reform both institutions at the national level (electoral system, organization of the parliament) and institutions affecting the balance between national and subnational level at the same time. Some combinations, on the other hand, are more puzzling, and will require closer analysis. For example, the most common combination of reforms is the association between decentralization/federalization reforms and the modification of the rules regulating state funding of political parties (16 instances). Diffusion effects could be relevant to explain this phenomenon, suggesting that European elites might have a general understanding of some “necessary” institutional adjustments (regulation of political parties, greater powers given to subnational entities etc.).

Conclusion

This exploratory assessment of the SIEPOL dataset on institutional change in West European democracies is still at an early stage, hence conclusions are necessarily provisional and limited. Three important points can nevertheless be emphasised. Firstly, institutional reform is far from a rare occurrence and indeed occurs quite frequently, even though our analysis is restricted to already consolidated democratic systems. This can be due to a variety of factors including legitimacy problems, citizen dissatisfaction, technological and societal developments, policy diffusion and globalization. Yet existing scholarship on the causes of institutional change has generally been limited to individual countries and/or individual dimensions of analysis, and so fails to incorporate the comparative picture. Secondly, because institutional change occurs along different dimensions and is executed in different ways, it is not always amenable to being modeled in redistributive winner-loser terms. There is clearly more to institutional change than the desire of particular actors to gain a specific advantage over others. Third, it is clearly limiting and perhaps also misleading to treat reforms as single-shot events. As we have seen with these data, most reforms occur in clusters, whether concurrently or sequentially within one legislative period, and hence the logic or motivations of actors might not properly be understood without taking account of the package as a whole. Like many other legislative actions, institutional reforms will build on compromises achieved through trade-offs and log-rolling, and it is only by seeing the reform in its wider context that these aspects might in future be uncovered.

Appendix

Annex 1. Detailed criteria of classification of reforms in the inclusiveness/exclusiveness dimension

1. Electoral reforms

Electoral reforms that have been classified as inclusive:

- Increase of preference vote
- Introduction of corrective tiers in majoritarian systems
- Expansion of the proportionality of the electoral system (through size of district, formula, etc.)
- Introduction/ Reinforcement of mechanisms to establish gender-equality
- Reduction of territorial discrepancies

Electoral reforms that have been classified as exclusive:

- Introduction or rise of legal threshold of representation
- Reduction of proportionality of the electoral system (through size of district, formula, etc.)
- Introduction of majority bonus in a proportional electoral system

When reforms that were introduced had both exclusive and enhancing dimensions, they have been classified as reforms with multiple logics. For example, the 1994 electoral reform in Austria was qualified as a reform with multiple logic because it both enhanced preference voting and increased the effective threshold of representation, and therefore gave at the same time both more and less weight to the decision of the voter. The same applies for all of the six remaining dimensions.

2. Parliamentary reforms

Parliamentary reforms that have been classified as inclusive:

- Decrease of the duration of the term of MPs/the president
- Increased possibilities for MPs to enter the government / choose the head of a chamber
- Tougher regulations of the incomes of MPs and elected officials
- Increase of the formal power of the Lower Chamber over the upper Chamber/the president
- Suppression of the upper chamber
- Reduction of the majority needed to pass a law/amendment
- Increase of the number of MPs
- Reduction of the *cumul des mandats*

Parliamentary reforms that have been classified as exclusive

- Increase of the duration of the term of MPs/the president
- Decrease of the number of MPs
- Weakening or suppression of the means of the minority to delay the adoption of a law and of amendments

3. Federal reform/decentralizing reforms

Federal/ decentralizing reforms that have been classified as inclusive:

- Creation of new regional entities

- Increase of the competences of the regions or federal entities
- Increase of the tax autonomy of regional or federal entities
- Introduction of increase of the possibilities to cooperate for municipalities
- Reduction of *cumul des mandats*

Federal/ decentralization reforms that have been classified as exclusive:

- Reduction of the proportionality of the composition of decision-making bodies in regions or municipalities
- Reduction of the number of municipalities/regions/federal entities
- Creation of scrutiny institutions to monitor spending of regions/federal entities

4. Public subsidies of political parties¹⁶

Parties' public subsidies reforms that have been classified as inclusive:

- Introduction/ lowering of the threshold of access of reimbursement of campaign costs
- Introduction/ lower of the threshold of access for state funding for individual MPs
- Introduction of public funding for political parties
- Tougher regulations on individual and organization donations
- Diminution of the amount of authorized campaign expenditure

Parties' public subsidies reforms that have been classified as exclusive:

- Increase of the thresholds to get public funding
- Suppression of public funding for political parties
- Expansion of the right for private actors to donate
- Augmentation of the amount of authorized campaign expenditure

Simple variations of the amount of public funding after introduction with no modification of the conditions of access were classified as reforms with multiple logics.

5. Mechanisms of direct democracy

Direct democracy reforms that have been qualified as inclusive:

- Introduction of citizens' initiative and other provisions for direct democracy
- Facilitation of citizens' initiative when it already exists (not applicable)

Direct democracy reforms that have been qualified as democracy restrictive:

- Suppression of citizens initiative and mechanisms for direct democracy (not applicable)
- Tougher regulation of citizens' initiative (not applicable)

¹⁶ Originally, Katz and Mair (1995) associated very closely their theory of the cartel party with the development of state funding of political parties, considering that it enabled established parties to secure their advantage and restrict access to political competition. It does not seem theoretically that obvious, since several authors have evidenced that this development did not necessarily restrict political competition, but quite the contrary, opened new opportunities for parties in development (see for example, in the Italian case, Pacini).

6. Access to suffrage

Access to suffrage reforms that have been classified as inclusive:

- Facilitation of postal or overseas voting
- Facilitation of the registration procedures on electoral lists
- Introduction of constituencies for citizens abroad
- Lowering of voting age
- Expansion of suffrage for the non EU-citizens

Access to suffrage reforms that have been classified as exclusive:

- Suppression of possibilities of alternative forms of voting (not applicable)
- Tougher regulation on access to alternative forms of voting (not applicable)
- Restraints on the access to suffrage based on age or nationality (not applicable)

7. Direct election of the head executive

Direct election reforms that have been classified as inclusive:

- Introduction of the direct election of the mayor / president of region or province
- Introduction of the direct election of the president

Direct election reforms that have been classified as exclusive:

- Suppression of the direct election of the mayor / president of region or province (not applicable)
- Suppression of the direct election of the president (not applicable)

Annex 2. Complete list of the reforms adopted in the 18 Western European democracies, 1990-2010

Country	Year	Dimension reformed	Content
Austria	1990	Public subsidies	Introduction of the public financing of campaign costs
Austria	1992	Parliamentary reform	MPs are allowed to resign from their parliamentary seat in order to enter a cabinet, with the possibility to return when leaving the cabinet
Austria	1992	Public subsidies	Introduction of state funding for individual MPs and of public subsidies to parties from the 9 provinces
Austria	1992	Electoral reform	Introduction of an electoral tiers in 43 districts, apportionnement of seats based on census, strengthening of preference voting. Hare methods is used for districts and Lander, d'Hondt at the national level
Austria	1992	Federal reform	The responsibility for housing is transferred to the Länder. The lower levels of government are granted participation in EU decision making.
Austria	1994	Direct election	Direct election of mayors authorized and implemented in 6 out of the 9 lander
Austria	1997	Parliamentary reform	Limit on the incomes of publicly elected officials
Austria	1997	Federal reform	Consoziational proporz abolished for two provincial governments
Austria	2005	Parliamentary reform	Abolition of the automatic rotating presidency of the Bundesrat. The Provincial parliaments can appoint an alternative parliamentarian within the same party
Austria	2007	Parliamentary reform	Increase of the duration of the legislature from 4 to 5 years
Austria	2007	Access to suffrage	Introduction of postal voting, lowering of the voting age from 18 to 16 for national and European elections, lowering of the age to be elected from 19 to 18
Austria	2009	Direct democracy	Introduction of a provision in the constitution guaranteeing that people's initiative (<i>Volkbegehren</i>) will be treated by the next parliament
Belgium	1993	Parliamentary reform	Lowering of the size of the lower house from 212 to 150 and of the Senate from 184 to 71 (only 40 senators being directly elected). Authorization for candidates to compete both for the Senate and the Chamber. Government limited to 15 ministers, vote of censure becomes harder, quorum for majority reduced to half of the members of parliament.
Belgium	1993	Access to suffrage	Simplified procedure to vote for citizens living abroad
Belgium	1993	Federal reform	Belgium becomes constitutionally a federal state. Huge increase in the competencies of the communities and of the regions: all competences not defined in the constitution are, in principle considered as federal. Increase of the number of provinces increased from 9 to 10
Belgium	1993	Public subsidies	Quadrupling of the level of public funding introduced in 1989
Belgium	1994	Electoral reform	Introduction of a gender quota stating that there is a maximum of two thirds of candidates of the same list of the same gender.

Belgium	1995	Electoral reform	Introduction of multiple preferential vote
Belgium	1998	Access to suffrage	Overseas residents are given the right to vote
Belgium	2000	Electoral reform	Increase of preference voting by reducing by 50% the weight of the list votes for determining the order of election of the individual candidates.
Belgium	2001	Federal reform	Reform of the financing mechanisms of region, that are given a significantly greater regional tax autonomy. Regions are given control over provincial and local laws, as well as responsibilities in overseas development, agriculture, trade and research
Belgium	2002	Parliamentary reform	Increase of the number of Brussels MPs from 75 to 89
Belgium	2002	Access to suffrage	Introduction of the possibility for proxy vote
Belgium	2002	Electoral reform	Strengthening of the gender quota, stipulating that one gender should have no more than 50% of the candidates of the list
Belgium	2002	Electoral reform	Number of constituencies reduced from 20 to 11: now composed of 9 constituencies and Bruxelles Vilvoorde and Leuven (that see their size increase). Introduction of a 5% legal threshold at the constituency level, allocating the constituencies on the basis of the number of unhabitants (and not of the number of citizens). Removal of the second tier allocation, use of the d'Hondt method in all 11 constituencies
Belgium	2003	Federal reform	Regions are given responsibility for the licensing of weapons
Belgium	2006	Direct election	Introduction of the direct election of the mayors in Wallonia, the candidate with the biggest amount of preference votes being appointed mayor
Belgium	2008	Federal reform	Agreement on the transfer of powers from federal government to regions in the field of industrial policy and introduction of new measures to strengthen inter-regional cooperation
Denmark	2005	Federal reform	271 municipalities merged into 198. Faroe Island is given greater power of Home Rule
Denmark	2007	Federal reform	15 counties merged into 5 regions
Denmark	2008	Federal reform	Greenland is given greater power of Home Rule
Finland	1991	Federal reform	Autonomous province of Aland is given greater autonomy, its own legislative assembly, and 16 municipalities
Finland	1992	Parliamentary reform	Most amendments can now be taken by normal majority
Finland	1993	Federal reform	Creation of 19 regional councils indirectly elected by municipalities, responsible for regional planning, the distribution of government and EU funds, the development of enterprise and education. Municipalities are given power to collect tax on real estate.
Finland	1994	Direct election	Election of the president by a two-round system

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Finland	1994	Parliamentary reform	Repeal of the minority delaying mechanism except for constitutional amendments and rights to social assistance
Finland	1995	Access to suffrage	Lowering of the voting age by 6 months (still 18)
Finland	1995	Federal reform	Government Act lays down powers, rights and obligations of local authorities, as well as their mechanisms for joint cooperation. Local authorities are given more flexibility but mergers are also encouraged.
Finland	1998	Electoral reform	Changing of the borders of the 15 constituencies to align them with the borders of the counties
Finland	2000	Parliamentary reform	Introduction of a new constitution. Reduction of the powers of the president. The Prime Minister is now chosen by the Parliament rather than the president. Fewer capacities of the president to nominate civil servants, reinforced leadership of the PM in government decision-making, reduction of the legislative powers of the president, reduced capacity of the president to decide on executive resignation
Finland	2005	Federal reform	Regional council of Kainuu directly elected as part of an experiment in regional self-government. Some competences are delegated by local and central government
Finland	2007	Federal reform	Encouragement of municipalities to merge, obligation to cooperate in the field of health care
France	1991	Federal reform	Corsica is granted extensive power for economic, social and cultural development
France	1992	Federal reform	Territorial Administration Act creates mechanisms for inter-municipal cooperation (" <i>commautés de communes</i> ") in certain policy areas (e.g. economic development, environment, planning, sports). Consultative municipal referenda are permitted and extra rights are granted to opposition in elected local authority assemblies.
France	1993	Public subsidies	Decrease of the requirements for public funding from presenting candidates in 75 constituencies and surpassing 5% in each constituency to fulfilling the same requirements in 50 constituencies
France	1995	Parliamentary reform	Simplification of the rules of immunity for the prosecution of parliamentarians. Unification of the two annual parliamentary sessions in a single one. , Inclusion of a compulsory weekly session of " <i>questions au gouvernement</i> ", introduction of a parliamentary reserved session for private members bills, widening of the use of referenda (that can now cover social security, education and privatization, but still not bear on moral issues)
France	1995	Public subsidies	Candidates running for President are reimbursed one third of the spending limit, but they need at least 5% of the national vote to receive more than a token contribution. Candidates for legislative elections are eligible to receive a flat-rate reimbursement of up to 50% of the legal spending limit, although again a 5% threshold needs to be passed. Similar systems are applied to all other types of election (local, regional, European).
France	1999	Federal reform	Abolishment of some structures of inter-municipal cooperations replaced by " <i>communautés d' agglomération</i> " for big cities

France	2000	Parliamentary reform	Term of the president shortened from 7 to 5 years
France	2000	Public subsidies	The level of public funding can be decreased to less than 2% of the usual amount for parties that do not respect the newly introduced gender quota (<i>parité</i>) for proportional elections.
France	2001	Electoral reform	Reform of the election of the senate. The majoritarian system is now used only in small <i>départements</i> (electing between 1 and 3 seats). Proportional representation is used in other cases. The previous system used the majoritarian electoral system for all <i>départements</i> electing between 1 and 4 seats. Introduction of the alternation between male and female candidates in lists (<i>parité</i>)
France	2002	Federal reform	Corsica gains entitlement for additional state subsidies as well as enhanced authority over education, culture, environment, agriculture, transport, housing, and social policy
France	2003	Public subsidies	Lowering of the previous requirements: need to obtain 1% of the vote in 50 constituencies to get access to public funding
France	2003	Parliamentary reform	Progressive increase in the membership of the Senate from 323 to 348, length of the term reduced from 9 to 6 years, age limit to be able to get elected reduced from 35 to 30 years
France	2003	Federal reform	Constitution specifies that the organization of France is "decentralized". Principles of devolution and financial autonomy for local authorities are placed in Article 72 of the French Constitution. Other Constitutional reforms confirm the existence of asymmetric exceptions for Corsica and TOM-DOM, which can change their territorial organization by local referendum, and can even contest national laws that infringe their particular characteristics. Legislation sees regional competences consolidated in vocational training, secondary schools, regional and town planning, rail transport, environment and culture. Constitutional guarantee of the existence of regions as well as introduction of opportunities for experimentation
France	2004	Electoral reform	Replacement of the national constituency by several meta-regional constituencies for the EP elections
France	2004	Direct election	Replacement of the PR system for regional elections by a two-round system for regional election with PR and majority bonus
France	2008	Parliamentary reform	President can now address houses of parliament, greater control of the assembly and the senate over the legislative agenda. Restriction of the possibilities of use of the article 49.3 to budget laws and provisions about Social security (previously granting the possibility to pass a law unless a non-confidence vote is adopted). Limitation of the presidential mandate limited to 2 terms
France	2008	Direct Democracy	Introduction of provisions for a combination of parliamentarians and citizens to organize popular referendums
France	2008	Access to suffrage	Introduction of constituencies for citizens living abroad (electing 11 MPs)
France	2009	Electoral reform	Change of the boundaries for the parliamentary elections

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France	2010	Electoral reform	Concomitance of the renewal of the <i>conseillers généraux</i> and the <i>conseillers régionaux</i> in order to prepare for the future election of the " <i>conseiller territorial</i> " in 2014 (replacing former provincial and regional councillors). For this period of transition, the duration of the term of the <i>conseillers régionaux</i> is set up to 4 years (election in 2010) and of the <i>conseillers généraux</i> to 3 years (election in 2011)
France	2010	Federal reform	Profound modification of the architecture of the local levels in France. Replacement of the <i>conseillers régionaux</i> and <i>généraux</i> by a new local mandate (" <i>conseiller territorial</i> "), seating both in the <i>région</i> and the <i>département</i> , elected for 6 years with a two-round system. Change of the boundaries of the <i>cantons</i> . Possibility for regions and cantons to merge after the agreement through referendum of the population. Creation of a new type of <i>établissement public de coopération intercommunale</i> , the " <i>métropole</i> " for agglomerations of more than 500 000 inhabitants. Mechanisms to facilitate the merging of municipalities. Specialisation of the competences of the <i>départements</i> and the <i>régions</i> so that from 2015 on they don't have anymore the " <i>clause de compétence générale</i> " (general competency clause). significant reduction of the number of persons elected at the local level: 3 493 <i>conseillers territoriaux</i> , whereas there were 6 000 <i>conseillers généraux et régionaux</i>
Germany	1992	Federal reform	Amendment of the Basic Law to give German Lander direct involvement in EU decision-making.
Germany	1994	Federal reform	Modest increase in the legislative powers of the <i>Lander</i> and more clearly defined separation of legislative powers between federal and <i>Land</i> levels.
Germany	1996	Parliamentary reform	Drop of the number of MPs elected in Single Member districts from 328 to 299, reducing overall the size of the <i>Bundestag</i> from 656 to 598. Hesse obtains 1 more vote in the <i>Bundesrat</i> because of population growth
Germany	2002	Federal reform	Law amending the Constitution with regard to the distribution of judicial powers between the Federal State and the <i>Länder</i>
Germany	2006	Federal reform	Major agreement on federal reform reached between federation and <i>Länder</i> . Clearer separation of the legislative responsibilities between national and regional levels, partly by almost eliminating the use of framework laws. Reduction of the proportion of national legislation that requires the <i>Bundestag</i> approval (60 to 40%), but also increases autonomy of German <i>Länder</i> in other policy areas (education, judiciary, commerce).
Germany	2009	Federal reform	Constitutional change that limits the ability of national and <i>Land</i> governments to increase the public debt
Greece	1990	Electoral reform	Introduction of a pure PR system with a 3% national threshold to access the Parliament
Greece	1990	Direct election	Introduction of the direct election of the mayors with a two-round system
Greece	1993	Electoral reform	Incorporation of a "bonus" of seats for the party winning the most votes, sufficient to secure a parliamentary majority

Greece	1994	Federal reform	Introduction of directly elected prefects and prefectural councils, a meso level between municipality and State (n.b. distinct from 13 development regions created by central government in 1988 and entirely nominated). Delegation to these new entities of competencies over development funding, education, health and hospitals, roads and transport, and the right to establish agencies.
Greece	1994	Direct election	Direction election of prefects and prefectural councils on the same model as mayors, run-off system
Greece	1997	Federal reform	Merger of several thousand nonviable municipalities into 804 new ones.
Greece	2001	Federal reform	Constitutional amendment strengthening regional government and recognizing the existence of two levels of localities.
Greece	2002	Public subsidies	Lowering of the threshold to get funding from 3 to 1,5%
Greece	2006	Direct election	Lowering of the threshold to be elected in the first round from 50 to 42%
Greece	2007	Electoral reform	“Bonus” retained but limited to 40 seats, with the other 260 seats are distributed entirely on a proportional basis. Any winning party must secure at least 42.5% of the vote to have a parliamentary majority
Iceland	1991	Parliamentary reform	Unicameral legislature introduced to replace the former tri-cameral system (upper, lower, and joint houses). The governing majority becomes 32 (previously 33) out of 63 seats
Iceland	1995	Electoral reform	Removal of the ‘vagabond’ seat which is now attributed to the constituency of Reykjavik.
Iceland	1998	Federal reform	Outlining of the rights and responsibilities of the local governments in Iceland, which are historically powerful, largely autonomous in fiscal terms, and have a degree of legislative capacity.
Iceland	1999	Electoral reform	Reduction of the number of constituencies from 8 to 6 with 6 seats each minimum. Introduction of a 5% threshold, shift to d'Hondt method. National Election Board is allowed to reduce territorial discrepancies, in order to reduce the surrepresentation of the countryside
Iceland	2000	Federal reform	Number of municipalities falls to 124
Iceland	2006	Federal reform	Number of municipalities falls to 79
Iceland	2007	Public subsidies	First introduction of legal restrictions on the level of party spending, any party with 2,5% of the vote is entitled to funding (at the national and at the local level), restriction of individual contributions.
Iceland	2010	Federal reform	Number of municipalities falls to 77
Ireland	1991	Federal reform	Creation of 8 regional authorities to monitor and coordinate implementation of EU structural funds, indirectly elected by local authorities.
Ireland	1997	Public subsidies	Increase of public funding for political parties

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Ireland	1998	Federal reform	Creation of two regional assemblies to monitor and coordinate implementation of EU structural funds, indirectly elected by local authorities. This complements (and does not replace) the 8 regional authorities created in 1991. Local Government Act approves a two-tier structure composed of town councils (lower tier) and county or city councils (upper tier). Replacement of the Urban District Councils and Town Commissioner Boards.
Ireland	2001	Public subsidies	Amount of total state funding is doubled. Rise of the limits of election spending by 10%, and of capped donations to £5000 a year.
Ireland	2003	Federal reform	End of the 'dual mandate' by introducing a rule forbidding members of parliament to run in local elections, while local councilors can no longer stand for the parliament
Ireland	2010	Direct election	Introduction of the legislation to allow the direct election of mayors
Italy	1991	Electoral reform	Suppression of the preference vote for Parliamentary elections
Italy	1993	Federal reform	Regional governments obtain the right to raise several of their own taxes including vehicle tax, an annual surtax, a special tax on diesel cars, health taxes and a university fee. Regions set the rate within centrally determined limits
Italy	1993	Electoral reform	Replacement of PR by a mixed-member majoritarian system, with 75% of the MPs elected in single-member districts, and 25% by compensatory list votes, both for the Lower Chamber and the Senate
Italy	1993	Public subsidies	Abolition of the law on public funding of political parties, replaced with a new law that reimburses campaign expenditure for parties with get at least 4% vote or more than 3% of the vote and one MP
Italy	1993	Direct election	New electoral laws introduce the direct election of Mayor and Provincial President through a two round ballot, a secure governing majority (60% seats) for party lists linked to winning Mayoral or Presidential candidate.
Italy	1995	Direct election	Introduction of the direct election of the presidents of regions with a two-round ballot
Italy	1997	Federal reform	Empowerment of the central government to transfer administrative responsibilities to the regions in the areas of their competence. Limitation on the exercise of central and bureaucratic controls. Ordinary regions are allowed to set their rate of personal income tax up to a nationally determined ceiling
Italy	1999	Public subsidies	Reimbursement of the campaign expenditure of all parties polling at least 1% of the vote
Italy	1999	Direct election	Constitutional reform secures the direct election of Regional Presidents through a one round system, and guarantees them a secure majority in the legislature (Regional Council). Mayors cannot hold office for more than two terms of 4 years

Italy	2001	Federal reform	Centre-left reform modifies the Article V of the Constitution and grants greater autonomy to regional governments, which obtain all powers not reserved for national government in the Constitution. Ordinary regions can set the rate on their share of value added tax. Introduction of an equalization fund that obliges the state to subsidize poorer regions. The five special regions (and Bolzano-Bozen and Trento) have particular arrangements whereby they receive a share of taxes collected in their jurisdictions
Italy	2001	Direct election	Direct election of the Regional President in Special Status regions introduced via Constitutional amendment. Now applies to all Italian regions except Val d'Aosta and province of Bolzano.
Italy	2005	Electoral reform	Replacement of the mixed-member majoritarian electoral system by a PR with majority bonus for the larger coalition
Italy	2005	Federal reform	Modification of 50 Constitutional articles, which would have transformed Italy into a 'federal state'. Increase of the competences of regions, the Chamber would develop exclusive authority on issues of exclusive national competence and would determine government formation and transformed bi-cameral symmetry of national parliament into an asymmetrical arrangement with federal features. The Senate would develop exclusive authority on issues of shared competence between national and regional levels, the Chamber would develop exclusive authority on issues of exclusive national competence and would determine government formation. (This reform was eventually repelled by a referendum)
Italy	2005	Access to suffrage	Introduction of overseas constituencies
Luxembourg	2000	Federal reform	70 inter-municipal joint bodies are created for the existing 118 municipalities.
Luxembourg	2003	Access to suffrage	Voting rights for local elections are also granted to non-EU citizens living in Luxembourg
Luxembourg	2005	Direct Democracy	Legislation approved for the possibility to organize popular referendum, requiring support of 25,000 voter or 1/4 MPs
Luxembourg	2007	Public subsidies	Introduction of state funding for political parties for the first time in Luxembourg. To be eligible for state funding, a political party shall: participate actively and permanently in the country's political life; submit a complete list in the four electoral districts in parliamentary elections and a list in the single national constituency in the European elections; obtain 2 per cent of total votes cast in national and European elections; deposit its statutes and the list of its national leaders in the office of the President of Parliament; declare its sources of finance by providing a list of donors and donations over €250, commit 10 per cent of the state allocation in research, training and political studies; ensure that each local or sector-based branch of the party delivers annually transparent accounts that cover all revenue and expenditure, validated by the General Assembly of the party after scrutiny from auditors; and publish its annual accounts in the official journal of Luxembourg. Existence of political parties now recognized by constitution

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Luxembourg	2008	Access to suffrage	Time for registration of voters reduced from 1 year to 3 months, and duration of residence requirement lowered from 5 to 2 years.
Luxembourg	2008	Electoral reform	Change in electoral system for EP elections, with possibility to express 2 preferences for the same candidate (as with general elections), and a total of 6 candidates per party list.
Netherlands	1994	Federal reform	A revision of the Provinces Act limited the supervision of central government, abolished <i>ex ante</i> control and replaced them with <i>ex post</i> (legality) controls.
Netherlands	1997	Electoral reform	Threshold for the preference vote was reduced from 50% to 25% of the Hare quota
Netherlands	1998	Public subsidies	Rules changed so that party organizations will be funded by government according to the number of seats obtained in the national parliament. Specific sums are designated for political research institutes, youth organizations and general party work. Prior to this reform, government subsidies were restricted to political education, political research institutes and youth organizations.
Netherlands	2000	Public subsidies	Limitations on private financing and doubling of the government subsidies.
Netherlands	2001	Public subsidies	Government financing of parties increased to 6.8mn Euros
Netherlands	2002	Public subsidies	Government financing of parties increased to 9mn Euros
Netherlands	2004	Public subsidies	Government financing of parties Increase to almost 15mn Euros. Subsidies will be based not only on parliamentary seats (80%) but also on party membership (20%).
Netherlands	2004	Citizens' initiative	Authorization of citizen-petitioned local and national consultative referendums
Netherlands	2008	Public subsidies	Reduction of 10% of public financing of political parties over 4 years
Netherlands	2010	Electoral reform	Rise of the threshold for preferential vote in the indirect election of the upper house. Party lists can no longer be linked after elections
Norway	1992	Federal reform	Adoption of some centralizing measures but also allows local government increased freedom in the structure of council and committees, and increased control over the structure of taxation.
Norway	2003	Electoral reform	The new system consists of 150 geographical district candidates and 19 adjustment candidates (1 per constituency). Prior to this reform there were only 8 adjustment candidates. The countryside remains over-represented, although parties agree to re-evaluate distribution formula every 8 years.
Norway	2003	Parliamentary reform	Increase in the number of parliamentarians from 165 to 169
Norway	2006	Public subsidies	Only registered parties are given public subsidies, which are divided between a baseline contribution (1/10) and a vote-based contribution (9/10).

Norway	2007	Parliamentary reform	Repeal of the division of the Storting into two chambers (the Odelsting and the Lagting), new bills will need to be passed twice by the plenary Storting. A new bill is rejected if it does not pass the first vote. If the same bill is passed in two subsequent meetings, the motion is carried. If the new bill is not accepted in the second parliamentary meeting, it must be evaluated a third and final time. If the third vote is negative, the new bill proposal is rejected; if it passes the third time, it will become law upon royal assent.
Portugal	1991	Access to suffrage	Among parliamentarians, 226 are elected in the national territory, 2 from Portuguese in other European countries, and 2 from Portuguese in Macau and other non-European countries). Allocation is ensured through PR using the d'Hondt method as before
Portugal	1991	Parliamentary reform	Reduction of the number of the national parliamentarians from 250 to 230
Portugal	1991	Federal reform	Increase in the regional powers of Madeira following that of Azores
Portugal	1997	Parliamentary reform	Reduction of the number of national parliamentarians from 230 to 180
Portugal	1997	Electoral reform	Creation through a constitutional reform of the possibility for some uninominal districts to be introduced alongside existing plurinominal constituencies
Portugal	1997	Direct Democracy	Constitutional amendment allows citizens to propose a referendum, which must be approved by Parliament before it is held.
Portugal	1997	Access to suffrage	Constitutional reform of 1997 creates the possibility for emigrants to vote in presidential from 2001. Overseas residents are granted the right to vote in presidential elections and referenda but only through a personal vote in their local consulate.
Portugal	1998	Direct Democracy	Reform introduced a 50% + 1 quorum for the popular referendums to become binding.
Portugal	1998	Federal reform	Increase in the powers of the two autonomous regions of Azores and Madeira through statute reform.
Portugal	1998	Public subsidies	Law on state funding awarding 1/225 of the minimum wage for each vote
Portugal	2000	Parliamentary reform	MPs can no longer suspend their mandates by finding temporary substitutes, while membership in the parliament becomes incompatible with the fact of holding positions in the public sector, local government, and European Parliament. If an MP owns more than 10% of a firm, this firm cannot have any public sector contracts. Restrictions introduced to prevent the abuse of immunity of MPs in relation to legal proceedings.
Portugal	2003	Federal reform	Greater autonomy granted to greater metropolitan areas (GMA), incorporating a minimum of 9 municipalities and 350,000 inhabitants
Portugal	2003	Public subsidies	Law on financing of political parties allocates 1/135 of the minimum wage to parties for each vote they obtain in the last general election. The minimum threshold is 50,000 votes or a seat in the Portuguese parliament

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Portugal	2006	Federal reform	Constitutional amendment replaces the Minister of the Republic to Azores and Madeira with a less powerful Representative of Republic.
Portugal	2009	Federal reform	New revision of the statute of the Azores
Spain	1991	Public subsidies	Reduction of the ceiling for electoral expenditure, while contribution from state to party financing is increased. State funds now cover propaganda sent out to constituents and supplementing additional resources allocated by state for the purpose of election campaigns.
Spain	1993	Federal reform	Change in financing laws to allow regional governments to raise 15% of own taxation (share of income tax and certain forms of indirect taxation)
Spain	1996	Federal reform	Change in the rules of regional financing allows regional governments to raise 30% of own taxation (share of income tax and certain forms of indirect taxation).
Spain	2006	Federal reform	Catalan Statute approved by the Spanish parliament, which grants the region of Catalonia more extensive/defined policy competences, and establishes mechanisms for greater regional fiscal autonomy.
Spain	2007	Public subsidies	Further increase of 20% in the level public funding of political parties with further restrictions on private donations, including bans on anonymous donations.
Sweden	1991	Federal reform	New Local Government Act provides greater freedom for municipalities to organize and new competences in education
Sweden	1994	Electoral reform	Introduction of single preference voting from the 1998 elections. This allows the candidate with the highest number of preference votes to come top of ballot, although it requires at least 8% of total preference votes for that candidate's party in that constituency (threshold is only 5% in municipal, county, and European elections).
Sweden	1994	Parliamentary reform	Increase in the length of legislature from 3 to 4 years.
Sweden	1995	Electoral reform	Introduction of preference vote for European elections
Sweden	1997	Federal reform	Two regions are formed (Vastra Gotaland, Skane) from the merger of 3 and 2 counties respectively. They co-exist with 19 counties in the rest of Sweden. The regions contain elected councils (PR every 4 years) and a regional executive commission. They take over responsibility for the functions of county councils (mainly healthcare), but have also been delegated new competences from the central government on economic growth and regional infrastructure.
Sweden	1998	Electoral reform	Voters cannot add or cross out candidates, and competing lists in same party cannot have ballot access, reinforcing power of party leadership vis-à-vis internal factions.
Sweden	1998	Public subsidies	State financing of national parties became entirely based on proportion of seats obtained in national parliament, although parties without seats also gain a subsidy if they obtain more than 2.5% national vote.

Switzerland	1991	Access to suffrage	Reduction of the voting age for Swiss citizens to 18
Switzerland	1992	Access to suffrage	Swiss citizens living abroad are allowed to vote in federal elections and ballots, and to append their signature to popular initiatives and referendums by correspondence from their foreign domicile.
Switzerland	1999	Federal reform	Constitutional amendment gives cantons the right to participate in Swiss foreign policy.
Switzerland	1999	Access to suffrage	Postal voting is now possible for everybody in federal/cantonal elections/referendums.
UK	1996	Federal reform	Two tier system of local government is replaced by a single tier system in Scotland and Wales. England continues to contain a complicated patchwork of single tier and two tier systems.
UK	1997	Electoral reform	Introduction of mixed-member electoral systems in devolved Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
UK	1997	Federal reform	Devolution legislation approved by incoming Labour government, granting a large number of competences to the newly created devolved assemblies.
UK	1998	Federal reform	8 Regional Assemblies are created in England (in addition to London) to monitor activities of the Regional Development Agencies.
UK	1999	Parliamentary reform	Hereditary peerages abolished except for 92 hereditary Lords 'elected' by their peers, who will stay in post (and pass on their peerages)
UK	1999	Access to suffrage	Reform of postal and proxy voting that makes it much easier for somebody away from their place of residence to vote
UK	2000	Public subsidies	The 2000 Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act created an electoral commission, greater transparency in party finance, expenditure limits for national elections, new rules for conduct of referendums, and the regulation of 'third parties'.
UK	2000	Direct election	Introduction of the direct election of the mayor of London. Local Government Act of 2000 also introduced the possibility of introducing the direct election of mayors at the municipal level, if this reform is initiated by the district and supported in a referendum.
UK	2001	Access to suffrage	The new rules make it unnecessary to give a reason and no requirement for an attestation of illness to use proxy or postal voting
UK	2002	Parliamentary reform	Reduction of the number of Scottish MPs from 72 to 59 from the 2005 election, as a result of the process of devolution to the Scottish Parliament, and in order to reduce the over-representation of Scottish MPs in Westminster. House of Lords Appointment Commission formally reduces ministerial power and discretion in the nomination of members of the upper house. Introduction of salaries for Committee chairs, making them more independent of government.
UK	2004	Electoral reform	STV electoral system introduced for local elections in Scotland (alongside with the Mixed-member proportional system for regional elections, the Westminster system for general elections, and the d'Hondt PR system for European elections).

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UK	2006	Federal reform	Government of Wales Act grants greater legislative competences for the Welsh Assembly
UK	2007	Federal reform	Restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly restored after an agreement between the Ulster Unionists and the Irish Nationalist parties. Further devolution of competences to Northern Ireland.
UK	2007	Public subsidies	Increase in the total amount of subsidies to 7.4 million Pound

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