The paper discusses and analyses the link between party system institutionalization and the effects of electoral laws in post-communist countries. Empirical studies show that the occurrence and strength of the psychological and mechanical effects of electoral laws change as time passes since the fall of communism and party systems become more institutionalized. The psychological effect (strategic voting) does not occur in the first decade after the transition to democracy and the mechanical effect performs a primary role in reducing the party system complexity. In the second decade, strategic voting reveals its significance and the mechanical effect weakens.

**Keywords:** party systems, party system fragmentation, electoral systems, cleavages, institutionalization