

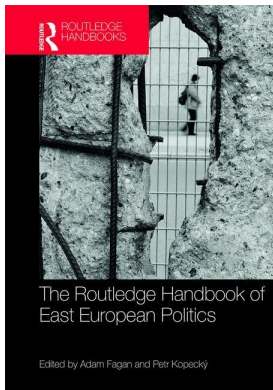
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Adam Fagan, Petr Kopecný

### Voters and Parties in Eastern Europe

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Zsolt Enyedi, Kevin Deegan-Krause

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## 12

# VOTERS AND PARTIES IN EASTERN EUROPE

*Zsolt Enyedi and Kevin Deegan-Krause*

## Introduction

Although the voters and parties of Eastern Europe are different from those of Western Europe, the differences are smaller than they were at the beginning of post-communism. Not all of the change came from the East, however. In some ways, the East and West have converged towards new patterns that do not conform to past experiences of political parties in the West or to Western expectations of the East.

In the second half of the twentieth century, an era of political stability in Western Europe coincided with the rise of a new generation of scholars and new research tools to produce an unprecedented number of landmark studies on political parties. As new democracies emerged elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s, much of this scholarship found its way into Western advice on transitions and became incorporated into what might be termed a “Western standard model” of party politics in consolidated democracies. In line with Western European patterns of the 1960s and 1970s, this model makes a series of implicit prescriptions for the health of democracy, including low to moderate fragmentation of the party system, stable programmatic positions of parties relative to one another, and a nearly fixed roster of major parties and inter-party alliances. The Western standard model also prescribed a strong linkage between parties and voters, built on low voter volatility, party preferences shaped by programmatic offerings on the most salient issues, stable party roots in society, and a relatively coherent socio-demographic identity and group consciousness among party voters (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Kitschelt 1992; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Mair 1989; Pedersen 1979; Sartori 1976).

In the early 1990s, party politics in Eastern Europe was as far removed from this model as possible. The region’s politics featured constant party entry and exit, lack of stability in party attachments, a weak role of standard socio-demographic categories in shaping party choice, continuous emergence of new issues (and new combinations of issues), and fundamental instability in the ideological and demographic profile of most parties.

Today, Eastern Europe appears much less deviant on some of these indicators. Most countries in the region have settled down into competition over relatively recognisable political issues among a reasonable number of political parties, most of which maintain at least some connection to particular demographic groups. In many ways, however, the East has remained quite different from the Western standard model: the issues and issue combinations are often different

than in Western Europe; the frequent entry and exit of parties continues as do the unexpected combinations within government coalitions; and electoral behaviour is characterised by the marginal impact of social class and by an amount of vote switching that is unknown in established democracies.<sup>1</sup>

But the lack of frozen party systems with identifiable reservoirs of loyal voters does not mean that there are no other patterns in the relationships between parties and voters. These patterns are worthy of study, not only to understand Eastern Europe for its own sake but also to understand it as a laboratory for party systems across the globe. Indeed, in some ways the weakness and instability of the early years of party politics in Eastern Europe have now become apparent on all continents, including even North America and Western Europe. The jury may still be out on whether these new norms are consistent with long-term democracy as the West has known it, but there can be little doubt that the experiences of Eastern European political systems are useful in answering this question and have developed a relevance far beyond their own region boundaries.

### Parties within party systems

Individual parties cannot be understood outside the context of their competitors. In many Eastern European countries, that context evolved relatively quickly into systems with a reasonably compact and relatively stable array of programmatic offerings, but in some countries the roster of parties making those offerings continued to change, sometimes abruptly.

#### *Party system fragmentation: towards a happy medium*

The number and relative sizes of political parties are the most visible and observable aspects of party systems. In the standard model, systems raise concerns when the number of effective parties falls below two or rises above five or six. After the collapse of communism, the number and relative sizes of political parties changed rapidly. In some cases, the binary oppositions between Communist Party successors and democratic initiatives shattered into fragments, but even in the most extreme cases the number of viable competitors soon returned to a reasonable number. As Figure 12.1 shows, by the late 1990s the mean number of parties had declined to levels indistinguishable from those of Western Europe, both hovering around 4.0. In the late 2000s, Eastern European levels fell narrowly below those of Western Europe, whose party system sizes have shown a slight upward trend.

There is also a degree of differentiation *within* Eastern Europe. Among the Eastern European countries that acceded to the European Union in 2004 – those in the Baltics and Central Europe – party system sizes were a full point higher (among the Baltic states it was higher still). In most of the other countries in the region, however, the fragmentation levels were lower. Ethnic complexity clearly plays a role in explaining some cases of fragmentation – Bosnia and Herzegovina may be better understood as assembly of two or three formally distinct party systems – and some studies suggest that electoral rules (especially high electoral thresholds) play a discernible role (Casal Bértoa 2013; Rashkova 2014). Nevertheless, the range of values within the sub-region and the significant changes within countries over time, some rising and some falling, resist easy explanation based purely on historic traditions or socio-economic development.

Although measures of the effective number of parties do adjust for party weight, it is also necessary to look at the *relative sizes* of parties. Single-party majorities were relatively rare in the region, and except in Montenegro in the 2000s and Hungary in the 2010s (and Russia during a period when the country had arguably ceased being a democracy), these rarely endured beyond a single term. Although a single party's possession of a parliamentary majority was

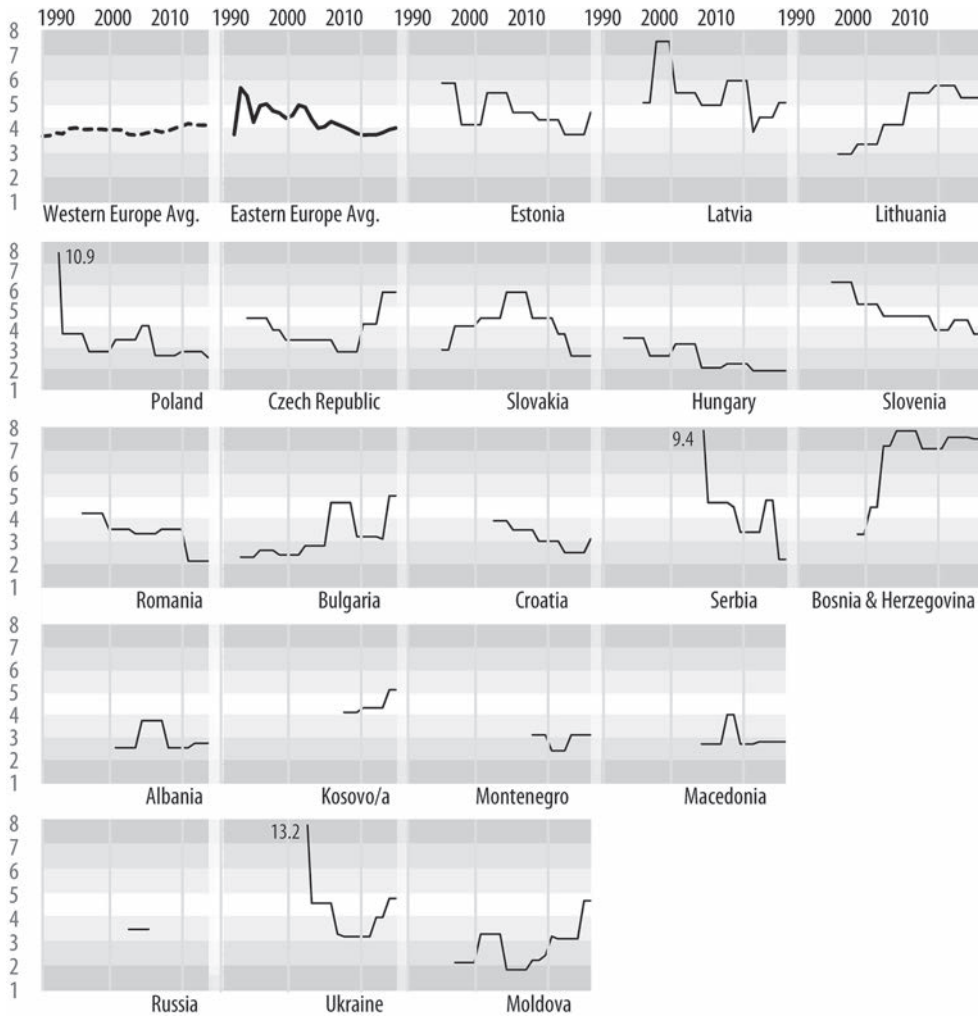


Figure 12.1 Effective number of parliamentary parties in Eastern and Central Europe over time  
 Source: Casal Bértoa (2016) for all countries except Bosnia and Herzegovina; Gallagher (2015) for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

neither a necessary condition for weakened democracy (Slovakia in the mid-1990s) nor a sufficient condition (Hungary, Bulgaria, and Lithuania during the mid-1990s), one party-dominated governments often undermined institutional accountability, particularly in countries such as Montenegro, Russia, and post-2010 Hungary.

**Party system ideological patterns: new configurations and different dimensions**

Ideology and programme played a consistent role in shaping the positions of and interactions within Eastern European party systems, though not to the same extent or in the same way as in the West. In the early 1990s, many scholars saw the political party oppositions in the region

as a tabula rasa that was wide open to many potential forms of competition, but even these authors did not expect the openness to endure forever (Elster, Offe and Preuss 1998). Subsequent scholarship (Evans and Whitefield 1993, 2000; Kitschelt, Mansfeldová, Markowski and Tóka 1999; Whitefield 2002; Tavits 2008; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012) from a wide range of methods – expert studies, mass surveys, and the analyses of party manifestos, as well as elite surveys, content analysis of mass media, and scrutiny of parliamentary roll call records and legislative debates – has produced considerable agreement concerning the fundamental nature and degree of Eastern Europe’s ideological divides.

While some of these studies indicate that Eastern European parties have less clearly defined policy profiles than their Western counterparts (Schmitt, van der Eijk and Wessels 2013; Wessels and Schmitt 2012), two large-scale expert surveys covering EU member states in the region nevertheless found similar (and similarly coherent) results regarding the main dimensions of competition. In spite of the fact that the strong push towards economic liberalisation after the collapse of communism limited parties’ ability to take clear economic positions (Innes 2002; Wessels and Klingemann 2006), factor analysis of both expert surveys detected a strong dimension of competition regarding economic distribution and the role of the state in the economy (this divide appears in particularly robust form in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Lithuania). In most countries, an additional factor emerged on questions of cultural norms and lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> The cultural conflicts in the region differ in important ways from those in the West with more emphasis on conflict over nation, religious norms, and authoritarian traditional practices, and less on post-materialist questions of environment, gender, and sexuality.

An even more significant difference is the way in which these two dimensions align. As Figure 12.2 indicates, Western European parties tend to combine free-market attitudes with cultural conservatism, whereas a preference for government intervention in the economy in Eastern Europe tends to coincide with a more restrictive view of cultural freedoms, stronger opposition to European integration, and more restrictive attitudes towards immigration (Marks, Hooghe, Nelson, and Edwards 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009, 2012; Kitschelt 1992; Vachudova and Hooghe 2009; Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009). Eastern Europe also exhibits more variation than the West in the specific country patterns. Bakker, Jolly and Polk (2012) argue that unlike other countries in the region, Slovenia, Estonia, and Latvia more closely resemble the Western pattern combining markets and conservatism, and that Slovakia shows no alignment between the two dimensions.

While East and West can be analysed through the lens of the same fundamental ideological dimensions, left-right orientation is less helpful for understanding policy positions in the East, largely because the economic and the cultural dimensions diverge. Consequently, the RILE index used to analyse party programmes produce less valid results in the East (Mölder 2013).

There is also a discrepancy between the content of the ideological orientations and the labels used to denote political actors. Parties that elsewhere would claim to be libertarian or classical liberal may accept in Eastern Europe the “left-wing” label due to their relatively cosmopolitan and modernist approach to family values or religious norms. In the most Eastern part of the region, on the other hand, a reference to socialism or communism in the name or ideology of a party often implies an anti-globalisation and anti-Western approach, the suspicion of capitalist market economy and organisational links with post-communist political forces. The region cannot even rely on the customary association between “left” and “change” since its own *ancien régime* had a self-proclaimed leftist ideology. Furthermore, many countries in the region have subsequently undergone repeated mini-regime changes, obscuring the locus of change itself.

The profile of regional patterns is further complicated by the fact that even these broadly formulated dimensions do not address all of the significant issue positions that shape politics

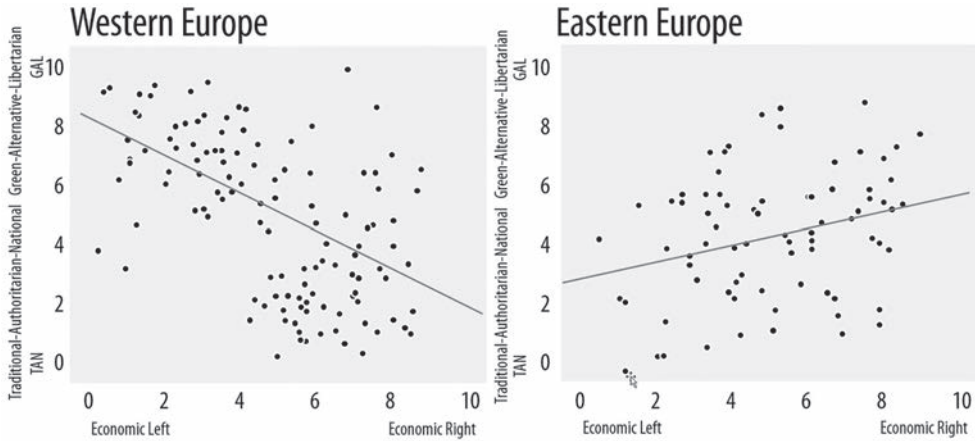


Figure 12.2 Positions of political parties on economic and cultural questions in Eastern and Western Europe according to expert surveys, 2006

Source: Rovny and Edwards (2012, 64).

in specific countries of the region. At least four other dimensions merit discussion, though for different reasons:

- *Communism.* Observers expected competition related to the communist regime to fade away after the regime change, but in fact it continues to divide parties, even though no significant political actors advocate the restoration of the communist regime. Nor does this issue dimension simply replicate the dimensions discussed earlier; anti-communism may focus on both moral and religious aspects and on economic ones, but it can also focus on only one or the other and can shift its emphasis depending on circumstances.
- *Ethnicity and nationalism.* Ethnic differences obey a logic different from questions about economic or cultural regulation. In countries where distinct ethnic groups are fairly evenly matched in size, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina or Ukraine, these issues quickly emerge to dominate political competition, but these countries are unfortunately absent from most cross-regional studies which offer systematic comparative data on ethnic competition. In better covered countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia, as well as the Baltics, ethno-linguistic minorities tend to constitute a smaller fraction of the voting population. These latter countries, furthermore, often experience a two-level effect that does not register easily: the majority-minority opposition is complemented by a more subtle but equal conflict that occurs *among* majority political representatives who may differ among themselves in a more symmetric conflict over how to deal with the minority. These intertwined dimensions interact in complex ways with other issues. In many countries where minorities originate from the centre of a collapsed communist federation (Soviet Union and Yugoslavia), parties supporting the minority ethnic group tend to have a statist orientation; the opposite pattern tends to prevail where the origin of the minority is different (Rovny 2015). Ethnic parties also differ in their availability for forming coalitions. In some countries in the region such as Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania, ethnic minority parties have emerged as pro-status quo forces which take centrist positions on nearly all issues except minority rights questions and



promote minority interests by a willingness to bargain in other areas. The opposite pattern prevails in countries such as Latvia and Montenegro, where a large part of the legislature is excluded from the government-building process due to its association with the identities and interests of minorities and of large, neighbouring states (Russia and Serbia, respectively).

- *Democracy.* In many Eastern European countries, competition has emerged between parties regarding their willingness to set aside the basic principles of democratic competition in the interest of a higher goal (most often a national or cultural one), though these differences are often obscured by both sides claiming that their position is the only truly democratic one. Threats to the democratic systems have coincided with these kinds of alignments: Croatia under Tudjman, Yugoslavia under Milošević, and Slovakia under Mečiar in the 1990s, and Hungary under Orbán in the 2010s (Haughton 2005; Fisher 2006). Romania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Croatia, and Bulgaria have also occasionally evoked concern in this regard, as has Slovakia under Fico and Poland under Kaczyński. Eastern Europe has also produced a significant number of parties (such as People's Party–Our Slovakia in Slovakia, Jobbik in Hungary, Ataka in Bulgaria, and the League of Polish Families in Poland) that reject liberal democracy in an even more explicit and unequivocal way than do most radical left-wing or right-wing parties in Western Europe, though these parties have been actively excluded from participation in government for the most part.
- *Corruption.* The question of corruption dominates political debate in many Eastern European countries but poses a difficult classification challenge, because it seems to lack ideological or programmatic characteristics. Since every party claims to oppose corruption, the question seems to fall in the category of “valence” issues related to effectiveness and trustworthiness, but corruption actually has a systemic character that makes it worthy of consideration as a programmatic conflict in its own right. The difference among parties emerges not necessarily in the specific anti-corruption policies, but rather in the salience of those policies for party campaigns and the degree to which leaders can point to systematic reasons for doubting the claims of the incumbents. Parties in Eastern Europe have had an advantage in this regard, since the claim that the ruling parties are corrupt has had (until recently at least) greater plausibility among Eastern than Western voters. Given the widespread corruption-related frustration in the electorate, parties such as the Party of National Resurrection in Lithuania, the Alliance of Dissatisfied Citizens in the Czech Republic, Ordinary People in Slovakia, the Party of Miro Cerar in Slovenia, and Bridge in Croatia may not feel any need to take extreme positions on questions other than corruption and may in fact adopt centrist positions on the other dimensions.

The issue dimensions listed can thoroughly reshape a country's politics when they emerge in parallel with other configurations described earlier. The ethnic dimension has shaped political competition, particularly in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the corruption dimension has recently produced major shifts in the governing balance of Czech Republic and Slovenia. The coincidence of a political divide over democracy and a single-party majority (or near-majority), coupled with high polarisation and populist party strategies, has periodically affected the democratic trajectory in Slovakia, Albania, Montenegro, Romania, Croatia, and Macedonia, and most recently in Hungary.

### ***Party system change: ongoing instability of party system components***

Responses to corruption also relate closely to perhaps the most noteworthy characteristic of Eastern European political parties: the degree of institutional change. From the post-communist

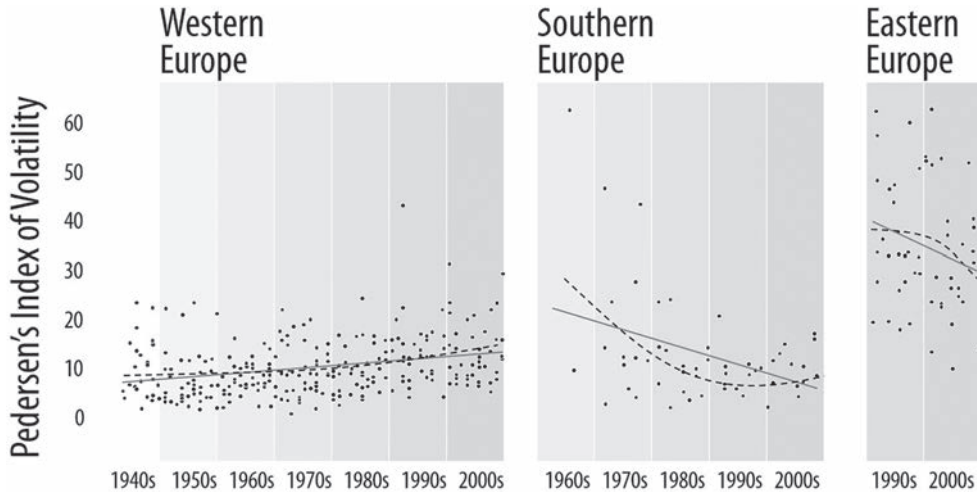


Figure 12.3 Dassonneville and Hooghe findings regarding Pedersen Index in parliamentary elections in Western, Southern, and Eastern Europe adapted to a single horizontal and vertical scale

Source: Dassonneville and Hooghe (2011, 18, 21, 23).

decade to today, observers have expressed wonder and concern at the high degree of electoral volatility in the region and the proliferation of party splits, mergers, deaths, and births (Tóka 1998; Tavits 2008; Sikk 2012).

Recent work by Dassonneville and Hooghe (2011, reprinted here in Figure 12.3) and Ersson (2012) confirms numerous other studies showing high rates of volatility in Central and Eastern Europe, a level more than three times higher than in Western Europe and twice as high as the average rate in the newer democracies of Southern Europe. Indeed, even the lowest volatility rates in the Eastern and Central European region are higher than all but the highest volatility rates in Western Europe. Dassonneville and Hooghe (2011) and Powell and Tucker (2013) find a decreasing trend for the first decade of the 2000s, but more recent results in many countries (including spectacularly high volatility in elections in Slovenia and the Czech Republic) point to a return to higher levels of volatility in the 2010s.

Of course, the volatility itself is inextricably bound both to party system offerings and voter preferences. Recent nuanced analyses of volatility look as closely as possible into the different kinds of change including exchange of voters among existing parties and the party system change related to party entries and exits. Measures of the role of new parties in volatility (Powell and Tucker 2013) and the average age of parties in the party system (Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015) show consistent patterns: the occasional breakthroughs of new parties at the expense of older ones, the constant churn among new parties frequently replaced by newer parties, and the relatively stable performance of more established parties. While in the West the shifts among established parties are four times more common than those related to party entry and exit, in Eastern Europe the entry of new parties and departure of existing ones produces almost the same amount of change as the shift of preferences within the universe of established parties (Mainwaring, Gervasoni and España 2016).

The most relevant reasons for the overall instability are the ones that were identified already at the beginning of the democratic era: fragile organisational structures, weak (or non-existent) inherited party loyalties, the shallow embeddedness of parties in civic organisations, media-oriented



(and now social media-oriented) politics, and fuzzy class identities. Some parties were successful in building a reliable clientele. Social and organisational rootedness can characterise both niche (ethnic, religious, pensioner, or peasant) and more mainstream parties such as the Czech Republic's Social Democrats, Bulgaria's and Romania's Socialists, Slovenia's Democrats, or Hungary's Young Democrats. Even many of these parties, however, are in constant danger of being squeezed or entirely overrun by new rivals that lack their deep roots but are also free from the deep antipathies to these parties that have developed over time among some voters. Disappointment with economic performance and corruption scandals have triggered the collapse of many major parties in the region and new parties have proven capable of taking advantage of loose, flexible structures, celebrity candidates, fuzzy identities, and corruption-related grievances to gain election. Of course, these characteristics favour party emergence more than sustainability, and only a few of the newer parties have managed to stabilise themselves by building party organisation, offering solid governmental performance, building networks of auxiliary organisations, and rallying around a single charismatic leader (though this last mechanism offers mixed blessings since the party's long-term survival becomes overly dependent on one person).

Change in party system components also concerns the coalitional units that parties create together and the positional relationships that parties hold in relationship to one another. Coalition governments are still the most common path to power in both Eastern and Western Europe (Bågenholm, Deegan-Krause and Weeks 2015), and the nature of coalition interaction is critical for understanding the political party systems in both regions. Building on the "party system closure" approach of Mair (1997), recent research (Casal Bértoa 2013; Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2013) finds that the institutionalisation of coalition patterns is lower in Eastern Europe than in the West, due to the frequency of changes in coalition partners and relative ease with which newcomers participate in the government-building process. At the same time, the fact that some Eastern European countries (Albania, Montenegro, Hungary, Georgia, and Macedonia) have developed relatively closed systems indicates that it may actually be easier for parties to close ranks in the governmental arena than to stabilise their electorates (Enyedi 2016).

### **Voters in party systems**

The relationship between voters and parties has three tightly interrelated but conceptually distinct aspects: the relationship of voters' choices to their past preferences, their current political attitudes, and their socio-demographic positions.

#### ***Voter loyalty: stable and unstable electorates***

Although party entry and exit, discussed earlier, are a primary source of electoral volatility in Eastern Europe, even shifts among existing parties are several times more common than in the West (Mainwaring et al. 2016). Party identification is also a less powerful predictor of electoral choice (Schmitt and Scheuer 2012). In line with these weaknesses of structural anchors, Roberts (2008) found that voters in Eastern Europe are exceptionally sensitive to variations in economic results. The resulting "hyper-accountability" leads them to punishing incumbents, even if it means giving up on parties they once supported.

The aforementioned focus on corruption issues (especially in the region's EU member states) also undermines habitual voting because new parties in power are unlikely to maintain a reputation for purity. The pattern of endorsing outsiders can be a self-reinforcing one and create the possibility of voters who are not merely de-aligned but who are actually unalignable, habituated not to a stable party choice but to a stable preference for doing something different in each

election. Exit polls give some evidence for the paradoxical emergence of a relatively stable core of unstable voters who alternate between not voting, voting for new parties, and voting for even newer parties (Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015). At the same time, surveys also give evidence that next to segments characterised by habitual volatility, there are other groups which remain committed over time to one preferred party, and some new parties even manage to convert their novelty-seeking electorates into loyalists.

At the same time, where partisan loyalty does exist, it is not without its drawbacks. While partisanship in the West tends to lead to satisfaction with democracy and thereby play an integrative role, in the East this beneficial mechanism is overshadowed by the potential of party identification to facilitate ideological radicalism (Enyedi and Todosijević 2009).

While there is less clear survey evidence from the Western Balkans and the former Soviet Union, the electorally fluid segment of the voting population in those regions of Eastern Europe appears to be considerably smaller than in the EU member states. Some of this quiescence may be due to the stronger role of socio-demographic identity in voting, but much of the immobility can be explained by a smaller range of party choices and the lack of plausible newcomer parties which in turn result from established parties' greater control of institutional rules and clientelist resources.

### ***Voter attitudes: stable issue preferences in unstable systems***

As a consequence of the factors considered earlier, electoral behaviour is more idiosyncratic in Eastern Europe than in the West (Van der Brug, Franklin, Popescu and Tóka 2009), and voters have more difficulty identifying the position of parties (Kritzinger and McElroy 2012). This difference, while relatively minor, has significant effects, especially because lack of clarity in the programmatic profile of parties often advantages the most radical forces, the only ones that appear to voters as transparent and predictable (Ezrow, Tavits and Homola 2014). At the same time, and in spite of the often changing and unorthodox character of the individual parties, the quality of party-based representation (understood as the similarity of electorates and parties in terms of major ideological dimensions) is not radically lower than in the West. The positions of the region's voters map quite closely onto the positions of the parties they voted for. On some topics, such as European integration, there is even more issue voting in East Central Europe than in the West (De Vries and Tillman 2011). It seems that the historical trajectory of the East, which triggered a focus on cultural matters and on sovereignty-related concerns, prepared the public well for the twenty-first century's values-based conflicts, at least on topics of globalisation and European integration.

### ***Voter demographics: ethnicity, religion, and location instead of class***

To the extent that the party systems of Eastern and Central Europe demonstrate a reasonably strong and moderately regular political competition on economic and cultural questions, it is possible to ask how closely those conflicts link social class, denomination, religiosity, age, and other socio-demographic characteristics. Most studies find a relatively small but still statistically significant relationship between these characteristics, policy preferences (such as redistribution or cultural norms), and party choice. Knutsen's (2013) study, for example, detects links between party choice and religious denomination, church attendance, rural residence, and certain measures of class (but not the Alford Index of "working class versus all others"). Ecological and survey-based studies suggest that while the party systems among EU members in the East have weaker roots than those of Western Europe as a whole, they are more strongly linked to religion, urban-rural divide, or class than in Southern Europe.

Ethnicity plays a particularly strong role in shaping political choice (Whitefield 2002). Almost without exception, in the swathe of territory stretching from Estonia to Macedonia, members of ethnolinguistic minority communities share similar opinions on group-salient political questions and vote for particular minority ethnic parties on the basis of identity and attitudes. Religiosity also has an impact but mainly in predominantly Roman Catholic societies such as Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia; in the Protestant countries of the Baltics and many Orthodox countries in the former Soviet Union and southern Balkans, religion has less structuring power.

Across the region, citizens with geographical locations and skills that facilitate integration into global markets or into the supranational administrative structures turned out to be the winners of market reforms, globalisation, and the post-communist transition, while low-educated, blue-collar, and administrative workers, together with the employees of non-competitive sectors and the members of the Roma minority, ended up as the losers. And yet, few parties unequivocally represent the winners' or the losers' side. In spite of the rapid increase of social inequalities, the transition has not led to the crystallisation of robust class-based identities, at least not those familiar to Western European modes of analysis. The most relevant socio-political units are not the working class subcultures or the self-conscious middle-class milieux. The level of education and the degree of connection to large cities, and thereby to the global economy, seems more important to many voters than actual income or any sense of class solidarity. The relative importance of rural-urban divisions also seems to be more embedded in different lifestyles and cultural sensitivities than in organised and economy-focused interest representation.

The relatively low explained variance of social structure on electoral choices found in most studies may also be due to the fact that existing methods simply fail to tap the deeper or less easily quantifiable structures that might actually explain voter behaviour. A more detailed classification of occupational groups (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014) or the integration of family histories may bring us closer to understanding electoral behaviour. The post-communist divide is, for example, largely based on family memories and on the related diverging interpretations of history. Similarly, qualitative evidence suggests that family- or community-rooted clientelist networks play a substantial role in shaping party choice. But such factors have little chance to show up in standard surveys.

Cleavages that divide large groups that recognise their internal common interests and are closed off from other groups – the model for Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and Bartolini and Mair (1990) – are rare in Eastern Europe. Applying such high standards for “cleavage” would lead us to ignore many of the region's most important divisions, while relaxing the expectations of group closure and group symmetry allows closer consideration of the broader array of divisions that shape party politics. Figure 12.4 presents this array in graphic form. The figure presents deep cleavages (in the upper left) but also examples that depart from this model in terms of symmetry (top to bottom) or closure (left to right). The greatest degree of closure in the region – deep divides between rival groups and their party representatives – appears on ethnic questions. The few cases in this category that are relatively symmetrical, such as Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina, have proven difficult to reconcile within the institutions of a single state (and many of the new states of the region are the result of previously internal cleavages that could not be accommodated within common borders). More common are the less symmetrical but high-closure circles of minority ethnic populations such as Russians in Latvia and Estonia and Albanians in Macedonia, along with smaller but still significant groups of Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, as well as Turks in Bulgaria. The asymmetry may sometimes keep the minority's political parties and its issues on the margins of political life, but such parties nevertheless frequently shape coalition formation and the resulting policy options. Non-ethnic cultural conflicts, particularly religious ones in Roman Catholic countries, tend to occupy a middle ground that ranges from

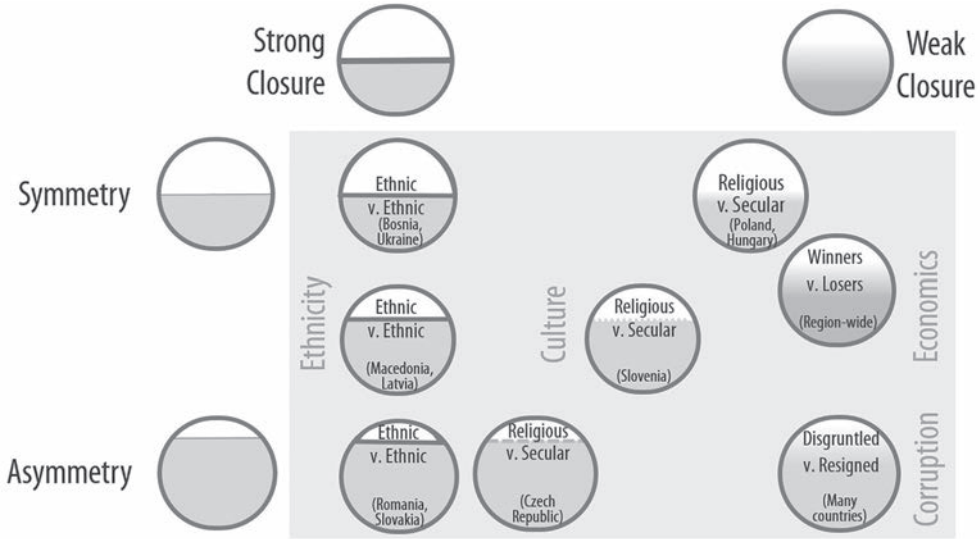


Figure 12.4 Examples of Eastern and Central European political divides according to degree of symmetry and closure

Source: Adapted from Deegan-Krause (2013, 831).

the Czech Republic’s small and relatively devout religious community with its own Christian Democratic party to Poland’s full-scale culture clash with multiple gradations between (and sometimes within) parties.

As indicated earlier, the differences between transition winners and losers, while universal within the region (right hand side of the graph), is rarely well articulated, partly because demographic differences are not tightly connected to values and party choice. The lower right quadrant in Figure 12.4 is populated by amorphous concerns such as corruption, which do not necessarily divide the population into equal shares or develop deeper roots. However, the lack of closure and symmetry does not make such conflicts irrelevant, at least in instances when, as in the case of the Baltics in the 2000s or Slovenia and the Czech Republic in the 2010s, these generate parties that use such issues to gain election victories and shape the course of government and society.

### Conclusion: Eastern European party systems, voters and the future of parties everywhere

Readers from 1989 might, at first glance, find little interest in a chapter from the future that emphasises East–West convergence. Indeed, most observers in the late 1980s and early 1990s expected that many Eastern European party systems and voters would eventually come to look more like their Western counterparts. The same readers, however, would likely be shocked at the specific ways in which the two halves of the continent have moved closer together: the declining relevance of traditional class divides (eroded in the West, weakly established in the East), the emergence of sovereignty and corruption as major issues that can reshape entire party systems, and the rise of a large societal segment that appears not only unanchored but perhaps even unanchorable.

Readers from the future, by contrast, might be surprised that this chapter still uses Western Europe as the appropriate baseline for comparison. Of course, the West's long research legacy along with historical connections and proximity make it an obvious reference point and encourage cross-regional research projects, but in many ways it is the East that more closely resembles party system and voter developments across the rest of the globe. In two decades of quantitative and qualitative research across twenty countries, scholarship on Eastern Europe has done more than simply demonstrate the similarities and differences between East and West. It has gone further to produce new insights and conceptual tools that have enriched the study of parties by clarifying phenomena that have not (yet) been integrated into models of party systems and voting behavior. In particular, scholarship on Eastern European parties has forced the attention to new kinds of social groups, and new (kinds of) issues that do not fit comfortably into the programmatic, clientelist, or charismatic categories. Furthermore, scholarship about Eastern Europe that integrates social structures, voter demands, and the supply side of party competition (Kreuzer and Pettai 2004; Deegan-Krause and Enyedi 2010; Sikk 2012; Raymond 2014) has demonstrated not only that party systems can exhibit a relatively autonomous logic but also that political parties can actively and purposefully shape social dynamics.

In conjunction with the literature on Latin America, published research on Eastern European political parties has also helped to refine the concept of institutionalisation, revealing differences between institutionalisation at the party-level and at the party-system level, and demonstrating that electoral volatility does not always serve as a stable proxy for institutionalisation. Turbulence in Eastern Europe's party politics has also produced new tools that can better account for splits and mergers, for changes of name, personnel and programme, and for the differences between volatility that is intra-system or extra-system and mass-driven or elite-driven (Rose and Munro 2003; Powell and Tucker 2013). Finally, research on politics in Eastern Europe also reminds us of the twin existence of the Scylla and Charybdis of party system institutionalisation: rapid party system and voter change can weaken the quality of governance and democracy, but so can the combination of institutionalisation with polarisation, and the entrenchment of parties that are willing to manipulate rules for their own benefit.

The study of the parties and voters in Eastern Europe does not yet possess a well-integrated narrative comparable to the one provided by Lipset and Rokkan and others for Western Europe. Nor is it as compartmentalised into various sub-fields as the US electoral behaviour literature. Developing a homogeneous framework or achieving American-style specialisation are neither realistic nor attractive goals, but the strengths of these approaches can help improve our understanding of Eastern Europe, especially if they reflect the existing strengths of scholarship on the region including sensitivity to historical and cultural differences, and acute awareness of the key role played by political actors. The impossibility of producing a single homogeneous framework for all countries in the region should not, on the other hand, hold back from theorising about the most fundamental conflict lines that divide the societies. These conflicts may be overshadowed by repeated waves of protest vote, fuelled by cycles of disillusionment and poor economic performance, but even these reactions will be socially and culturally conditioned. Understanding the interaction between these structures and the choices made by political actors will require more and better information. Research in the region will benefit from finer-grained research on occupational groups, education specialisations, and other demographic categories; the assembly of richer time series of attitudinal data and the gathering where possible of panel data; the integration of party manifesto data with data on campaign materials, speeches, and elite interviews; and the linkage of candidates, elite surveys, and mass surveys. These efforts may never produce an "Eastern standard model", but they will shed light on the most important political questions in a region which, it seems, is ever more typical of the world as a whole.

## Notes

- 1 This description does not apply to Russia, where the concentration of power in the executive office and the intimate links between politicians and business groups relegate parties to the fringes of political life (Hale 2007).
- 2 Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2012) find the cultural conflict to be considerably weaker in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe, while the Chapel Hill Expert Survey detects a relatively strong and independent cultural dimension.

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