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Cleavages, Party Strategy and Party System Change in Europe, East and West

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the development of competitive party politics in post-communist East Central Europe from a comparative perspective. The central concerns are party system stabilisation and change in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and implications for comparative theory. Starting from Lipset and Rokkan's 'cleavage model', the article assesses the relevance of their key variables for party politics in the 1990s. Although there are considerable similarities (particularly in termsof choice of electoral systems), the cleavages, relationships between voters and parties, and the very nature of parties all differ considerably from the early Twentieth Century West European cases. Party strategy emerges as the key variable in explaining patterns of party system stability and change. Variations result from: (i) the prevalence of catch-all type strategies; (ii) interest representation strategies; and (iii) the presence of parties that have staked out positions on the flanks of the system. The conclusions concerning the central role of party strategy are not confined to East Central Europe, but are also pertinent to the study of party system change in Western Europe.

Introduction

More than a decade after the collapse of communism in East Central Europe the question of party system consolidation and stability remains somewhat

contentious. It is sometimes argued that these systems are more unstable than their western counterparts, because of the nature of the transitions, the instability of the parties or the volatility of the electorates in East Central Europe. However, analysed from a comparative politics perspective the party systems of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and even Slovakia reveal underlying patterns of stability. Developments since the 1997-98 round of elections in the region are perhaps better analysed in terms of party system change than as indications of continued instability. In what follows, the development of competitive politics in the region is analysed from a comparative politics perspective, building on the West European politics literature in general and Lipset and Rokkan's 'cleavage model' of party system development in particular.[1] This warrants reconsidering some of the assumptions in the West European literature in the light of the post-communist context, which in turn permits some tentative conclusions about party system stability and change in general. The political parties, and particularly party strategy, emerge as the central variable in this analysis.

The following analysis takes Lipset and Rokkan's model of party system formation as a starting point, albeit more as a heuristic device than as a construct to be applied directly to post-communist East Central Europe. The first section therefore constitutes an effort to adapt the model for application beyond its core cases, reconsidering some of the explicit and implicit assumptions about institutional design, cleavages, voters, and parties in the light of the conditions of post-communism. The second section turns to party strategy, suggesting that post-communist parties have been free to adopt a range of party strategies, some more successful than others. The third section briefly addresses the development of systematic party competition in a selection of East Central European cases (namely Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia), suggesting that a degree of party system stabilisation was evident by the late 1990s in terms of patterns of party competition and government formation. The concluding section considers the implications for party system stability and change in Europe more generally, both East and West.

Cleavages, Parties and Party System Development: Extending the Lipset-Rokkan Analysis beyond its Core Cases

The emergence of competitive multi-party politics after the collapse of communism in East Central Europe soon prompted questions about the applicability of West European comparative theories. Despite some obvious differences in the nature of political parties and dimensions of conflict and competition, the processes of establishing new institutions and patterns of competition were comparable to those that had taken place earlier in Western Europe. Perhaps the most obvious points of comparative reference were the Mediterranean transitions to democracy in the 1970s, or the processes of post-war democratisation in Germany and Italy.[2] However, given the very rapid completion of transition and consolidation in the minimalist sense of all main actors accepting the new rules of the game, the operation and stabilisation of competitive politics became the central questions.[3] Here the political parties play a key role, hence the focus on the development and stabilisation (or otherwise) of multi-party systems. Hence Lijphart's application of Rokkan's work on institutional design to analyse the newly negotiated electoral and parliamentary systems of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.[4] In similar vein, Smith drew on West European literature to analyse post-communist developments, but raised questions about whether the new parties could 'leap over' the stages of development from mass party to catch-all party and about the implications of relatively un-aligned electorates.[5] Lewis added questions about the implications of low party institutionalisation.[6] Kitschelt argued that economic and political competition produced patterns of voter and party alignments that differed from Western Europe, because political and economic liberalisation would be aligned under post-communism in contrast to the western combination of political conservatism and free markets.[7] Mair took this a step further by focussing on differences in patterns of party competition and government formation.[8] In short, while theories of West European politics proved pertinent to analysis of developments in post-communist politics, they raise questions about differences and exceptions.

These questions in turn raise the issue of the implications for party system theory. Referring to the debate on party system freezing and change, Mair suggests that 'it is only by comparing established party systems with those which are still in their infancy that we can really begin to understand the

freezing process.'[9] Much of the literature on the development, freezing and changing of West European party systems builds on assumptions that do not necessarily hold for post-communist party systems, or even beyond the core West European cases. Though the Lipset-Rokkan model of party system formation was developed with reference to Western Europe as a whole, is has an in-built bias towards the northern monarchies bordering on the Atlantic, Norway in particular. Application of the model to the Mediterranean states and peripheral states like Finland or Ireland is more problematic, particularly in the light of territorial change and civil war.[10] Sinnott argues that the model can only be applied to Ireland if the state is considered part of a wider political system including the UK (taking 1918 as the starting point).[11] The relevance of territorial change, revolution and civil war to the Finnish party system is less contentious, but still generates challenges for the Lipset-Rokkan approach.[12] Analyses of the new Greek, Portuguese and Spanish party systems that emerged in the 1970s, a decade after the Lipset-Rokkan model was elaborated, invited questions about the extent to which it applied in a late Twentieth Century context: the changing Italian party system of the 1990s carried similar implications.[13] Application of the model to East Central Europe merely multiplies these problems and, like some of these Western cases, provides opportunities to revisit and develop party system theory.

The Lipset and Rokkan Model and the Development of Competitive Party Systems in East Central Europe: Reconsidering the Parameters

Although Lipset and Rokkan's analysis is sometimes interpreted as a sociological model that focuses on structures, the actors - the political parties - are allocated a central role. Their 'freezing hypothesis' - that 'the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s' - probably generated more controversy and debate than their analysis of party system development.[14] Approaching 'freezing' as a party-driven process, Sartori commended Lipset and Rokkan's focus on the role of political parties in translating cleavages into party competition.

> The 1920 freezing of party systems and alignments is intriguing only as long as we persist in understanding party systems as dependent variables. It is not intriguing, however, if we realise that a frozen party system is simply a party system that intervenes in the political process as an inde-

pendent *system of channelment,* propelled and maintained by its own laws and inertia.[15]

In other words the party system, once developed, contributes to its own perpetuation. It is not merely the result of other forces, but an independent factor contributing to its own stability. The party system is by and large the product of the *interaction* between parties.[16] Their strategies for building alliances (combining cleavages) and mobilising voters explain the differences among West European party systems. Hence the argument that the development of party systems is driven by *party strategy*, within parameters set by *cleavage structures, institutions, voting patterns* and *party organisation*, and that the conditions of post-communism place far fewer constraints on party leaderships than was the case in early Twentieth Century Western Europe. These are considered briefly in turn below.

First, the central point in Lipset and Rokkan's analysis is how and in what sequence *four sets of cleavages* were translated into political competition. But this list is hardly exhaustive, even as far as Western Europe is concerned. Two emerged from the 'national revolutions': centre - periphery cleavages between the core nation-builders and political, ethnic or cultural peripheries, and state - church cleavages pitting secular against religious forces. Two more were caused by the industrial revolution: rural interests (primary industry, including agriculture) against urban industry, and owners and employers versus workers. Different patterns in the central nation-building elites' commitments on the religious and economic fronts, i.e., respectively to a secular state or a church on the first front, and to urban or landed interests on the second, explain the main differences among West European party systems (Table 1). On the other hand the politicisation of the fourth cleavage, workers versus owners, made for increasing similarities between the party systems because socialist parties emerged across Western Europe, and usually succeeded in redefining the left side of the political spectrum. To reiterate, however, this list of cleavages is hardly exhaustive.

To be sure, Parsons' schema, from which Lipset and Rokkan derived these cleavages, purports to be a *general theory*, but it has been criticised for being excessively static and equilibrium-oriented.[17] Bartolini and Mair's definition of cleavages as featuring three elements, *empirical, normative* and *organisational*, where 'a cleavage has to be considered primarily as a *form of closure of*

Table 1: Lipset & Rokkan's eight-fold typology

	Central core of nation-builders' alliance on the religious front	Nation-builder's economic alliance	Examples of nation-builders	Periphery or opposition's response	Examples of opposition
1	National church dominant (i.e. allied with the state)	Rural: landed interests	Britain: Conservative	Dissident religious, urban	Liberal
2	National church dominant	Urban: commercial and industrial	Scandinavia: Conservative	Dissident religious, rural	Liberal or 'old' left.
3	National church dominant, Catholic strong minority	Rural	Prussia/Reich: Conservative	Secular, urban vs. Catholic	Liberals vs. Catholic
4	National church dominant, Catholic strong minority	Urban	Netherlands: Liberal	Dissident rel., vs. Catholic vs. rural	Religious parties
5	Secular state against Catholic Church	Rural	Spain: Liberal	Urban vs. Catholic	Catalans vs. Carlists
6	Secular state against Catholic Church	Urban	France, Italy: Radicals, Liberals	Catholic, rural	Conservative Catholics
7	State allied with Catholic Church	Rural	Austria: Catholics	Secular, urban	Liberals, Pan-Germans
8	State allied with Catholic Church	Urban	Belgium: Catholics vs. Liberals	Rural	Flemish separatists

social relationships', opens the possibility that other events may generate cleavages.[18] Analysis of Italian, Finnish and Irish politics suggest (albeit not without some controversy) that regime change could cause cleavages, and a similar argument has been put forward regarding European integration.[19] In any case there is no *a priori* reason why such 'non-structural' cleavages (that lack the objective element) should not be as divisive or decisive as structural cleavages.[20] Applied to post-communist politics, this suggests that non-structural cleavages that centre on regime change or approaches to nationalism may be as significant as the socio-economic cleavages generated by the process of

economic transition.[21] An example analogous to Lipset and Rokkan's eight-fold typology is set out in Table 2, although this holds only for the first and second parliaments, and even then is a considerable over-simplification.

Moreover, the *institutions*, or *rules of the game*, are less problematic in the post-communist context. As far as the development of party systems is concerned, the initial period is characterised by institutional flux rather than stability. The new rules of the game enjoy legitimacy precisely because they are the result of negotiations between the main protagonists on the political scene. Hence the introduction of PR electoral systems in early Twentieth Century Western Europe, as the conservative and liberal parties sought to limit any

Table 2: A possible post-communist eight-fold typology

	First Governments, ca. 1990-1993 period	Government's economic strategy	Examples of first governments	Periphery or opposition's response	Examples of opposition
1	Former opposition, commitment to secular state (civic nationalism)	Fast pace of reform	Poland: Liberal wing of Solidarity	Nationalist vs. Reform communists	Populists, Reform communists
2	Former opposition, commitment to secular state (civic nationalism)	Moderate pace of reform		Nationalist vs. Reform communists	
3	Former opposition, nationalist posture (ethnic nationalism)	Fast	Czech lands: Klaus's Civic Forum technocrats	Civic vs. Reform communists	Social liberals, social democrats, communists
4	Former opposition, nationalist posture (ethnic nationalism)	Moderate	Hungary: Christian national gov't Slovakia: Meciar	Civic vs. Reform communists	Liberals vs. Reform communists
5	Former Communist (civic nationalism)	Fast	Bulgaria	Nationalist	
6	Former Communist (civic nationalism)	Moderate	Yugoslavia	Civic vs. nationalist	
7	Former Communist (ethnic nationalism)	Fast	Romania	Civic	
8	Former Communist (ethnic nationalism)	Moderate	Serbia	Civic	

potential manufactured majority the socialist parties might be accorded under a plurality electoral system, while the social democrat parties sought to guarantee their parliamentary presence.[22] Lipjhart has demonstrated that the same logic explains institutional choice in post-communist East Central Europe.[23] Institutions such as electoral systems are therefore dependent rather than independent variables during the early phases of party system development, except when they are imposed from the outside or reflect earlier systems. Hence the adoption of proportional electoral systems in Poland and Czechoslovakia, although a combination of historical factors and negotiating positions contributed to a semi-majoritarian solution in Hungary. These institutions help shape party system 'freezing' inasmuch as they establish the levels at which barriers to new entrants are set. Moreover, all four states have modified their electoral systems since 1990 by raising these barriers. The relationship between voters and parties, reflected in voting patterns, has proven the most controversial aspect of application of West European theories to post-communist East Central because the very existence of pluralist civil society has been retarded.[24] Although Lipset and Rokkan did not make this explicit, their analysis was predicated on strong links between parties and voters. On the socialist left, trade unions played a major role in tying voters to parties, while churches played a similar role for part of the old centre-right.[25] To be sure, several analyses point to or demonstrate the effect of social structures on post-communist voting patterns.[26] However, the combination of disaggregated interests and weak extra-parliamentary organisational support for parties, notably in the form of the Church and trade unions playing a small role in politics, weakens the basis for voters' party identification.[27] Moreover, the costs of economic transition alone suggest that voters might turn against incumbents come election time.

> Given the large number of economic and social problems each rebuilding democracy usually faces, and given the propensity of the winning party to place all of the problems on their initial agenda, it is unlikely that any governing party could achieve complete success before the second election.[28]

The less than surprising result has been a propensity for East Central European voters to reject the incumbents come election time. Yet far from causing party system instability, this tendency to propel opposition parties into government after elections has forced almost all parties to engage in coalition building,

thereby accelerating the process of party system development. By the end of the 1990s, all major parties in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic had taken part in coalitions, and therefore developed more systematic and stable patterns of interaction. In some cases these patterns have proven more stable than the party organisations. Although new parties emerged in Poland and Slovakia before the 2001 and 2002 elections, taking advantage of the anti-incumbency effect, the most significant effect in post-communist voting patterns appears to be that anti-incumbency voting accelerated the stabilisation of party systems by prompting bloc-building and the government - opposition competition.

Finally, it should be said that the *nature of political parties*, or more specifically their organisation, remains an implicit factor in Lipset and Rokkan's model but emerges as a key variable for analysis of party system development outside their core cases. Their analysis is based on the Nineteenth Century elite parties being challenged by emerging mass parties on the socialist left, and the assumption that the latter articulated a relatively clear set of interests linked to the 'workers' side in the owner - worker cleavage.[29] Yet party organisation had changed considerably by the late 1960s, as Kirchheimer and others have shown - relaxing ideological stances, relying more on party professionals and the media than on the mass membership in campaigns, and seeking to extend their appeal across cleavages to most of the electorate.[30] Katz and Mair have found evidence of further professionalisation of West European parties, to the extent that they come closer to a 'cartel party' ideal-type that represents the state to society rather than vice versa, and focuses more on public relations techniques and issues or general competence in campaigns.[31] To be sure, several parties have chosen not to compete along the main left - right dimension, and to maintain a focus on the interests of a more clearly delineated constituency, or to adopt more leadership-dominated 'new populist' strategies.[32] It should therefore come as no surprise that extension of Lipset and Rokkan's analysis to cases that feature very different forms of party organisation has proven more problematic, as the Irish and Greek cases have illustrated.[33]

Unsurprisingly, party organisations in post-communist East Central Europe hardly conform to the mass party ideal type, being leadership dominated and more precarious because of limited or weak institutionalisation.[34] At least
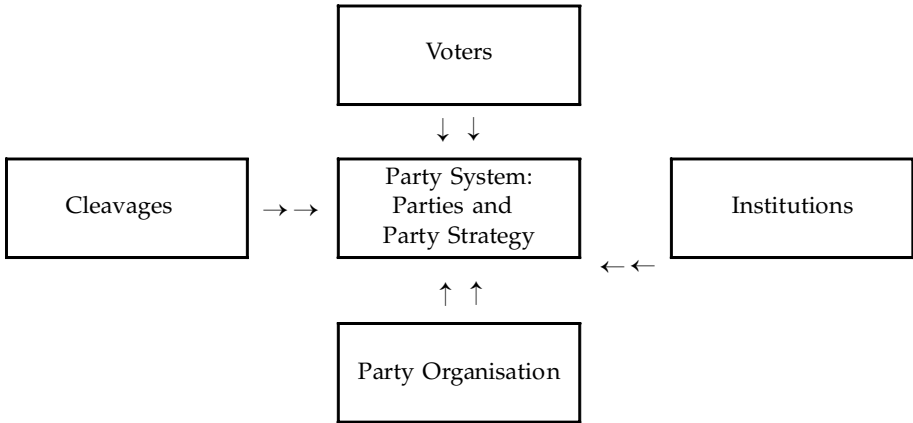
four types of party emerged on the scene in after the fall of communism: (i) the reformed communist parties, which is as close as the region comes to the catch-all ideal type in terms of organisation and evolution; (ii) new parties born out of the opposition movements, which have attempted Smith's 'evolutionary leap' straight to catch-all or cartel type; (iii) interest-oriented parties, often reviving predecessors from the inter-war or immediate post-war era; and (iv) new populist parties that have much in common with their new West European counterparts. Electoral alliances of varying longevity make up a possible fifth category, but they usually fall into one of the four ideal-types or represent a hybrid. This means that the mass party organisation, a key factor in the stabilisation of the older West European party systems, hardly features under post-communism.

The parameters within which post-communist parties operate therefore differ considerably from those of early Twentieth Century Western Europe, in terms of cleavages, voters and the very nature of political parties, if less in terms of institutional contexts. In Lipset and Rokkan's analysis relatively strongly institutionalised parties translated a clearly defined set of cleavages into party politics. This was a step-by-step process, which brought about stable alliances and prompted gradual revision of the rules of the game to accommodate new challenges. Parties built close links with voters through extra-parliamentary organisations. Most of these assumptions do not hold for post-communism. The result has been parties that operate under less constraining parameters, and are freer to experiment with different types of strategies. Somewhat paradoxically, this happened at the same time as actual *policy choices* were constrained by the overwhelming consensus in favour of West European type liberal democracy and free markets, which meant operating within IMF guidelines and designing public policy compatible with the EU's *Acquis Communautaire.* Party strategy therefore became the key factor shaping the development and stabilisation of party systems (Figure 1).

Party Strategy and the Emergence of Competitive Multi-Party Politics in East Central Europe: Three Dimensions of Opposition

The transition from communism is probably the wave of democratisation in which the parties have been most 'free to choose'. Whereas some invoked West European ideologies, mainly social democracy and liberalism, and a
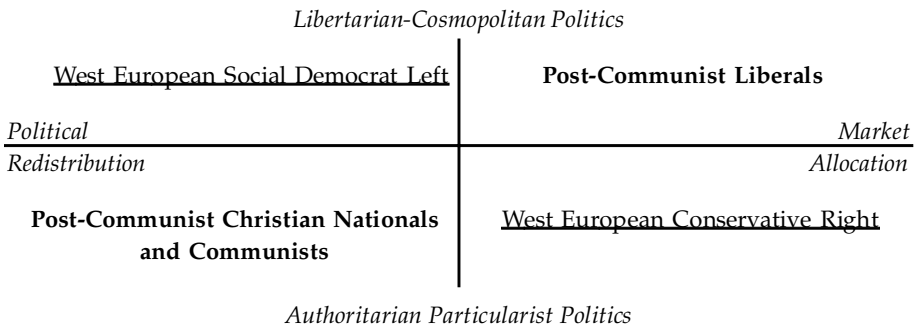
Figure 1: The development of competitive politics

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'return to Europe', others sought to invoke inter-war or immediate post-war ideology, the struggle against communism or even to focus on the problems of post-communist state-building. Within this diversity, three broad patterns of opposition emerged. These amount to three broad strategies of party competition. To the extent that the communist parties sought to abandon communism and stake out a centre-left position, the most attractive option was simply invoking the West European social democratic tradition. The opposition tended to divide into a more individualistic and market oriented liberal right, which invoked West European or US liberalism, and a more traditional Christian national right that looked to national identity and faced the somewhat difficult task of defining conservatism after four decades of communism.[35] First, as the opposition movements' successor parties engaged in a struggle to define the 'right' in East Central Europe, the social democrats (including reformed communists) defined the 'left'. Second, several parities sought to revive pre-communist organisations or dimensions of competition, establishing so-called 'historical parties' based on ethnic or regional identity and/or economic interest. Inasmuch as these parties failed to shape left - right competition, or chose to cross-cut it, their strategy developed into a second dimension of opposition. The third dimension of opposition is made up of the parties that established themselves on the flanks of the party system, be they unreformed communists or workers parties on the left or nationalist parties on the radical 'right'.

The first strategy of government - opposition competition, characteristic of most of the catch-all and cartel parties of Western Europe, entails competition along the main left - right dimension of the party system. This has usually been linked to issues related to market regulation, the welfare state and redistribution of resources, though as the Irish case illustrates, this is not always the case. In fact, definition of the main dimension of competition has usually been contentious in Western Europe, and in some cases the liberal - conservative contest as to which party would represent the main opposition to the social democratic left produced a three-bloc party system. This question was of central concern in Kitschelt's 1992 analysis, where he suggested that party alignments in East Central Europe would reflect different combinations of positions on the economic policy dimension (political or market redistribution) and a non-economic dimension running from cosmopolitan libertarian to authoritarian particularist politics.[36] In Western Europe the bulk of voters, and therefore the most successful parties, lie in the upper-left and lower-right quadrants in figure 2 (underlined text). However, the fact that post-communist voters interested in fast economic change would also be oriented toward rapid opening of society, while some would resist, meant that most of them would be found in the upper-right and lower-left quadrants. The more successful parties would therefore be located in these quadrants (bold text in Figure 2). In these terms, the left - right dimension in East Central Europe was at ninety degrees to that familiar from West European politics. Although post-communist parties emerged in all four quadrants, the most successful were expected to lie at the upper-right and lower-left. However, as Kitschelt has since noted, the inter-party contest to define and shape the left - right dimension would prove more complex, and involve some parties' invoking cleavages related to national identity.[37] The bulk of this contest took place during the first two or three parliaments.

The parties that defined the 'left' include the ex-communist Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP), the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) in Poland, and Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) in Slovakia, as well as the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD), a revival of the party that was merged with the communists in 1948. All four invoked West European social democratic ideas, advocating relatively rapid economic transition, and took relatively secular approaches

Figure 2: Competitive space in European party systems

Libertarian-Cosmopolitan Politics

West European Social Democrat Left	**Post-Communist Liberals**
Political	*Market*
Redistribution	*Allocation*
Post-Communist Christian Nationals and Communists	West European Conservative Right

Authoritarian Particularist Politics

Note: Adapted from Kitschelt, 'The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe'.

to nationalist issues. The Polish and Hungarian parties won executive office as early as 1993 and 1994 respectively, and the Hungarian party proceeded to accelerate its predecessors' economic reforms. Although the CSSD did not gain executive office until 1998, it represented the main alternative to the Klaus government in the 1996 elections. Only the SDL has seen less success in its efforts to stake out a strong position on the left, despite its erstwhile co-operation with the Slovak Social Democrats (SDSS). In Poland, the old regime - opposition divisions contributed to the independent survival of the ex-Solidarity social democrat Union of Labour (UP).

On the centre-right, two broad sets of parties have struggled to shape the right wing of the spectrum, with clearer outcomes in the Czech and Hungarian cases than in Poland and Slovakia. In the Czech case, the technocratic free-market wing of the Civic Forum in form of Klaus's Civic Democratic Party (ODS) initially won this contest, and it soon absorbed the Christian Democrat Party (KDS). It was flanked on its immediate left and right by the smaller Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-CSL) and the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA), but would find its dominance of the right reduced after a large faction opposed to Klaus split off to form the Freedom Union (US) in late 1997. By contrast, both Christian national and liberal parties prospered well into the late 1990s in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. In the Hungarian case, the liberal Alliance of Young Democrats' (Fidesz) change in strategy after losing the 1994 election allowed it to encroach on the Christian national right's territory and eventually become the main

right-wing party. With the other liberal party, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz), having joined the MSzP in coalition government for the duration of the 1994-98 parliament, Hungary was well on the way to a two-bloc system by 1998.

The Polish right remains more divided, and the Slovak right is somewhat problematic to define given Meciar's interventionist economy policy. The Polish Christian national parties, most of which combined in Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) before the 1997 election, and regrouped as the smaller Solidarity Electoral Action of the Right (AWSP) in 2001, are usually considered as the 'right' in that country. The more economic reform-oriented liberals, initially the Liberal Democratic Congress (KLD), Democratic Union (UD) and the free market wing of the Polish Beer Lovers' Party (PPPP), which eventually united in the Freedom union (UW) in 1994, made up the liberal free market 'centre-right'. It was squeezed out in the 2001 elections by the newly formed Civic Platform (PO), whose founding members came from the UW and AWS and positioned their new party between the two. Meciar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia's (HzDS), which combined emphasis on Slovak national interests and moderately paced economic reform, came closest to defining a post-communist 'right' that belongs in Kitschelt's lower-right quadrant. Apart from the SDL, Meciar's main opposition between 1992 and 1998 consisted principally of the small liberal Democratic Party (DS, comparable to the Czech ODA), the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), and the Democratic Union (DU, formed and reinforced by HzDS dissidents and expellees). In the run-up to the 1998 election these parties formed the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK), with the Greens (SZS) and Social Democratic Party of Slovakia (SDSS), with the explicit aim of defeating Meciar's government. Efforts to turn the SDK into a party were only partly successful, yielding the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU), but not integrating the KDH. In addition, the Slovak scene has seen a number of populist parities attempting to establish themselves as the main alternatives to Meciar, with considerable but short-lived success in the case of the Party for Civic Understanding (SOP), and potentially, Direction (Smer). Both have aligned themselves on the centre-left.

The Second Strategy of Opposition: Cross-Cutting Competition and Territorial Opposition

A number of parties opted for strategies that involved efforts to appeal to a more clearly identified electorate. This strategy is comparable to that developed by regional, agrarian and dissident religious parties in Western Europe that have eschewed the trend toward catch-all strategies. This has involved drawing on the economic, political or cultural (including ethnic) interests of peripheries against the administrative centre.[38] In East Central Europe the most successful examples include parties targeting agrarian and regional interests, primarily the Polish Peasant Party (PSL), the Independent Smallholders' Party (FKgP) in Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Christian democrat parties, and the parties representing the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. The KDU-CSL and KDH come close to the West European Christian democrat model, whereas the Christian National Union (ZChN) in Poland and the KDNP have adopted a Christian national appeal that increasingly diverged from the Polish and Hungarian mainstream right. Lepper's Farmers' Self-Defence (Samobroona) represent a hybrid of this strategy and the third strategy, an interest group turned populist political party, operating on the left flank. Like most East Central European parties, these tend to be hierarchically organised and weakly institutionalised, which exacerbates the consequences of internal divisions regarding strategy. This proved the undoing of the KDNP in 1997, when the party split over relations with Fidesz and lost several of its members to that party. The FKgP suffered similarly in the run-up to the 2002 election.

The Third Strategy of Opposition: Competition at the Flanks of the Party System

Finally, a number of parties have chosen a third strategy of opposition, on the flanks of the party system. In West European politics this strategy was first defined by anti-system parties on the communist left and fascist right, particularly during the inter-war years, although these parties have yielded ground to the 'new left' and new populist parties over the last few decades. In East Central Europe the unreformed communists have been relegated to this kind of opposition, and a number of hard-line nationalists have taken up positions on the right flank of the party systems (but are hardly enthusiastic

about liberalised markets). The Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM, successor to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, KSC) and The Hungarian Truth and Justice Party (MIEP) epitomise these two variants. A host of other parties have adopted more or less populist and anti-system positions, such as the Czech Republicans (SPR-RCS) and the Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland (ROP). Something similar applies to the two parties that were formed from AWS's populist right wing in 2001, the League of Polish families (LPR) and the Law and Justice party (PiS). Apart from the KSCM, left wing success has been confined to the Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS), while the Polish and Hungarian far left have fared much worse or chosen to remain within the reformed parties. Other manifestations of 'new politics' on the left, such as feminist and green movements, have been far less successful. Perhaps the most interesting case is the hybrid HzDS, which to some extent constituted an anti-system party within the Czechoslovak context, but came to define the 'right' in Slovakia after independence. Although the extreme right is comparatively weak in East Central Europe in 2002, it played a considerable role in right-wing politics in three of the four cases during the 1990s. The Czech Republic is the exception, where the Republicans never played a significant role in either coalition games or party politics on the centre-right.

In short, the East Central European Parties have been relatively free to choose strategies, and have tested the full range, some far more successfully than others. The first dimension of government - opposition competition features parties that come close to the evolution from (communist) mass to catch-all party, as well as parties that 'leapt' straight to the 'cartel' type or mixed this with the East Central European brand of Christian nationalism and new populism. While the liberal successor-parties tended to focus on economic transition, their Christian national rivals have more often than not invoke anti-communism and ethnic approaches to nationalism. In this sense they can be said to have translated different cleavages into politics. However, a number of parties have opted for competition along a second dimension of opposition, mobilising voters along divisions that are very much like Lipset and Rokkan's state - church, centre - periphery and urban - rural divisions. Finally some parties have positioned themselves at the flanks of the party systems, rejecting or circumventing the left - right dimensions and therefore constituting a third dimension of opposition. Unlike the parties competing

along the first and second dimensions, these parties have mostly been excluded from government. Therefore, although the parties may differ considerably from their West European counterparts, broadly similar patterns or dynamics of competition can be found. The next section turns to how this has played out in the development, stabilisation and change of party systems in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The Development of the East Central European Party Systems: Changing Patterns of Competition and Bloc-Building

The first decade of competitive politics in East Central Europe constituted a testing ground for a wide range of party strategies (see Table 3). In the Hungarian and Czech cases the process of testing and adjusting strategies produced relatively stable party systems, and in Poland it produced clear patterns of bloc-building and competition, if not stable party organisations. The Slovak scene is more fluid, particularly in terms of the actual parties, and new parties retain the potential to change patterns of competition and coalition politics. The former opposition came to power in all four cases, albeit in different forms. Whereas the liberal wing of the opposition came to dominate the executive during the first four years in the Czech lands and Poland, the Christian national or populist elements won power in Hungary and Slovakia. This first phase therefore saw the beginning of an answer to the question of who made up the 'right', while the reformed communist parties and the CSSD established dominance on the left. The SLD and MSzP's positions were consolidated during the second phase, after their election victories in 1993 and 1994, which prompted the right to regroup in both countries. The same process came four years later in the Czech Republic. All three cases therefore saw considerable party system stabilisation through the development of stable patterns of competition and coalition building, even their party systems have since seen further change. By contrast, the decade since Slovak independence has produced repeated efforts to build a stable alternative to Meciar's HzDS, without yielding the same degree of stabilisation.

Only in Hungary did the first elections produce a clear winner in the contest between the liberal and Christian national opposition. Invoking national identity and anti-communism, the MDF-KDNP-FKgP coalition defeated the

Table 3: Patterns of party competition in East Central Europe since 1989

Poland	1989 Election	1991 Election	1991-1993	1993 Election	1997 Election
Left flank social democrat	SLD **Solidarity:** UP	SLD Solidarity UP	SLD Solidarity UP	**SLD** UP	SLD
Liberal right	**Solidarity: ROAD**	UD KLD PPPP	**UD KLD PPPP**	UD(+KLD + PPPP), becomes UW	**UW**
Christian national right	**Solidarity:** PC ZChN KPN	**PC** ZChN	PC **ZChN**	BBWR	**AWS**
Others (agrarian)	PSL (ex-communist) **Solidarity:** PSL-PL	PSL PSL-PL	PSL **PL**	**PSL**	PSL
Right flank		KPN	KPN	KPN	ROP

Hungary	1989/1990	1990 Election	1994 Election	1998 Election
Left flank Social democrat (formerly communist)	MSzP	MSzP	**MSzP**	MSzP
Liberal right (centre)	SzDSz Fidesz	SzDSz Fidesz	**SzDSz** Fidesz	SzDSz
Christian national right	MDF	**MDF**	MDF	**Fidesz MDF**
Others (Christian, agrarian)	KNDP FKgP	**KNDP FKgP**	KNDP FKgP	**FKgP**
Right flank		MIEP	MIEP	MIEP

liberal challengers and remained in power through the full parliamentary term. Fidesz and SzDSz's focus on economic transition, in effect mobilisation along a different cleavage, not simply the other side of a given set of cleavages, proved less effective. Elsewhere the elections were won by broad movements in the form of Solidarity, Civic Forum (OF) and the Public Against Violence (VPN), all of which would break up along lines similar to those that divided the liberal and Christian national camp in Hungary. Solidarity's split between ROAD (Citizens' Movement for Democratic Action) and the Centre Alliance (PC), later replaced by Walesa's Anti-party Bloc for Reform (BBWR,
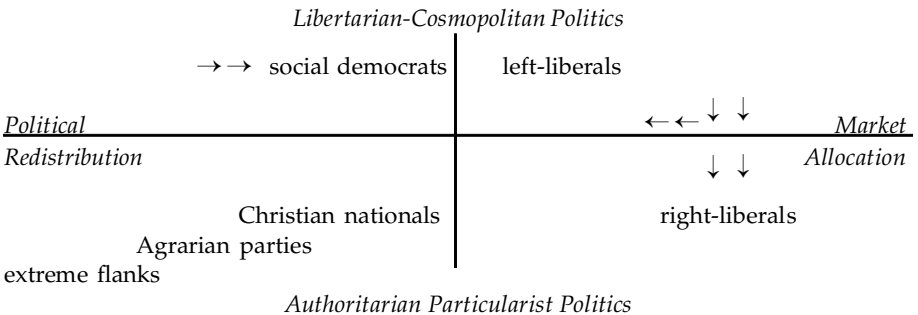
borrowing its initials from Pilsudski's inter-war populist party), set the scene for the division of the right into two blocs emphasising respectively economic shock therapy and conservative values. Despite coming out stronger in the 1991 election, the Christian national right proved unable to build a stable coalition. Suckocka's liberal-led coalition survived longer than expected, falling after a year in 1993, and losing the subsequent election to the reformed communist PSL-SLD coalition. In Czechoslovakia the OF and VPN fragmented into two wholly separate party systems, a range of liberal and conservative parties coming to dominate the Czech scene, while a fragmented system centred on support for and opposition to Meciar emerged in Slovakia. Meciar's combination of advocacy of slow economic transition and emphasis on Slovak nationalism confounds description of the Slovak party system in terms of left and right, although his HzDS would dominate, if not define the 'right' in that country. All four cases thus institutionalised divisions on the 'right', and with the exception of the Czech lands, this entailed competition between liberal free market parties and a more Christian national right which fits Kitschelt's model well. In contrast, the split in OF reflected a division between the technocrats led by Klaus (ODS) and the former dissidents in the Civic Movement (OH) and the ODA on the economic right.

The second series of fully free elections, 1992 in Czechoslovakia, 1993 in Poland and 1994 in Hungary, set off a second phase of party system development, as success or failure at the polls and in the subsequent coalition games shaped the consolidation of patterns of competition. The somewhat unexpected election victories of the SLD and MSzP changed the dynamics of bloc-building on both the left and right in Poland and Hungary, whereas Klaus's and Meciar's victories in the Czech lands and Slovakia reinforced their emergent patterns of political competition. In Hungary, the SzDSz's pre-election drift to the left was reinforced by its governing coalition with MSzP, while Fidesz's tendency in the opposite direction was firmly established at its 1995 party conference by way of a decision to adopt a more nationalist profile. Come 1998 the party's effort to establish itself as the main party on the right had paid off, as it absorbed elements of the KDNP and MDF, and Hungary's two-bloc system was all but consolidated. Fidesz' election victory that year, and its four-year coalition with the rump-MDF and FKgP, followed by the MSzP-SzDSZ victory in 2002, completed the consolidation.

By contrast, the retrenchment of the Polish right, although successful inasmuch as UW and AWS defeated the SDL-PSL coalition in 1997, yielded much less institutionalised parties. Considerable divisions remained, particularly within the AWS, to the extent that it is difficult to talk about stabilisation of political parties on the Polish right. However, the pattern of left - right competition was stabilised, to the extent that both the 1997 and 2001 election saw competition between relatively clearly defined blocs. Although the AWS-UW coalition lasted out the four-year term, the parties did not. The SLD-PSL coalition that took office after the 2001 elections faced a fragmented opposition, including a more West European style conservative party in the PO. The two party systems have thus moved closer to the West European pattern of competition identified by Kitschelt (figure 3), with the proviso that the right-liberals are not always the most enthusiastic proponents of international free markets economics.

The stabilisation and change of the Czech party system also fits a pattern of re-alignment towards the West European dynamic, whereas the Slovak system remains dominated by Meciar even after HzDS lost the 1998 election. The split in ODS after the Klaus government fell in November 1997 (over a party finance scandal) helped consolidate a Scandinavian-style three-bloc system, with the ODS in the lower right quadrant, the CSSD in the upper left, and centre parties between the two in the upper right quadrant. The 'Opposition Agreement', which secured ODS support for a minority CSSD government, removed the need for further coalition games before the 2002 election. With the 1998 election, the consolidation of the centre-right parties into the SDK coalition and an alliance of SDK with SDL to build an alternative to Meciar's

Figure 3: A possible realignment of party competition in East Central Europe

Libertarian-Cosmopolitan Politics

$\rightarrow \rightarrow$ social democrats | left-liberals

Political _____ $\leftarrow \leftarrow \downarrow \; \downarrow$ *Market*

Redistribution $\downarrow \; \downarrow$ *Allocation*

Christian nationals | right-liberals
Agrarian parties
extreme flanks

Authoritarian Particularist Politics

government appeared to herald a consolidation of Slovak politics into a more stable pattern. Meciar's efforts to build and maintain coalitions, his defeat in 1994, subsequent election victory and new coalition games produced a dynamic similar to the competition between Berlusconi and the centre-left in Italy. However, the success of SOP in the 1998 election, and strength of Smer and the newly formed New Citizens' Alliance (ANO, Slovak for 'yes') in pre-election polls in 2002, suggests that new parties retain a considerable potential to cause further change in the party system.

The fact that most parties that have developed cross-cutting or flanking strategies of competition are located in the lower-left quadrant of figure 3, and that these parties have been marginalised in Hungary and the Czech Republic, contributes further to the picture of stable party systems. In Hungary the KDNP divided over questions of strategy, and specifically over its relationship with Fidesz, which all but killed the KDNP. The FKgP, which had split over its relationship with the MDF-led government in the early 1990s, suffered similar problems in the Fidesz coalition. In 2002, unlike 1994, this cost the party its parliamentary representation. MIEP's failure to pass the threshold in the 2002 elections confirmed the shift to the two-bloc system, the party's position on the nationalist right having been squeezed considerably by Fidesz shift to the right. The Parties on the Czech flanks, the communist KSCM and the Republicans, have likewise been marginalised, if not eliminated from parliament, by the logic of coalition games among the three main blocs. The regionalist Movement for Moravia and Silesia (HSD-SMS) saw only temporary electoral success, as did the Liberal and Social Union (LSU), which included agrarians and greens. By contrast the Hungarian Coalition (MK, later SMK) in Slovakia and the agrarian PSL in Poland have successfully maintained stable support by appealing to a clearly delineated electorate. The agrarian elements of solidarity (PSL-PL, the Polish peasant Party-Peasant Alliance, later simply PL) joined AWS. Only in Slovakia has a party of the far right retained consistent support, the Slovak National Party (SNS) securing representation in every Slovak parliament so far. However, the effort to integrate the Polish right in AWS contributed to blurring the boundaries between the Christian national and far right, the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN) joining AWS, and the right-populist LPR subsequently leaving the alliance. With the transformation of Samobroona into a left-flank agrarian party, which like the LPR successfully campaigned

on Euro-sceptic platforms, both Polish flanks remain populated and somewhat volatile.

Summing up, four broad trends can be discerned. First, among the parties that compete along the main left - right dimension a combination of personality politics and weakly institutionalised parties keeps the number of parties volatile. This appears to wreak greater havoc on the right than the left, and features mainly in Poland and Slovakia. While it has not changed the dynamic of party competition or government - opposition relations dramatically in Poland, the Slovak party system appears more vulnerable to full-blown party system change. Second, with the exception of the PSL and the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, the parties that opted for strategies involving cross-cutting competition along a second dimension of opposition have generally fared badly, dividing over how to align with the parties that position themselves on the main dimensions. Third, on the flanks, electoral support for the extreme right and left appears to be declining, suggesting that this type of opposition is not a particularly succesful strategy in the region. Fourth, however, the impending enlargement of the European Union has introduced a new potential 'touchstone of dissent' - Euroscepticism - which may be mobilised by the parties competing on the second or third dimension.[39] The different degrees of party system change thus produced are set out in figure 4, which combines change or stability in the set of parties and patterns of competition between them. Stabilisation of the party system in Hungary and the Czech Republic in the second half of the 1990s also involved changes in the patterns of bloc building and competition, whereas the Polish party system has remained remarkably stable in terms of patterns of competition compared to the number of parties. There is less evidence that Slovakia has stabilised either of the two.

Conclusion: The Changing East Central European Party Systems

Returning to the central questions about the applicability of West European comparative politics theory to post-communist East Central Europe and the implications for party system theory, three sets of conclusions and suggestions are warranted. First, application of theories developed for the comparative analysis of West European cases to the new party systems of East Central Europe is pertinent, but raises important questions about the theories' assump-

Figure 4: Party system change

	Stable Patterns of Competition	Changing Patterns of Competition
Stable set of parties	I **Party System Stability**	II - Hungary, Czech Rep. **Party System Adaptation** Patterns of competition and coalition-building evolve
Changing set of parties	III - Poland **Party System Modification** Parties change, patterns of competition remain	IV - Slovakia **Party System Change** New parties cause changes in competition, or vice versa

tions. In the present analysis, the role of actors - parties and their strategic choices - emerges as stronger than in most interpretations of Lipset and Rokkan's model. Cleavages, institutions, voting patterns, and to some extent even party organisations, are parameters within which parties' strategic decisions impact on the development and stabilisation of party systems. In East Central Europe, these factors have combined to produce a setting that enhances the importance of how parties chose to compete.

Second, the development of competitive multi-party systems in East Central Europe has been driven by the contest between parties to define the post-communist 'right'. The stabilisation of the party system reflects directly the extent to which this contest has been resolved, and this has meant that the competition between a liberal free market right and Christian national right has been accorded a prominent role. Defining the left proved easier, particularly in the Polish case where it reflects old regime - opposition divisions, but even in the Slovak case, where the left is comparatively weak. Most parties competing on cross-cutting or flanking dimensions have been marginalised, agrarian parties in particular experiencing limited success outside Poland.

Third, the development of more or less stable party systems has been largely a party-driven process. Party system stability depends on both the number of parties and their strategies (Figure 4). Adaptation, where existing parties modify their strategies to maintain or enhance their position in the party

system, is common in West European politics, as are adjustments to coalition games. In this sense party system adaptation or modification is more common that radical change, in East Central as well as in Western Europe. Therefore, if theories of party system change and stability contribute to the analysis of party system development in East Central Europe, it is perhaps equally significant and more interesting that party system development in East Central Europe contributes to general theories of party system stability and change. The East Central European experience suggests that parties themselves, as in recent cases in Western Europe, are the main drivers behind party system change and stability. In short, the parties have stolen the show.

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