Explaining electoral volatility in Central and Eastern Europe : a party organizational approach

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Introduction | Institutional Determinants of Voter Choice

New democracies face the crucial challenge of constructing and maintaining strong and stable political institutions. As political parties are key components of representative systems of government (Bryce 1921, 119; Schattschneider 1942, 1), the emergence of regimes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) after the fall of communism coincided with the (re)appearance of a multi-party system in which independent and competitive actors had the opportunity to run in elections and form governments. Their status as primary post-communist institutional actors – with their existence prior to elections, separation of powers, constitution drafting, and legislatures – allowed political parties to play a major role in the regime change (e.g. the Round Table Talks[1]) and in initial institutional design choices (Schopflin 1991; Kitschelt 1992; Bozoki 1993; Berglund and Dellenbrant 1994; Elster et al. 1998). More specifically, political parties decided upon the general framework for economic change, constitution making, and rule of law (Pridham and Lewis 1996, 5; van Biezen 2003, 5) thus legitimizing and shaping the processes of democratization and democratic consolidation. As an illustrative example, Kopecky (1995, 516) argues that the Czech post-communist designers perceived parties as the core foundation of the democratic system. The end of the communist regime and the shift of power in most CEE countries took place in response to bottom-up pressures exerted by the population using street protests (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland) and violence (Romania).

However, the decisive factor was institutional (van Biezen 2003) as the beginning of transition was marked by negotiations among political elites grouped in proto-parties or political formations (e.g. umbrella organizations). This top-down practice in combination with the fact that parties emerged prior to any other political institutions guaranteed the increased importance of parties in the political life of these countries. As a result, post-communist politics soon became party politics (Enyedi and Toka 2007). Empirically, this claim is substantiated by the only isolated instances in which independents managed to secure seats in CEE legislatures. The vast majority of decision-making processes in the most recent two decades were the result of intra- and inter-party competition and negotiations.

[1] The Round Table Talks were a series of negotiations taking place in several countries from Central and Eastern Europe between communists and opposition. Their general aim was to set the grounds for the first non-controlled elections.

The prominence of parties within the political system of the new democracies from CEE is accompanied by the long-lasting feature of electoral volatility. The background in which post-communist political parties emerged explains the initial difficulties they encountered in obtaining stable support among citizens. Their birth took place on barren soil in the absence of multi-party competition and representation for almost half a century, in the absence of democratic experience even in the inter-war period prior to communism, and in the context of adversarial attitudes and behaviors towards parties due to their identification with the communist state. This unfriendly environment, combined with ideological confusion and weak programmatic identities among the competitors in the first post-communist elections (Kitschelt 1995; Millard 2004; Grzymala-Busse 2006) led to a situation in which voters could hardly be expected to develop identification with and attach loyalty to particular parties (Mair 1997). However, this inability to rely on relatively stable electorates was not limited to the first election, but was perpetuated over time.

Previous research has indicated high levels of electoral volatility throughout the entire post-communist period, both in absolute terms and relative to that of the Western European countries (Rose et al. 1998; Toka 1998; Krupavicius 1999; Lewis 2000; Birch 2001; Sikk 2005; Tavits 2005). A quick look at the governments of these countries indicates that there are only rare cases when the same party governs in consecutive terms, and out of the few hundred parties competing in elections over the past two decades, less than a quarter has sustained a continuous presence in Parliament. Such evidence goes against claims that post-communist parties and party systems have a tendency towards consolidation and stabilization (Agh 1998; Olson 1998a; Lewis 2001a; Casal Bertoa 2008). Moreover, citizens continue to be skeptical of parties. Parties are the least trusted political institution in the region, and this situation has persisted since the beginning of the transition (Rose 1995). Despite governments' visible success at domestic (e.g. significant economic growth, political stability) and international levels (e.g. NATO and EU accessions), parties are perceived negatively by citizens and instill only low levels of confidence, rarely exceeding 15% of the population (CCEB 2001-2004; EB 2004-2007).

How can electoral volatility in the new European democracies be explained? The main goal of this book is to address this question by examining the political parties that have maintained a parliamentary presence in at least half of the national elections in six CEE countries over two decades. This study focuses on individual political parties for three interconnected reasons: they are the agents of representation that interact directly with citizens, demand their support, and are directly influenced by vote shifts; there are large, unexplained variations in terms of electoral volatility within party systems; and other levels of analysis are not appropriate in the CEE context (see Chapter 1).

Previous studies identify two sets of factors as the main explanations of electoral volatility. The first set includes all those elements belonging to the sociology of politics. This approach argues that party formation and competition takes place along various cleavage lines ranging from age, education or professional background, to religion, ethnicity, and social class. The electoral loyalty of the voters is the result of their social characteristics and their alignment along various competition lines. The particular features of the post-communist space, described in detail in the following section, illustrate how cleavage-related factors cannot represent valid explanations of electoral volatility. Unlike in other regions (i.e. Western Europe in particular) and time periods, there are fewer opportunities for the CEE political parties to reach out to their voters on cleavage grounds. The second set of factors includes the institutional determinants of party competition and the role of the agency in structuring voter preferences.

Following this line of reasoning, I propose an institutionally embedded framework to explain voters' choice in new democracies that illustrates how political parties can influence the electoral environment in which they are active. The logic behind the key argument is briefly discussed in the second section and can be summarized in a few sentences. The survival of parties on the political scene implies that a relevant contingent of parties' voters do not alter their choices. To encourage such an outcome, political parties provide their voters with incentives. However, the CEE electoral environment makes this task quite difficult: the weak societal roots of parties do not allow for party identification or voter alignment; the unclear patterns of competition make the policy dimension not very relevant; and the lack of elite loyalty reduces leadership continuity.

Post-communist political parties do not have numerous tools at hand to mobilize the open and available electorates. As party organizations create effective gates of communication with the electorate (Adams et al. 2005), political parties can use them to stabilize their electorates. To this end, I argue and test that party organization can contribute to the creation of a recognizable label that voters can identify with over the medium to long term, that it may favor the creation of popular networks, and can promote and rely on recognizable candidates in consecutive elections.

In order to do so, three distinctive means are employed: intra-party decision-making, membership rates, and re-nomination of incumbent members of parliament (MPs). With regard to the first, the party may be better connected with voters through its decentralized decision-making. Decentralization of decision-making enhances the citizens' perception that problems are tackled at the local level and that they may have some say in the process of representation. Second, the party can create long-term attachment vis-à-vis member recruitment. Members build their own networks and through

these the party acquires easier access to broader segments within the electorate. Third, through legislators' re-nominations, party organization delivers recognizable candidates who may help to reach two interrelated goals important to the process of representation: a) the increased perception of continuity on the part of voters; and b) the diminishing of the level of abstraction in politics by associating candidates with party labels. In a nutshell, the sources of electoral volatility are considered to be mainly institutional. Therefore, party organizations can diminish volatility, and thus increase electorates' stability.

Why is the Story Different?

Three macro-characteristics – party formation, unstable political environments, and non-mobilized elites – are key in demonstrating that cleavage-related factors have little if any potential to explain the variation of volatility in the CEE countries. Cleavage structure analysis, as put forward by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), cannot be used as a tool to investigate party formation in the CEE countries. The communist regimes leveled out any type of major social differentiation using their egalitarian ideology (van Biezen 2003, 35-36). Ethnicity, language, religion (i.e. Church isolation), and urban positioning did not produce significant differences between citizens. With regard to ownership, only the state benefited from this right, eliminating possible disparities between owners and workers. As a result, the cleavage lines common to Western European countries do not find correspondence in the CEE space (Rivera 1996). Therefore, because parties could not appeal to interest representation of collective identities formed on fault lines, their formation had to have other roots. Instead, parties were created on the basis of attitudes towards institutional aspects of regime change (van Biezen 2003, 159). That explains why in these countries, more than one anti-communist party emerged with similar societal targets, but nuanced attitudes towards the previous regime.

Given the general absence of cleavages, the vast majority of the CEE parties do not have societal, but rather institutional origins. This situation made it difficult to recognize the existence of traditional left-right axes of party competition within the CEE region. However, the absence of cleavages enforcing ideological and social differences does not imply that divisions associated with the electoral choices of citizens do not exist. Thus, although ideological differences between parties were blurry, electoral competition was marked by debates over the specific means by which to achieve common goals such as democratization, privatization, European accession etc. For example, economic issues revolved around differences of opinion on growth and distribution of resources within society: the role and intensity of state

intervention in redistributing income, free vs. directed mechanisms of distribution, and public vs. private property (Evans and Whitefield 1993).

The CEE electorates are open and volatile, and are rarely characterized by party identification (Rose and Mishler 1998; Millard 2004; Gherghina 2009; 2011). Votes are generally (re)allocated to reward or punish parties' behavior. Frequent vote shifts imply a fragile identification of the electorate with established parties, and indicate the availability of many voters for new electoral alternatives. CEE represents an illustrative case of this situation. Having emerged in an environment with strong anti-party feelings, post-communist parties faced an initial legitimacy problem that made the existence of stable psychological attachments among voters difficult. The non-crystallization of identities did not allow for a clear pattern of alignment (Mair 1997, 182). Weak societal roots strengthened the reticence of voters to attach long-time loyalty to one political competitor. The picture of low party loyalty is complete if we add the absence of stable constituencies that may enact strong political identities among voters (van Biezen 2003, 37), and the occurrence of numerous small parties with no stable norms and conventions in patterns of competition (Mair 1997). The latter render the electoral environment uncertain. All of these factors indicate that high levels of party identification cannot and should not be expected in CEE.

The fluidity of political support in CEE can also be demonstrated in the context of two macro-perspectives of global trends and technological developments. First, the CEE post-communist political parties emerged when volatility increased in the once stable Western European party systems (Rose and Urwin 1970; Pedersen 1983; Crewe and Denver 1985; Bartolini and Mair 1990; Franklin et al. 1992; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Therefore, even within party systems in which preferences were stable, voters modified their preferences. Second, these parties skipped a few phases of development (i.e. the mass party phase and communication with the electorate via members and local organizations), and had direct access to modern resources. They emerged in an era of developed media with multiple channels of information, in a time at which opinion polls are a widely used means of measuring public opinion, and voters have greater access to higher education and develop different values and interests compared to those of their predecessors. Apart from the observable advantages of such a context for political parties (i.e. effectiveness of communication, higher visibility), there are a few disadvantages that can favor shifts in electoral preferences. Electorates have access to more information about competitors, thereby widening their spectrum of choices, and increasing their availability.

These contextual situations indicate that cleavage-related factors cannot explain either the levels of or the variation in electoral volatility in CEE. Overall, as a consequence of the communist legacy, the post-communist space

has only very weak, if any, cleavages. The ideological fuzziness, the institutional origins of parties, the numerous entries into and exits from the political scene, the limited elite loyalty, and electorates' availability either contradict or have a logic parallel to the one implied by party competition along cleavage lines. This is the reason for which I now turn to non-cleavage factors (i.e. institutional determinants).

Institutional Explanations for Volatility

This section elaborates on the institutional sources of voter choice, explaining how certain features of party organization can diminish electoral volatility. Voters' preferences are more than just the result of socialization or experience (Berelson et al. 1954; Easton 1957). Politics consists of complex and sophisticated processes. As the choice among initial alternatives is not often accessible to ordinary voters, political parties simplify choices. In doing so, they generate symbols of identification and loyalty (Neumann 1956; Key 1964; Borre and Katz 1973; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000) that can stabilize the democratic polity and create continuity in electoral choices (Converse 1969). This process occurs if parties can create a communication chain with the citizens (Colomer 2001, 136). Voter choice is sensitive to the structure and positioning of competitors in the political space (Roberts and Wibbels 1999). Following this logic, the stability of political parties may lead to the maintenance of electoral preferences. In this context, stability requires the sending of coherent messages, the continuous presence of parties on the political arena, homogenous actions, and long-term perspectives for representation (i.e. recognizable labels and candidates).

Given their institutional origins and weak linkages to society, the CEE political parties developed two additional means of communicating with voters in addition to their use of the media: by way of ancillary structures (e.g. youth organizations), and/or active local party branches. The latter can establish direct communication with voters and can mobilize them if local organizations have autonomy in reaching decisions. To fulfill this communication task, local organizations should be able to – or be perceived by voters as being able to – channel societal demands and give them priority. For example, local organizations can set salient societal issues on the party's agenda or can promote candidates perceived by voters as being capable of representing them. In this respect, intense action at local level can bring parties closer to the voter, and can increase the probability of long-term attachment.

Strong anti-party feelings in the aftermath of regime change and the continuously low levels of trust in political parties can be partially explained by the lack of citizen involvement in politics. Low levels of party membership reflect this issue of involvement. At the same time, the membership organization creates the premises for societal webs that result in a stable core

of voters (i.e. low volatility). In this respect, complementary to the previous argument about decision-making at the local level, party members help to build an image of legitimacy and societal linkage. Members create social networks in which they can spread the message of the party or even create party loyalties. A high roster of party members sends the electorate a message of popular legitimacy, and provides the basis of a partisan discourse of strong ties with ordinary citizens (Scarrow 2000, 84). As a result, party membership can influence voters' preferences.

Similarly, the promotion of recognizable candidates on party lists can shape citizens' preferences.[2] It does so in three ways. First, it ensures long-term communication between candidates and voters – assuming that the candidate does not regularly shift between local constituencies – allowing a permanent exchange of votes for quality of representation. This communication often occurs as a result of the free media access of the incumbent MP. Consequently, the visibility of the candidate and of the party increases. Second, due to their access to state resources, incumbents bring benefits to their constituencies or at least they can always claim to do so. By adding extensive access to media channels to this situation we acquire a picture in which incumbent MPs can promote their image and constantly remind their voters of all the good things they do (Fiorina 1977; Stonecash 2008). Third, the promotion of incumbents can always bring to the fore messages of experience and professionalization of elites that newcomers cannot use. MPs who are re-nominated do not need time to accommodate to the workings of the legislature, understand the problems of their constituencies, or to become aware of the solutions at hand. These advantages can make a difference and their re-nomination may shape voters' preferences.

Summing up, the autonomy of local branches, membership rates, and re-nominated candidates are useful tools that parties can use to establish a better connection with the electorate. These variables are central to the key theoretical arguments (see Chapter 1) that are empirically tested (Chapters 3-6) to explain volatility in CEE. To this end, the following section briefly describes the case selection, general methodological issues, and data employed in the rest of the book.

Method and Data

Based on similarities in terms of former political regime, non-belonging to the Soviet Union, and paths towards democratization, this book focuses on the six

[2] The mechanism presented here complements the classic perspective according to which political parties renominate candidates considered to be successful. In doing so, I emphasize the supplementary benefit of voter stability that renomination can bring on top of the reelection (electoral performance).

former Warsaw Pact countries: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. The case selection has both theoretical and methodological underpinnings. Most studies of the post-communist space represent either extensive single-country studies or comparisons of two countries upon which generalizations can rarely be made (Pop-Eleches 1999; Szczerbiak 1999; Lewis 2000; 2001b; Kopecky 2001; Moser 2001; Spirova 2007), or broad comparisons that include general explanations, but neglect details and variables relevant for many observed countries (Miller et al. 1998; Moser 1999; Tavits 2005).

However, occupying a middle position on the ladder of generality, there are several relevant studies that selected a medium number of cases to provide both an in-depth analysis of political developments and a comparative perspective (Markowski 1997; Golosov 1998; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Lawson et al. 1999; Grzymala-Busse 2002a; Bozoki and Ishiyama 2002; van Biezen 2003). This approach provides at least two advantages. First, it is possible to conduct a better investigation of the processes and developments in the selected countries. Second, due to the different nature of variables, such a design allows for the combination of statistical and narrative comparisons based on extensive information gathered (Mahoney 1999). Moreover, a mid-range comparison is suitable for use in both a longitudinal and cross-country research contexts, provides rich information, and increases the quality of comparisons made.

By conducting an analysis that takes almost two decades into account for all these countries, I focus on the relevant political parties. In this context, relevance bears a different meaning than the one coined by Sartori (1976) who refers to the coalitional and blackmail potential of a political actor. My criteria for relevance are continuity in representation (i.e. spending a long period of time on the political scene), and contestation in a relatively independent manner. Accordingly, relevant political parties should be present in at least half of the legislatures elected after the fall of communism, and their presence there should be mainly the result of contestation on an individual basis (for details, see Chapter 2). These criteria eliminate parties with sporadic appearances in Parliament and those that got there due to specific conjunctures. For example, due to the lack of an effective electoral threshold, there were 29 parties in the 1991 Polish parliament, out of which only five survived in the subsequent 1993 parliament (Table 1 refers to six parties for 1993, as one emerged between the two elections).

The second criterion explicitly refers to those parties that gained access to parliament after running in various electoral alliances and coalitions. This is a specific situation in which the parties' appeal to voters remains a dilemma, as it is very difficult to asses whether citizens cast votes for them or for their partners. For example, the Christian Democratic National Peasants Party

(PNTCD) was the leading party within the Romanian coalition government between 1996 and 2000. However, it experienced contestation on individual grounds only once (in 1990) with modest results (2.6% of the votes). In the following three elections, the PNTCD formed a broad electoral coalition with various compositions and levels of success ranging from a peak of 30.2% in 1996 to 5% in 2000. In such instances, the evaluation of electoral potential is difficult.

Given the longitudinal nature of this study, these criteria diminish existing problems rather than create new ones. One may claim that a focus on parliamentary parties with a continuous presence in the legislature leads to a biased calculus of volatility. This is a valid observation for a different level of analysis – the party system – in which every component can make a difference in explaining vote shifts. However, when looking at individual parties, it is highly problematic to asses the volatility of actors with little support among citizens or with only sporadic appearances on the political scene. On the one hand, parties that are permanently outside the legislature have a very low level of electoral volatility, but this fact has virtually no substantive meaning. A party obtaining around 1% of the votes in a general election will appear very stable, but its performance makes it irrelevant in terms of the national political system. Consequently, by leaving them out, I avoid over-estimation of their electoral stability.

At the same time, in empirical terms, it is highly problematic to calculate the volatility for such parties as they are often included in the "other" category when electoral results are reported. On the other hand, neither the extra-parliamentary parties nor those with an occasional presence in the legislature develop the means – including the organization – to encapsulate the preferences of voters for a longer period of time. Quite often, some political actors gain short-term support as a result of factors such as the economic situation, or failure of the previous government or coalition partners. To conclude, application of the continuity and independence criteria leave minor parties or parties with a short existence based on contextual factors for their electoral performance outside the analysis.

The unit of observation in this study is the political party at election time. The time-period of analysis is the beginning of the transition period (1989-1990) until the most recent elections (Romania 2008). Table 1 presents the selection made for each country. The last column includes the number of parties that fulfill the selection criteria. By comparing it to the number of actors present in the legislature after each election, we get a rough estimate of the entries to and exits from the political scene. Bulgaria is the country with the least continuous parties in parliament, being characterized by numerous entries and exits into the party system (Spirova 2007). Hungary and Poland have the highest number of parties with consistent presence in parliament since their formation. The raw numbers hide the structural evolution of representation.

These two party systems have different traits in terms of volatility and stability (Lewis 2000; Bielasiak 2002; Birch 2003; Millard 2004; Sikk 2005; Webb and White 2007; Enyedi and Casal Bertoa 2011) which are also visible at the party level. Whereas in Hungary most of the six parties from the last column are in the legislature throughout the entire analyzed period, until 2001 only three Polish parties fulfilled the selection criteria. The most recent three elections promoted three more stable parties on to the political scene.

Table 1: Representation and Continuity in the CEE Legislatures (1990-2008)

Elections / Countries	Parties represented in parliament						Parties with consistent presence in parliament
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	
Bulgaria	3	5	5	4	7		3
Czech Republic	8	6	5	5	5		4
Hungary	6	6	6	4	5		6
Poland	29	6	5	7	6	6	6
Romania	17	7	6	5	5	6	5
Slovakia	5	7	6	7	6		5

Notes: a) independents are not counted; b) The numbers refer only to parties winning seats: reserved seats like those for the German minority in Poland or for the national minorities in Romania are excluded; c) in Hungary, I did not include the Agrarian Union (ASZ) in 1990 and 1994 as it obtained only a single seat.

This analysis approaches the topic of volatility from the perspective of political parties which has two immediate conceptual and methodological consequences. First, the concepts of electoral stability and volatility are used interchangeably throughout the book as they are complementary: low electoral volatility implies high electoral stability and vice versa. Second, this study uses net volatility as a measure of aggregated vote shifts because the primary focus lies within the mechanisms that mobilize the electorate as a whole, and not particular individuals (see Chapter 2). The quest for sources of electoral volatility at the party level in new democracies from CEE relies on several arguments about the role of party organization in shaping voter behavior. With the contextual features of the post-communist space as a basis, the theoretical framework goes beyond the particularities of investigated party systems and sketches unifying principles that explain longitudinal and cross-country variations. In doing so, I construct a model to predict levels of electoral volatility. The empirical testing is organized in two phases: a) investigation of the bivariate relationship (i.e. correlation) between various components of party organization and net electoral volatility and b) use of the multivariate model (i.e. ordinary least squares regression) that includes – apart from the

three main effects presented in the previous section – control and systemic explanations.

Political and historical similarities were the main criteria used to select the six countries included in my study: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. The parties included in the analysis are[3]: BSP, DPS, and SDS in Bulgaria, CSSD, KDU-CSL, KSCM, and ODS in the Czech Republic, FKGP, FIDESZ, KDNP, MDF, MSZP, and SZDSZ in Hungary, PIS, PO, PSL, SD, and SLD in Poland, PDL, PNL, PRM, PSD, and UDMR in Romania, HZDS, KDH, MKP, SDKU, SNS, and SDL in Slovakia. As many of these parties have changed their labels across time and, as such, their histories are difficult to follow, I use the most recent label for the sake of consistency. This does not always correspond to the name of the actors involved in the political events. For example, the Romanian PSD acquired its current label in 2001 (renamed from PDSR), but I use this name when referring to the government period of its predecessor from 1992-1996.

Longitudinal developments represent a key issue in my study as they allow for the mapping of institutional effects on volatility over time within the same country. Accordingly, all data are collected at the level corresponding to the unit of observation (i.e. party/election). The period of investigation starts with the first free and fair elections in Hungary (1990) and ends with the most recent legislative elections in Romania (2008).[4] For most of the countries I account for five elections, though for Poland and Romania I account for six. As volatility is calculated only from the second election onwards, there are four observations for most countries, whereas Poland and Romania have five. The total number of political parties under investigation is 29; the number of analyzed political actors is different across countries ranging from three political parties in Bulgaria to six in Hungary. By combining the number of elections with that of political parties, the result is a total of 121 observations.

My analysis and argument follow a deductive model that starts with the most general level of explanation and is gradually narrowed to the most particular. It is organized in three layers: 1) patterns that are valid across time and countries, 2) country specifics and differences within the same party system, and 3) illustrations of how observed mechanisms function for individual parties. Whereas the statistical analyses are crucial for empirical testing at the first two layers, the mechanisms are revealed through single-case studies. Such insights are useful to illustrate how patterns identified by means of statistical analysis function in specific contexts.

[3] The full names of the parties included in analysis can be found in the list of acronyms placed at the front of the book.

[4] Czech Republic and Slovakia organized their first free elections as independent states in 1992; the ones in 1990 were still organized under the label of Czechoslovakia.

Overall, I use a combination of behavioral and institutional data relative to the conceptualization and type of variables. The dependent variable in the analysis is net electoral volatility and is calculated as a weighted difference in electoral performance in consecutive elections for each political party present in at least half of the national legislatures during the investigated period (for details, see Chapter 2). The three independent variables are centralization of candidate selection for the national elections, size and variation of membership organizations, and candidate re-nomination rates. The centralization of intra-party decision-making refers to the layer of decision-making pertaining to the list of party candidates used in national elections. Using document analysis, data are retrieved from party statutes and constitutions (Chapter 3).

Membership rates are calculated as the percentage of party members within the electorate as a whole. Data are collected from political parties (e.g. party headquarters, official websites, and publications), newspaper articles, secondary literature, and survey data. Accurate membership figures are difficult to obtain and claimed totals should be treated with caution. Whenever possible, I used triangulation to ensure data validity. This was particularly important due to the fact that various sources provided different estimates of party membership at similar moments in time. I have relied on three types of sources: the parties' official reports or estimates of their individual memberships[5] and secondary sources[6].

Re-nomination of candidates refers to the percentage of previous MPs that are re-nominated on the lists of candidates. The calculus of the ratio was based on the data provided by national parliaments' websites and on party lists of candidates (see Chapter 5). The data used for these three main effects are original and often complement existing figures (e.g. party membership). For control variables (see Chapter 1), the data were collected from secondary sources (for party system volatility), electoral databases and websites of national elections (for turnout), and party websites or secondary literature dealing with histories of the parties (for government incumbency). Unless sources are explicitly specified at the bottom of tables or graphs, the data used in this book are original. Similarly, although the results of elections are publicly available, the electoral volatility - and related concepts such as elasticity – is calculated on the basis of formula provided in the following chapters.

[5] Parties report aggregate figures and often use suspiciously rounded numbers. They are not very reliable sources for data on membership (Mair and van Biezen 2001) as they often augment their number of members. I carefully handled this type of information and – whenever possible – confronted the figures with those existing in previous studies.

[6] When figures were contradictory, a choice between the alternative numbers had to be made. in doing so, I followed the numbers provided by more independent sources.

What is New?

Earlier research on electoral volatility has two visible shortcomings. First, there are no studies that have tested the relationship between institutional structures and their acceptance in society. Instead, the latter is generally explained by exogenous factors at aggregate level (i.e. party system). Second, many conceptualizations of party organization allow little or no replicability, as they are based more on in-depth or contextual knowledge of the cases. There are very few indicators to allow comparability and further investigation. This study fills these gaps using three interrelated strategies. First, unlike previous explanations that emphasize the effects of exogenous factors on electoral volatility, this book focuses on the impact of endogenous factors. In this respect, the central argument is that certain features of party organization can explain variation in electoral volatility. At the party level, electoral volatility is not solely the result of general processes such as democratization, economic performance, or electoral framework (see Chapter 1). In an unstable environment such as that of CEE in the first decade after the fall of communism, I argue that party organization can play a crucial role in shaping voter choice.

Second, from a methodological standpoint, this analysis combines quantitative and qualitative techniques in an innovative design intended to capture the substance of relationships between party organization and the electorate. This analysis operationalizes the concept of party organization and measures its component features to identify differences and the effects they produce. These measurable indicators of party organization justify the consideration of this variable in further research designs to explain other processes related to electoral systems (e.g. the entries and exits of parties to and from the political arena).

Apart from these contributions, this research yields three other innovations. First, it shifts the level of analysis from party system to party level, investigating what happens *within* the system. By narrowing the analytical focus, I examine variations in volatility often disregarded by system-level approaches. Political parties represent the basic unit of interaction and change within a political system. They are the primary agents of representation and the main competitors in legislative elections. Consequently, political parties are the level at which vote shifts should be observed and explained. Second, the book proposes a different approach to the study of the manner in which political parties relate to their electorates. Previous studies illustrate how parties react to existing constraints (Harmel and Janda 1982; Mair et al. 2004).

Parties are politically purposive organizations with a political ideology (Luther and Muller-Rommel 2002, 6) that individualizes them in the electoral space and shapes their relationships with the voters. They are dynamic organizations that suffer changes at the structural and institutional levels (Katz

and Mair 1992; 1994; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000, 4) most of the time as an effect of the environment. This mechanism is underpinned by a two-faceted reasoning. On one hand, parties are considered rational actors that react and adapt to the constraints and opportunities provided by the electoral market (Kirchheimer 1966). On the other hand, political parties are influenced in terms of their organization, ideological positioning, membership, and policy proposals by state organizations, the type of government (i.e. presidential vs. parliamentary systems), the electoral system, democratic experience (Rae 1971; Harmel and Janda 1982), and electoral law (Sartori 1976; 1997). However, my analysis investigates whether or not this relationship is univocal. The central argument is that political parties can also be in the position to influence the institutional settings in which they operate.

Such an argument was earlier explored by Sartori (1969) in his theoretical review of the differences between the sociology of politics and the political sociology. The latter states that politics is no longer solely a reflection of the society; it can also shape it. In particular, when investigating the relationship between social class and political party, Sartori concludes that the existence of political parties is not a consequence of class. On the contrary, the political parties, through their organizational coverage and pressure, shape the class and the ideology that accompanies (or implies) it (Sartori 1969, 84-85). Accordingly, political parties do not only reflect the cleavages, but also produce them. Consequently, parties activate, channel, deflect, repress, or reinforce the cleavages, thus shaping their environment (Sartori 1969, 89).

A further example of party organizational influence on external settings can be identified in Katz and Mair's discussion (1995, 22) about the cartel party. They argue that once in government, parties practically become the state, having the capacity to influence the rules of the game and, thus, the environment. Third, it is the first comparative study to test the relationship between components of party organization and the electorate. By explaining behavior~~s~~ in the context of endogenous institutional features, the results can provide an institutional explanation for the level of electoral volatility in CEE states, and can reveal the mechanisms used by parties to influence their environment. In this respect, this study may contribute to the institutional theory by providing an explanation for variations in electoral volatility and by showing that formal and structural institutionalization of political agencies enhances further institutionalization.

The societal relevance of this study rests on two arguments. First, this study offers an empirical test of institutional influence on behaviors of voters. Party organization may have both a direct and indirect effect on society. The direct effect to be investigated implies a relatively stable electorate as a result of organizational stability. The indirect effect is based on two consecutive steps. Initially, the organizational structure of political parties leads to an

organizational culture shaping the values of its members. Afterwards, these values are propagated in society through various channels of communication and institutions (bureaucracies) to which party members have access. Second, the existence of a nexus between party organization and electoral volatility can illustrate specific attitudes and expectations of the voters towards electoral competition and political actors. Voters' long-term preferences for a certain type of political party add new incentives in the context of electoral competition. In doing so, parties have the capacity to indirectly influence competition. For example, as parties depend heavily on votes, it is their interest to converge with citizen opinion. Consequently, they are likely to be sensitive to voters' messages.

In addition, a policy dimension can be identified. Policy-makers and party-strategists can use the fact that party organization has an influence on political institutions. Parties have the tendency to expand their patterns of organization to institutions in which they are involved. For example, relationships between MPs and members of government belonging to the same party are rooted in specific organizational structures created by that party.

Plan of the Book

The book is divided into six chapters evolving from basic guidelines on institutional explanations of electoral volatility to substantial empirical evidence. The sections above have introduced the key concepts, logic of the tested relationships, main determinants of electoral volatility, and methodological approaches. I will be returning to all of these subjects in greater detail in the first chapter of the book. This first chapter focuses on existing explanations of electoral volatility and also provides an analysis of the multi-layered character of the concept. The literature review and empirical evidence reveal two interrelated situations. First, given the contextual factors in CEE, the analytical level that makes most sense for the purposes of this study is the individual party. Second, there exist only poor explanations of variation in electoral volatility among these parties. Consequently, three institutional explanations are formulated to account both individually (on a bivariate basis) and collectively (in a multivariate model) for this variation.

Building on these premises, Chapter 2 conceptualizes and operationalizes electoral volatility, including also an empirical description of volatility throughout CEE. Two types of analyses are employed in order to gain a better picture of the region: the identification of general patterns for the CEE parties either at various moments – by introducing the time dimension – and by accounting for extreme support (i.e. the electoral elasticity); and the focus on a handful of cases to illustrate the evolution of their extreme volatility during the two post-communist decades.

Each of the following three chapters represents an empirical test of the bivariate relationship between components of party organization and electoral volatility: decentralization of candidate selection for the national elections (Chapter 3), party membership (Chapter 4), and MP re-nomination rates (Chapter 5). Their structure is similar: each chapter begins with a general description of the analyzed organizational component, continues with the statistical analyses, and ends with comparative cross-national and cross-party perspectives. The results of the bivariate analyses are comprehensively explored as they may provide relevant empirical support for each hypothesis. Each chapter concludes with an in-depth discussion of two political parties from different countries selected to provide an accurate representation of the observed effect.

The last chapter brings together the main effects and investigates the explanatory power of a multivariate model in which I introduce the control variables outlined in Chapter 1: party system volatility, turnover rates, and government incumbency. The chapter includes the substantive and methodological implications of this analysis for the study of electoral politics in new democracies in general.