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

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Citation

Gherghina, S. M. (2012, March 8). *Explaining electoral volatility in Central and Eastern Europe : a party organizational approach*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/18567>

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Issue Date: 2012-03-08

Chapter 1 | Party Organization and Electoral Volatility: An Analytical Model

Introduction

What is electoral volatility and how can it be explained? As these questions represent the starting points of my study, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear answer to both. Previous research has shown that electoral volatility is a multi-layered concept with complex analytical and empirical dimensions. Often calculated and analyzed at the aggregate party system level, electoral volatility emphasizes changes that occur at different levels of representation (Crewe 1985a, 8). Bartolini and Mair (1990, 25) distinguish between the party system, party block, and individual parties as three distinct levels at which volatility can be calculated. At the party system level, volatility encompasses electoral variation as a whole and includes the sum of parties' net electoral gains or losses in consecutive elections. It is a reliable indicator of relative strength and social rooting of political actors in consecutive elections (Krupavicius 1999, 8).

With respect to the changes identified at the party block level, these can refer either to a party family or to parties grouped along several dimensions: left-right, old vs. new, or opposition vs. government (Pennings and Lane 1998). We can distinguish between intra- and inter-block volatility. The first refers to electoral changes between parties from the same block, whereas the second captures vote swings between blocks. At the party level, electoral volatility is a reliable indicator of the acceptance of a party in a society (Lane and Ersson 1999, 127) and is often included in measurements of party institutionalization. Electoral volatility at the party level provides an indication of the number of voters gained or lost by individual parties between elections. Calculating volatility at the party level diminishes the major shortcoming of volatility calculated at the party system level: its blindness towards the parties contributing to it (Sikk 2005, 408). Thus, an accurate estimation of vote shifts between existing parties is captured best by party volatility.

Analysis of volatility at any of the three levels has a unique departure point: the electoral performance of a political party across time. The stability of electoral performance over time can be assessed within the broadest framework in which the party competes (i.e. the party system), alongside competition partners on various dimensions (party block), or at the individual party level. In this respect, the political party is the most important unit of analysis. This observation is also valid on theoretical grounds. In a functional

sense, political parties are the main tools of citizen representation. Parties are the visible actors that run in elections and are held accountable by voters for their actions and policies. A party's electoral performance is a function of the interaction between this party and voters, of the exchange of votes for policies. In this respect, it makes the most sense to analyze volatility where it occurs in practice – at the level of the individual party.

Party system and block volatilities have analytical value, but are constructed on the basis of behaviors observed at other levels. In this sense, Bartolini and Mair (1990, 4) explain that “electoral instability is a phenomenon originating at the level of individual behavior, but which acquires political relevance only by reference to the changes which it produces in the structure of party systems”. Block volatility is an intermediary between the party system and individual party levels. It aggregates electoral swings on certain dimensions: ideological, governmental etc. Although it is necessary to understanding the dynamics within a political system, block volatility does not provide the basis upon which substantial conclusions can be drawn about parties' electoral volatility, as the configuration of these blocks often changes. In conceptual and empirical terms, of the substantive characteristics of party blocks are rarely consistent across countries thereby limiting our ability to compare these units across different settings. This is why this concept has been left out of my analysis.

In light of the exclusion of block volatility from this analysis, this chapter focuses on volatility from the standpoint of both the macro (party system) and meso (party level) perspectives. This chapter differentiates between these two analytical levels and explores the determinants of electoral volatility. The first section provides an analysis of the layers of volatility and explains the reasons for which volatility in CEE should be regarded as a function of individual parties and not of the party system. In spite of this analytical differentiation, the party system and party levels are interconnected. This is the reason for which the sources of electoral volatility can have an influence on both layers. As such, the second section of this chapter emphasizes explanations of electoral volatility in a sequential manner, approaching then general (party system), mixed, and individual party levels in that order.

In this section, I argue that despite theoretical reasons to expect various institutional and behavioral factors to have an effect, most determinants of volatility have either no variation or no explanatory potential in the CEE context. Consequently, previously unexplored factors are considered as possible explanations. In this sense, the third section of this chapter proposes an institutionally-embedded explanatory framework – based on party organization – as the key explanation of party level volatility in CEE. An idea such as this is expressed in broad terms by Kostecky (2002) who argued that the organizational weakness of parties is a major factor contributing to the

observed electoral volatility in CEE party systems. Of the many party organization components that may influence electoral volatility, only three have the potential to explain variation in CEE: candidate selection, party membership, and MP re-nomination. I formulate testable hypotheses for each of these components. The fourth section of this chapter presents my analytical model which includes these three main effects and the control variables. This model represents the basic skeleton of the empirical tests in Chapters 3-6.

Party System and Party Volatility

Most of the existing literature refers to the party system when analyzing electoral volatility. However, as was shown in the introduction to this chapter, there are theoretical and methodological reasons for favoring the party level approach. In addition, three empirical arguments – all specific to CEE – lend support to this idea. First, the post-communist party systems are structurally unstable. They are characterized by a large number of entries and exits thereby generating episodic appearances in the political space. In consecutive elections, the format and composition of the party system are rarely similar and methodological problems related to comparability arise. For example, Bulgarian politics has displayed continuous change over the past two decades, with only three parties that have successfully participated in half of the elections (BSP, SDS, and DPS).

As a result of the fact that the same parties have not participated in all elections, the party system measurement cannot distinguish between volatility among stable parties and volatility created by entry and exits (Neff Powell and Tucker 2008, 2-3). As these two types of volatility have different causes and effects on political processes, it is crucial to isolate and calculate them separately. By lumping them into a common measurement we create confusion and provide results that are not only difficult to interpret, but also far removed from reality. Moreover, previous studies (Sikk 2005) illustrated that in CEE an index of volatility calculated at party system level ignores the parties contributing to it. Consequently, looking at the components of the party system and evaluating their performance from a cross-sectional and a cross-time perspective allows for a deeper understanding of the political dynamics in the region.

Second, only an investigation conducted at the party level is able to answer questions related to splits, mergers, coalitions, and label modifications. Such developments are essential to tracing the histories of political parties which are relevant in terms of electoral performance. These decisions are elite driven and usually rely on beliefs about voter behavior, assumed to either influence it or to be an effect of it. Sometimes the two rationales are combined. For example, electoral coalitions are both proactive (as the parties that decide to join forces wish to maximize their performance in the upcoming elections)

and reactive (as they are built on favorable signals received from the electorate). Empirically, this interplay between political actors and their supporters can only be fully captured if developments within parties are closely examined. The following example illustrates this argument: Party A, running in the elections t and t_1 , has a split at half the distance between the two elections. The splitter, Party B, does not compete alone in elections, but merges with Party C in election t_1 . Assuming that Party B has some electoral support, Parties A and C will both end up with different degrees of electoral volatility. Thus, without accounting for party dynamics, the relationship between voters and representatives is misleading.

Finally, size is a relevant feature of political parties when considering their societal support. Apart from the visibility of the party dimension in terms of government functioning or in occupying positions in the political system, this feature also differentiates parties with respect to electoral volatility. A small party that appeals to 5-6% of the electorate and loses 2% of its usual vote share suffers much more than a large party that gathers, on average, 20-22% of votes and loses the same amount. Thus, without accounting for differences and conflating the volatility scores into a single measurement at the party system level, the gains and losses of small parties are underestimated, whereas for large parties they are overestimated. A methodological shortcoming such as this cannot be overcome when accounting for the effective number of parties. The score obtained indicates a relative division of power and importance between parties within the system at a given moment; it still does not say much about the extent to which parties perform relative to their own position in the system. Put simply, calculating absolute vote transfers does not provide an accurate image of voting patterns within a party system. It provides only comparability between countries. The longitudinal performance of parties is best accounted for in terms of relative gains and losses.

As a consequence of all of these features, electoral volatility at the party system level may not reflect the dynamism of relevant competitors within the system. That is why I focus on the volatility of individual parties that are *relevant* to the political system (see Introduction). However, there is a linkage between parties and the party system that is visible in many areas from policy drafting to electoral results. Accordingly, it is expected that a linkage will exist between the party and party system volatility. Moreover, as they are not always easy to separate in practice, the effect of some determinants is visible at both levels. For this reason, the next section structures the discussion of the determinants of electoral volatility in three separate categories. First, it refers to the determinants (e.g. electoral system, democratization) that are visible solely at party system level. Variations are expected to occur across time and space.

Second, there are some country level determinants (e.g. the number of parties, voter turnout) that may have an influence on parties. Finally, there are determinants (e.g. party organization, party identification) that have an influence exclusively at the party level. These indicators are the most important in the context of my research design. If this is the case, why then should I account for the other factors? The determinants of party system volatility cannot explain variation in volatility at the party level. These determinants are constant for all of the components of a party system at a particular moment in time. For example, political parties within a country develop in the same democratic environment, face similar economic crises, and fight according to the same electoral rules. Although such determinants appear irrelevant in the context of the cross-party analyses pursued in this book, they may be valuable in the context of longitudinal comparisons. This is the reason for which they are approached systematically in the following section, with an explanation of both the theoretical reasons behind the relationship with volatility and the reasons for which they may or may not represent relevant explanations.

Determinants of Electoral Volatility

Many factors shape a voter's decision to attach loyalty to a particular political party. These factors range from the socio-psychological characteristics of the voter, to institutions and the outcomes they generate. Previous research on advanced democracies has tended to explain electoral volatility according to three major categories of factors: cleavage structures, electoral institutions, and economic performance. The resulting picture is complex and blurred, characterized more by mixed evidence rather than by clearly identifiable explanatory patterns. In general, these explanations appear to be context-dependent, as they are often case (e.g. country or region) or time specific.

The inception of this type of explanation was prompted by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) who argued that parties mobilize voters on the basis of cleavage structures that have existed for decades in Western European countries. Two studies that followed sought to add nuance to Lipset and Rokkan's theory. First, in their attempt to explain the stability of post-1945 Western European countries, Rose and Urwin (1970) presented refined evidence of the strong social connections between voters and parties. Second, Pedersen (1979) argued that electoral volatility after 1960 – within the same universe of cases studied by Rose and Urwin – was rooted in the de-alignment of class and party. All these studies reveal one basic conclusion: longitudinal change in electoral preferences is a result of the transformations that take place in terms of value and social structures (Dalton et al. 1984, 451).

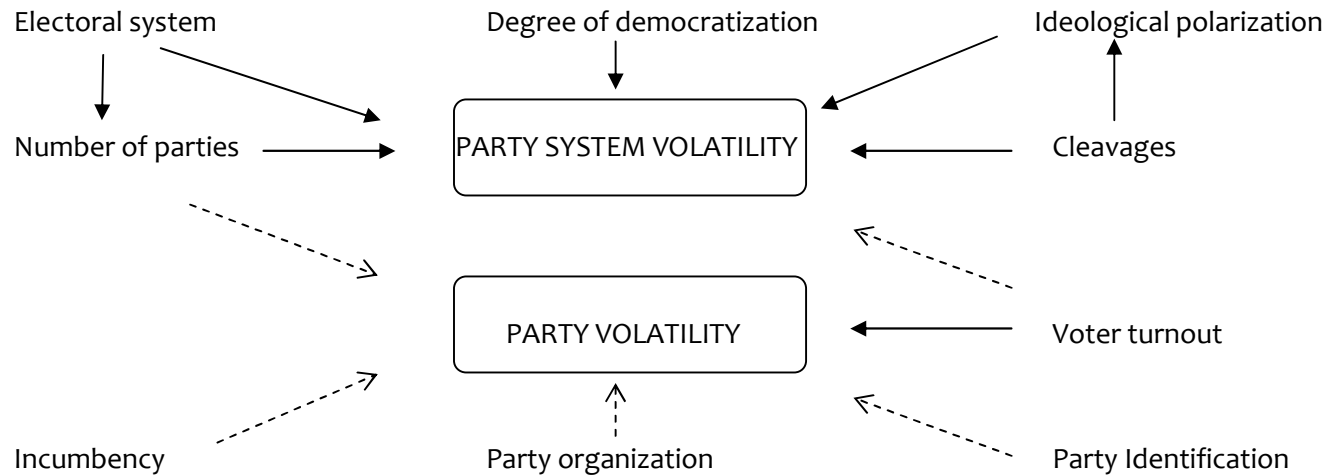
Building on these two studies, the research to follow put forth yet more explanations of electoral volatility. In his analysis of several Western European countries, Crewe (1985b, 129) argues that ideology plays a role in voting

behavior. The way in which people vote and change their vote can be explained in terms of the relationship between their own positions and the perceived party positions on major divisive issues. This emphasis on the ideological sources of vote commitment is complemented by Bartolini and Mair's focus (1990) on the party system format (i.e. the number of competing parties), the electoral system, and the political system (i.e. voter turnout). The complexity of providing an exhaustive explanation of volatility convinced Bartolini and Mair (1990, 282) to categorize the causes of volatility in five main groups: changes in the electoral system, the format of the party system, cultural segmentation, the density of organizations connected to political parties, and short-term factors.

Lane and Ersson (1999, 198) conceptualize and operationalize this last "short-term factors" category by breaking it down into party membership, votes for the left, convergence on the economic right-left scale, and economic vulnerability due to openness. Using such detailed accounts, their results explained almost 70% of the aggregate variation in electoral volatility compared to the less than 50% explained by Bartolini and Mair. Summing up, over the course of three decades, the number of explanations applying to a limited number of countries significantly increased. Similarly, the type and nature of explanations became diversified.

Following the recent research focus on post-Communist countries (Lewis 2000; Birch 2001; Sikk 2005; Tavits 2005), a few additional causes of electoral volatility can be put forth. These causes are depicted graphically in Figure 1.1 and include country level (i.e. the electoral system, cleavage structure, the number of parties, or degree of democratization), party level (i.e. ideological polarization, incumbency, and party organization), and voter related (i.e. party identification and turnout) determinants of electoral volatility. In line with the discussion of the previous section, this figure suggests a multi-layered approach. It differentiates between determinants of party system and party level volatility. Previous research has often referred to these two layers interchangeably. However, the separation of these two layers is empirically necessary to avoid confusion and to illustrate the effects at the primary level of occurrence. Accordingly, Figure 1.1 explicitly illustrates what previous research assumed or implied: some determinants act at the system level through individual parties.

Figure 1.1: Determinants of Electoral Volatility for Party System and Individual Party Levels



Note: The different styles of arrows⁷ indicate the various levels at which the effect is observed (regular arrow for party system and dotted arrows for party).⁸

⁷ The arrow structure in the figure is simplified, without connecting all inter-dependent variables, as the goal was to illustrate how determinants connect with volatility. Thus, clearcut relationships like the one between ideological polarization and the number of parties is not visible in the

Though not depicted in the figure, these two layers are expected to be permanently inter-connected: party level volatility influences party system volatility and vice versa. The electoral volatility of the party system is the sum of the vote shifts among its components. Conversely, the volatility of individual parties can be shaped by the environment in which they develop. That is why some explanations provided by previous studies were primarily identified at the level of individual parties and afterwards extrapolated to the party system.

The following three sub-sections examine the relationships between these causes and the electoral volatility at party system and party levels. The theoretical rationales behind these linkages are complemented by empirical results that clarify their functioning in CEE. Following these insights, the central argument of this section is that explanations of volatility at party level are better than those at the party system level to capture the dynamism of electorates in general and in CEE in particular. Such an insight allows for cross-party analysis within the party system in which large variations are observed (see Chapter 2). Among the party level explanations, the most salient and underexplored relationship is the one between party organization and electoral volatility to be thoroughly examined in the second section of this chapter.

Determinants of Party System Volatility

Figure 1.1 includes four factors considered to influence electoral volatility in the party system exclusively: the electoral system (and changes to it), the level/degree of democratization, the party system format, and the ideological polarization of political parties. This sub-section sheds light on the way in which these factors function and how they apply to the CEE context.

The Electoral System

The components of the electoral system appear to make a difference with respect to the level of party system volatility. In general, the linkage between the stability of institutional rules and that of electoral choice is uncertain (Bielasiak 2002). In particular, there are a few observable linkages. In their longitudinal study of the Western European countries, Bartolini and Mair (1990, 39) explain volatility in terms of several changes in electoral institutions (including regulations), franchise enlargement, introduction or abandonment of compulsory voting, provisions of electoral laws, and the disproportionality of different electoral systems. In contemporary times, most of these elements either do not vary (i.e. the franchise) or they are no longer on the political agenda (i.e. compulsory voting). Consequently, only the proportionality of the system continues to be a variable that can explain variation in electoral support. The mechanisms at work here are driven in large part by the formula employed and the electoral laws at work specifying modifications to the electoral threshold or district magnitude.

Electoral setting can, thus, indirectly influence voter choice and the stability of preferences by way of the “psychological” (complementary to the “mechanical”⁹) effects of electoral systems (Duverger 1954). These effects imply the presence of strategic incentives both for voters (who seek to avoid wasting their votes) and politicians under different electoral rules (Blais et al. 2001; Gschwend 2007). These incentives influence the number and nature of political choices that voters confront. For example, high explicit electoral thresholds discourage political parties from contesting seats (Rae 1971; Lijphart 1994; van Biezen 2003; Bakke and Sitter 2005). In a situation such as this, voters face limited choices and are encouraged to cast strategic votes for larger parties. By discouraging the expansion of alternative vote choices, the level of electoral volatility is likely to be reduced.

Yet none of these theoretical arguments are supported by evidence from the CEE countries. To start with, the electoral threshold, the average total electoral volatility calculated at the party system level (Enyedi and Casal Bertoa 2011, 134), indicates that countries with similar thresholds display stark differences. For example, Romania and Poland have similar thresholds for political parties (5%) and coalitions (8%)¹⁰, but the average volatility scores are extreme in both cases: 19.1 for Romania and 34.3 for Poland. As these are also the only countries in CEE that did not use electoral thresholds in their first free elections – 1990 in Romania and 1991 in Poland – the likelihood that similar volatility trends and values will be experienced in both cases increases. Similarly, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have the same 5% threshold for political parties, but the average volatility of the former is situated around 21%, whereas in Slovakia it is 6% higher.

Moreover, the theoretical expectation according to which countries with higher thresholds should have lower volatility is not supported by evidence in CEE. 176 out of the 386 seats in the Hungarian parliament are allocated on the basis of competition in single member districts. These districts have very high implicit thresholds. The average volatility of Hungary’s party system is higher than that of Romania and that of the Czech Republic, both of which have lower electoral thresholds: 19.1% and 21% respectively. In addition, a longitudinal investigation provides supplementary evidence. Contrary to the argument presented above, the electoral volatility of one country is proportional to the size of the electoral threshold (e.g. when one increases, the other increases as well). If we look at 2000 when the electoral threshold in Romania increased to 5%, its party system volatility scored 29.1 compared to

⁹ They refer to the aggregation of votes into seats under different formulas.

¹⁰ The difference between the two electoral systems consists of supplementary thresholds in Romania, depending on the number of parties within a coalition: 9% for three parties and 10% for four or more parties.

14.3 in 1996 (Sikk 2005, 396). Similarly, the threshold cannot explain variation in volatility when the threshold remains constant. For example, Hungary has had a stable set of rules throughout the entire post-communist period, yet its volatility varied greatly reaching a peak of 31.7 in 1998 and a minimum of 8.4 during the 2006 elections (Enyedi and Casal Bertoa 2011, 134). Summing up, the electoral threshold appears to have no impact on volatility levels, as there is no visible empirical pattern in their relationship.

With respect to district magnitude, the theoretical expectation is that large magnitudes yield an increase in the number of parties and diminish disproportionality in representation (Rae 1971; Taagepera and Shugart 1989). High district magnitudes allow a large number of political parties to coexist and compete, thereby expanding the breadth of choices available to voters and increasing electoral volatility. However, the results of the study conducted for CEE countries by Tavits (2005) indicate that magnitude is negatively related to electoral volatility.

Regarding another component of the electoral system, earlier research has shown how the electoral formula employed can indirectly influence volatility. The effect of electoral formula is mediated by proportionality (Lijphart 1994). Assuming that voters are at least minimally rational, Bartolini and Mair (1990, 152-155) explain how strong and perceptible constraints on voting choice lead to increased volatility. The electoral formulas that ensure high proportionality when transforming votes into seats allow voters to maintain partisan preferences. Extremely disproportional systems require voters to employ strategic behavior, as they have to avoid wasting their votes. As a result, individuals replace their potentially losing preference with the most acceptable alternative and, as such, a greater degree of vote switching is likely to be observed. In terms of further constraints on the voter, majority formulas are more likely to produce higher volatility than proportional representation (PR) formulas.

The evidence from CEE does not support this linear linkage. The countries with a partially different formula than the rest (Hungary and Romania as of 2008) do not display a clear pattern of higher/lower electoral volatility compared to the rest. Moreover, they do not cluster at various moments in time. At a general level of abstraction, the Czech Republic resides in between the two countries, with Slovakia following Hungary closely in terms of volatility. Moreover, the party system volatility of Romania in 2008 is considerably lower than it was in 1996 when a PR system was used. In light of this evidence, it appears that electoral system components are not helpful in explaining party system volatility in CEE.

The Degree of Democratization

A second major determinant of party system volatility is the level of democratization. Its influence is both direct and indirect. Increased democratization stabilizes patterns of party competition. The direct consequence of this is the production of a low-volatility system in which the entry of new competitors is highly unlikely. The continuous existence of parties combined with low turnover allows voters to get used to the competitors and start attaching their loyalty accordingly. Given the relatively low vote fluctuations, the citizens are able to learn what these parties stand for from one election to the next. Along these lines, a recent study of Third World countries indicates that volatility is negatively correlated with the degree of democratization (Lundell 2008).

Furthermore, the level of democratization has an indirect effect on party system volatility, which is intermediated by the time factor and the number and polarization of parties. The heterogeneity, division, and polarization of the political spectrum in the years immediately following regime change appear to influence the behavior of the political parties. As time passes by, countries reached democratic performances. There was the expectation to have more stable party systems in countries that have finished their transition and reached democratic performance. Tavits (2005) shows that in the first years of political transition to democracy, the level of electoral volatility was high in post-Communist countries and that stable support emerged only after a decade, when democratic performances were reached.

However, inspection of further evidence from the CEE countries reveals a blurry picture. A close look at the speed of democratization in the former Warsaw Pact countries until 1999¹¹ and their party system volatility does not reveal any linear cross-country and/or longitudinal relationship. For example, the Bulgarian party system (in a country that has experienced a slow democratization process) has a smaller average party system volatility over the first three democratic elections (20.7) compared to Hungary (28.4) or Poland (26.4) that were forerunners of democratization in the region. Moreover, within the same country, there is no coherent pattern to be identified. For example, party system volatility values in the 1992 and 2000 Romanian elections were similar; the Czech Republic registered a decrease in party system volatility as democratization progressed (from 27 in 1996 to 15.8 in 1998); whereas Bulgaria consistently increases from 18.5 in 1991 to 24.6 in 1997.

¹¹ This is the year in which all these countries signed on to initial EU accession negotiations, thus receiving formal recognition of their democratic achievements.

Summing up, there is no identifiable linkage between democratization and party system volatility in the six studied countries.¹²

The Ideological Polarization

The ideological polarization of parties represents a third factor that can influence party system volatility. The spatial models of competition illustrate how both policy positions (Laver and Hunt 1992) and distances between these positions can have an impact on volatility. The theoretical underpinnings of this claim draw on Enelow and Hinich's claim (1984) that voters cast their votes for the parties closest to them in a political space of salient issues. Regarding the positioning on the ideological spectrum, it is argued that parties to the left are better able than those to the right to create local organizations and maintain a more stable core of voters (Duverger 1954). In the post-Communist space, the political actors of the left are mainly successor parties that inherited organizational resources from their predecessors and experienced continuity in their relationship with the voter (see Chapter 2).

In this particular case, institutional legacies coincide with the party's positioning to the left. In general, mapping the political space in CEE is problematic. It is difficult to specify a set of non-controversial ideological dimensions upon which to distribute parties (Bohrer II et al. 2000, 1164). Mapping is impeded in part by the blurry cleavage structure discussed in the following sub-section. Even if conventional axes are drawn, there is often substantial disagreement regarding the placement of political parties on them (Kitschelt 1992; Day et al. 1996; Bugajski 2002; Millard 2004; Vachudova and Hooghe 2009). Given these methodological and empirical obstacles, policy positions provide no substantive explanation for volatility in CEE.

Regarding political distance, Bartolini and Mair (1990, 38) test its influence on the electoral mobility of voters. Bartolini and Mair (1990, 196) argue that preferences may become stable and behavior can change according to the choices available. However, they found no evidence to support this relationship in the Western European democracies. In CEE, where parties lack clearly defined competition axes and occupy loose ideological positions, such a relationship is even more difficult to observe. Moreover, Bielasiak (2002) presents evidence illustrating that even when voters identify party positions on issue dimensions, there is still little attachment to political parties.

Overall, the application of the three determinants of party system volatility appears to be problematic in the CEE context. In spite of strong theoretical reasons to expect explanatory potential and previous evidence in

¹² This conclusion does not imply only linear relationships. The matrix of the democratization levels and electoral volatility reveals a spread of cases that does not allow for the identification of any pattern,

support of such explanations in other regions of the world, the relevance of these three determinants in the post-communist landscape is limited. One reason for this situation is the specific character of CEE (see Introduction). There is little if any correspondence between the concepts employed for other regions and those for CEE (e.g. the format of the party system, ideological polarization, etc.). A second reason is the absence of variation in some determinants (e.g. some components of the electoral system, the age of democratization). A third reason is based on empirical evidence that either goes against previous results or illustrates a random distribution of values (e.g. the electoral system). On these grounds, none of the three possible causes plays a crucial role in explaining variation in volatility between party systems. With this in mind, let us now turn to the variables influencing both party system and individual party volatility.

Determinants of both Party System and Party Volatility

Earlier studies have revealed the importance of the number of parties and cleavages in shaping voter preferences. Consequently, these two variables can also explain the variation of electoral volatility for individual parties or for a party system.

The Number of Parties

The number of parties has been identified in previous research as playing a role in determining party system volatility. High degrees of electoral competitiveness and party system fragmentation coincide with high electoral volatility (Coppedge 1998; Mainwaring 1998a; 1998b; Bielasiak 2002). When voters have many available alternatives among the parties running in elections, there is a general tendency towards high rates of electoral volatility. Bartolini and Mair (1990, 136-138) present evidence from Western European countries showing that the number of parties positively correlates with electoral volatility. Further arguments explain why volatility is expected to be greater in those systems in which voters have more choice in elections.

Pedersen (1979; 1983) was the first to reveal a positive relationship between the number of parties and electoral volatility, yielding two conclusions: more parties create more volatility and a change in the number of parties fielding candidates increases volatility. The latter is Janus-faced as it can mean an increase in the number of parties due to new entrants or a decrease in this number due to erstwhile competitors dropping out. However, when voters have fewer choices and they want to change their preference, there are insufficient choices available to them in order to do so. However, Bartolini and Mair (1990, 131) show that a change in the number of parties cannot explain volatility; a change in the number of parties can also be an effect produced by volatility not only its cause. Consequently, the number of parties remains a

determinant of volatility. How does it influence volatility? There are two mechanical effects at work. First, voter choice is characterized by a certain degree of randomness. An increase in the number of competitors leads to an increase in random choices. Accordingly, volatility increases as a result of this randomness (Neff Powell and Tucker 2008, 12-13). Second, related to the policy positions, Madrid (2005, 2) shows that an increase in the number of parties decreases the policy distance between competitors (as the political space becomes more crowded). As a result, voters have more options close to their policy preferences and can easily shift their votes between elections. Again, volatility is expected to go up in response.

In spite of these clear theoretical linkages, previous research has revealed mixed empirical evidence. On one hand, Bartolini and Mair (1990), Remmer (1991), Roberts and Wibbels (1999), Birch (2001), and Birnir (2001) report a positive correlation between party system fragmentation and volatility. According to their results, the presence of more competitors coincides with high volatility. On the other hand, Mainwaring and Zoco (2007) and Neff Powell and Tucker (2008) find little or no effect of the number of competitors on electoral volatility. In addition to these inconsistent results, there are a few empirical problems. First, the number of parties can explain volatility at the party system level only. This measurement captures the cross-country differences, but fails to account for differences at the party level within the same party system. For example, the variable cannot explain why parties from a certain country have different levels of electoral volatility in the same election when the number of competitors is the same. Second, the evidence from CEE reveals one further empirical problem. Following the theory, fewer parties should lead to a decrease in volatility. There is a relatively constant decrease in the number of parliamentary parties in CEE elections (see Table 1 in the Introduction), but electoral volatility is characterized by ups and downs (see Chapter 2). Given these issues, the number of parties does not appear to be a useful indicator of volatility in the CEE countries.

The Cleavages

The second variable relating both to party system and party level volatility is the cleavage structure. Previous research has shown how social cleavages stabilize electoral politics (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Horowitz 1985; Bartolini and Mair 1990). Although considered thus far exclusively in relation to the party system, the cleavage structure relates to the social make-up of support accruing to individual parties, not to the system. The effects of social cleavages at the system level are registered through individual parties (Smith 1989, 351) and are usually reflected in the ideological alignment of parties on the political spectrum, the political identification of voters with specific parties, and the number of political parties within the system. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) argue

that societal cleavages provide anchors that stabilize mass preferences, thus reducing volatility. The basic mechanism at work is that parties are deeply rooted in class, religious, and other types of generative cleavages that are institutionalized through party competition and the development of mass parties. Once on the political agenda (i.e. by generating political conflict), cleavages provide bases of support for parties (Dalton 1988) and structure party competition and partisanship, allowing parties to target particular groups with their messages (Katz 1990; Birnir 2006). Accordingly, voting is primarily an expression of social position, values, and interests formed along cleavage lines (Tavits 2005, 287). The presence of cleavages can solidify the ties between parties and the electorate and can increase the predictability of political outcomes (Lijphart et al. 1993). Well-organized social cleavages close the electoral market (Bartolini and Mair 1990) and stabilize the preferences of the electorate, decreasing volatility. The absence of social cleavages leads to swings and volatility associated with personality politics and authoritarian populism (Evans and Whitfield 1993).

Specifically, the role of cleavages in determining voter preference is captured through electoral or partisan dealignment, referring to the eroding ties between parties and voters (Dalton 2000). This process had a variety of causes ranging from voters' social modernization (Franklin et al. 1992) and cognitive mobilization (Nie et al. 1976; Dalton 1984) to challenges faced by political parties in fulfilling their traditional functions (Flanagan and Dalton 1984; Lawson and Merkl 1988; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). In CEE, there is no prior alignment and political parties still search for mechanisms by which to strengthen their bonds with the electorate. The cleavage lines common to established democracies in the West can hardly be identified in CEE. The communist regimes leveled out major social differentiation with their egalitarian ideology and policies (van Biezen 2003, 35-36). For example, communist economic policies implied public property, mass education, and lack of wealth discrepancies, thereby inhibiting the formation of social classes (Evans and Whitefield 1993; von Beyme 1996; Elster et al. 1998).

Although social cleavages are absent in CEE, legacies of the past can be identified in contemporary societies in the form of divisions. Schattschneider (1960) explains that not all social differentiation is organized into politics. A division becomes a cleavage only when it structures people's identities and social actions (Gallagher et al. 1992). The absence of major cleavage lines does not imply the homogeneity of the CEE societies or the lack of divisions.¹³ On the contrary, there are a few obvious divisions that communism could not level out

¹³ Whitefield (2002) provides a list of social divisions for 12 East European democracies upon which voters can align. However, these divisions did not become cleavages as neither were parties formed along these lines nor were votes cast according to them.

(Tucker 2002) and may have even reinforced. One such example is the divide between the winners vs. losers of transition. The industrialization of some countries was equivalent to urbanization, in which massive movement of people from rural to urban areas was visible. Rural areas relied mainly on agriculture and the dissolution of collective farms created large-scale unemployment. During the transition to a market economy, state subsidies for agriculture were dramatically reduced, transforming the rural population into the losers of transition.

Based on these discrepancies between the winners and losers of transition, which correspond to various geographical areas, a few studies (Whitefield 2002; Tworzecki 2003) explain its impact on post-communist electoral behavior. If alignment is made on these cleavage lines, we would expect more agrarian parties to win seats and maintain rather stable electoral support. Only three parties belonging to this category have enjoyed a rather continuous presence on the political scene of their country (PSL in Poland, PNTCD in Romania, and FKGP in Hungary), the last two parties were not able to obtain seats in parliament starting 2000 and 2002 respectively.

Two other divisions had the potential to become cleavages in CEE: religion and ethnicity. Posner (2005) shows how cleavages can occur when circumstances change. The isolation of the church in most communist regimes could create a division within society between its supporters and opponents. As a result, we can expect societal divisions to exist in the post-communist period. However, with the exception of Poland, the religious cleavage is not observable in other countries. This outcome was also due to the fact that the church was represented only by few parties during democratization (Crawford 1996; Wittenberg 2006).

The issue of ethnicity is more nuanced. In the aftermath of regime change, one major challenge for many CEE countries was the accommodation of ethnic minorities and their re-emerging identities. During communism, nurturing ethnic identities was discouraged. The CEE nations were kept together by a common identity, imposed on them by the USSR – the politics of "one state, one nation, one population" (Linz and Stepan 1996). Three CEE countries under scrutiny have significant minorities that reside in their territories: the Hungarians in Romania and in Slovakia and the Turks in Bulgaria.¹⁴ Previous research has viewed ethnic identity as a function of contextual factors and political strategies adopted by the group leaders (Horowitz 1985; Laitin 1998; Chandra 2004). The early years of transition set the stage for such identities to reemerge. First, there were some clashes between majority and minority populations in Bulgaria (in the two regions where the

¹⁴ In the Czech Republic there is a secessionist movement belonging to the Moravians. However, they are not a distinct ethnic group, but rather have a strong regional identity.

Turks represent the majority of the population), Romania (in mixed towns in Transylvania), and Slovakia (on the border with Hungary).

Second, debates about the first post-Communist constitutions were dominated by ethnic issues in these three countries. Restrictive measures were included in the laws mostly consisting of the non-recognition of collective rights. Third, these ethnic disputes were politicized by the formation of parties along ethnic lines: Hungarians in Romania mobilized in 1989 and formed the UDMR, the Turks in Bulgaria founded the DPS in January 1990, while in Slovakia (then part of Czechoslovakia) several Hungarian parties were also formed in 1990 (Gherghina and Jigla 2011). Fourth, as a response, a few nationalist parties emerged: the PRM and the PUNR in Romania or the SNS in Slovakia. For example, the PUNR was formed in 1990 as the successor of the Transylvanian nationalist movement (Gallagher 1997, 29-31) perceiving its major role as a reply given to the political structures representing Hungarians in Transylvania (Soare 2010).

Accordingly, it seemed that an ethnic cleavage would develop in CEE and was expected to play an important role in post-communist politics (Lewis 2000, 143). Kitschelt (1992, 20) expected the ethnic dimension of collective political identification (including religious and linguistic differences) to be one with particular features. The first elections provided partial empirical support for these expectations. As a response to the ethnic mobilization described above, many parties played the nationalist card. For example, the successor communist parties in Bulgaria (BSP) and Romania (PSD) adopted an anti-ethnic minority discourse as an electoral strategy. However, the ethnic issue remained minimally salient throughout the post-communist period. It did not create a sharp societal division on which voters could align. It was mainly visible in the electoral support provided to ethnic parties. There is a process of stable ethnic voting amongst the minorities that is mainly fueled by ethnic socialization through information shortcuts. The most important source of political learning for ethnic voters is the members and leaders of their own ethnic group (Birnie 2007). Ethnic parties rely on these cues and this is the main reason for which the volatility of these parties is usually reduced.

This process did not lead to the creation of ethnic cleavages within societies, but only encapsulated voting preferences of ethnic minorities. The other side of this division is also no longer present in CEE: voters are no longer mobilized by anti-ethnic discourse. Although radical right or nationalist parties have not ceased to exist, their discourse changed as a result of the adaptation function. The initial anti-minority focus – characterized by xenophobic messages and appeals to violence – and defense of the country against external interference gradually lost the ethnic component and now targets contemporary issues such as social protection, migration, and the EU. Contemporary CEE radical right parties are preoccupied by different issues than

they were in the beginning of the transition period. Their discourse diversified to appeal to a broader electorate. Those parties that did not adapt also failed to enter parliament, for example the PUNR in Romania or the Justice and Life Party (MIEP) in Hungary. This adaptation function and change of discourse lead to the occurrence of nationalist parties long-time after the ethnic parties were constituted (e.g. Ataka was formed in Bulgaria in 2005) or to the emergence of these type of parties in countries with a very small percentage of ethnic minorities (e.g. Jobbik in Hungary). These late appearances on the political scene are accompanied by populist messages oriented not only against ethnic groups, but also against other political parties. All this empirical evidence suggests that ethnicity did not represent a major issue within the CEE societies.

Next to these institutional features, there is one behavioral aspect: electoral participation (Franklin 2004). Although changes in the size of the electorate were associated with party system electoral volatility, the basic mechanism exists at the party level. When turnout decreases and citizens who vote maintain their preferences between elections, the support for one party increases. Although the absolute number of its voters remains the same, its vote share increases. If one party has the same number of voters in consecutive elections, the oscillations of turnout lead to different calculations of the percentage of total vote share. As a result of this mechanism, it is theoretically possible to experience volatility without losing or gaining supporters. Empirically, earlier studies point out that changes in the size of the electorate are positively associated with volatility in Western European (Bartolini and Mair 1990) and Latin American countries (Madrid 2005). In a departure from these theoretical and empirical reasons, the turnout variable can explain volatility. As no previous study has tested its impact in CEE, I use it as a control variable in the empirical model I develop at the end of this chapter.

Summing up, the two variables that can explain party system and individual party level volatility are generally problematic in the CEE context. Most of the problems with these variables are empirical in nature. The number of parties provides mixed evidence in the post-communist region and has problems explaining longitudinal development of volatility. With the exception of an ethnic division that has the potential to mobilize voters of the few ethnic parties from CEE (see Chapter 2), cleavage structures are almost non-existent in CEE societies. Let us move on to the most particular level of explanation: the factors that can explain party level volatility.

Determinants of Party Level Volatility

The three variables that can influence party level volatility are government incumbency, party identification, and party organization. One of them, the party identification, is an individual level variable, whereas the other two are

party related. Accordingly, they explain the variations in electoral support from various perspectives.

Government Incumbency

First, elections often serve as visible milestones that reflect voters' tendency to hold incumbents responsible for their performance. Overall, there is demand for political change whenever significant downturns occur between elections. In CEE, citizens often evaluate government performance strictly in economic terms. When asked in an international survey about the most salient issue in the country, more than 80% of respondents indicated economy (ESS 2003). Using the same data, the correlation between evaluation of government activity and the economic situation in the country is above 0.6 – with modal values of 0.8 – in the CEE countries, all statistically significant (Gherghina 2011).

Political contexts are sometimes relevant in the assignment of credit and blame to incumbents (Anderson 2000) especially in local elections (Boyne et al. 2009). However, in CEE economic evaluations appear to be empirical proxies for government performance especially in the first post-communist decade (Fidrmuc 2000). A recent cross-national empirical study focusing on the six countries analyzed in this book shows that government performance is one key determinant of voter preference for incumbent political parties (Gherghina 2011). Moreover, Roper (2003) has shown that voters in Romania were repeatedly disappointed with incumbent governments and based their votes on these attitudes.

The economic variable appears to play such an important role that even partisans can turn away from their party in times of poor economic performance (Kinder and Kiewit 1981). Incumbent parties are directly affected by retrospective evaluations that are transformed into punishment or reward-based behavior on the part of voters (Kramer 1971; Fiorina 1981; Bellucci 1984; Ferejohn 1986; Lewis-Beck 1988; Powell and Whitten 1993; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000; Freire and Lobo 2005; Anderson 2007). In spite of their lower level of experience in elections, these mechanisms are also at work in the new democratic post-communist countries. Earlier studies (Fidrmuc 2000; Jackson et al. 2005; Tucker 2006) have indicated an economic effect of the vote for particular types of parties (e.g. reformists or successor parties). In short, with these attitudes at work, fluctuations in economic conditions increase electoral volatility (Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Tavits 2005). These theoretical and empirical factors indicate that government incumbency is a potential source of volatility at the party level. Accordingly, this book's empirical analysis includes it among the control variables.

Party Identification

If people were to vote based purely on their perception of the economy, approximately half of the voters would regularly change their electoral preferences (Wlezien et al. 1997). As that is not the case even in the unstable CEE (see the levels of volatility in Chapter 2), other underlying factors must affect volatility. A second variable that may explain volatility is an attitudinal feature identifiable at the individual level: party identification. Party identification has received considerable attention as determinant of vote choice (Belknap and Campbell 1952; Miller 1952; Campbell et al. 1954; 1960; Burdick and Brodbeck 1959; Converse 1962).

Two possible interpretations of the concept are available. First, party identification is seen as an enduring psychological affinity between the individual and the party (Campbell et al. 1960). Second, party identification is considered to be specific to short-term policy preferences and evaluations influencing vote choice (Miller and Shanks 1996). From this perspective, it is not rigid and is often modified depending on societal conditions (Lawson 1980) or political contexts (Fiorina 1981, 102). Irrespective of the manner in which it is conceptualized, the logical mechanism through which party identification represents an important predictor of voting behavior is the same: individuals who identify with a party tend to support it in elections.

In CEE, electorates are open and volatile and are rarely characterized by party identification (Rose and Mishler 1998). Frequent vote shifts suggest that the electorate identifies only loosely with established parties and indicate the availability of many voters for new electoral alternatives. CEE represents a case that is illustrative of these situations. Having emerged in an environment characterized by strong anti-party feelings, post-communist parties faced an initial legitimacy problem that made the establishment of stable psychological attachments among voters difficult. The non-crystallization of identities prevented the emergence of 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 presence of several small parties with no stable norms and conventions in the pattern of competition (Mair 1997). The latter renders the electoral environment uncertain. These are all reasons for which we should not expect high levels of party identification.

Party Organization

In addition to incumbency and party identification, party organization is another variable that can explain electoral volatility at the party level. The primary linkage between organization and volatility resides in the communication established between parties and voters. Why do parties

connect to citizens? The mechanism is straightforward: the exchange of voter mobilization for policy responsiveness (Poguntke 2002, 44-46). For the most part, parties connect with voters using two types of linkages, those at the elite level and those at the organizational level. Elite communication implies a linkage with voters through direct communication initiated by party leaders or visible party elites (i.e. MPs, ministers, mayors). The second type of communication uses the party organization as an intermediary (including party members) to establish the connection. In this respect, the party organization can complement leaders' communication with the electorate in providing incentives to the voters to stabilize their preferences. The party organization plays two roles: 1) it acts as an effective communication channel through which the party messages reach voters; and 2) it mobilizes voters and enhances their loyalty.

There are three major differences between parties' direct and organizational styles of communicating with the electorate. First, the complexity, coverage, and length of the process differ. Direct communication is relatively simple and reaches a large audience in a short period of time. Organizational communication requires more resources and time. Its coverage, however, can be wider than that of direct communication. More importantly, through its personal approach it enhances long-term bonds between voters and parties. Second, while organizational communication can employ direct communication; the reciprocal is not possible. For example, not only party leaders use TV outlets, leaders of local branches or prominent members can do the same. Third, direct communication is almost a constant within the party system, whereas organizational communication differs greatly given the different development of party organizations.

Consequently, direct communication cannot explain volatility in CEE. Given the institutional roots of these parties (see Introduction), the necessity to compete before developing appropriate organizations, and their emergence in the era of media politics, post-communist political parties were likely to rely more on direct communication of the elites in public office with the voters (van Biezen 2000, 397). However, most parties have access to media and, thus, can establish direct contact with the electorate, but their volatility varies. At the same time, direct communication cannot explain the electoral success of new parties.¹⁵ Similarly, it is quite difficult to explain why parliamentary parties once highly successful fail to reach the legislature in subsequent elections in these terms.

¹⁵ These arguments refer to the general process of communication. One particular variable that may explain electoral volatility is the communication strategy of political parties in elections. This variable was not considered for practical reasons: the communication strategies are not available for most elections (especially in the 90s) and such information is usually controlled by campaign specialists or high profile party elites in office at election times.

On the other hand, organizational communication can explain volatility. At a general level, the organization of parties, similar to electoral volatility (see Chapter 2), varies greatly. The existence of strong organizations in CEE is quite unlikely. Given the elite-driven, top-down formation of most parties, their weak grounding in society, low party membership, financial dependence on the state, and dominance of the party in central and public office over the party on the ground (Kopecky 1995; Lewis 2000; Szczerbiak 2001a; van Biezen 2003; Millard 2004; Enyedi 2006), the organizational structures of the parties are underdeveloped. In spite of these general labels – most of them applied after comparison with Western European reference points – there is visible variation in the organization of post-communist political parties (see Chapters 3 and 4). In particular, party organizations may be fundamental for electoral stability in the long run. In spite of the fact that a strong electoral performance could be achieved without building organizations (van Biezen 2000, 396), the survival of political parties depends on their societal connections.

This can best be achieved through party organization, as this is the most stable component of a political party. In the context of the volatile and uncertain CEE electorate, with floating elites, and a context of competition in which the number of actors often changes (Mair 1997), parties with strong organizations have an advantage over newcomers; established parties display solid bases on which they can attract voters. Changes at the organizational level (e.g. leaders' migration, decision-making layers, mergers and splits) are often visible and reflected in elections and voters may support or oppose these changes. Summing up, party organizations deliver coherent messages to the voters, ensure a continuous and stable presence in the political arena, undertake homogenous actions, and enhance long-term perspectives for representation. How do they do this? A few mechanisms by which this takes place are explored in the following section.

The Party Organization and Electoral Volatility: Relevance, Components, and Linkages

Organizational aspects represent the core of political parties (Panebianco 1988, 3). Their features are comparable and thus allow for cross-country and longitudinal comparative research (Janda 1980; Katz and Mair 1994). Most functions performed by parties take place at the organization level (Dalton 1996). The importance of party organization is emphasized by Huntington (1968, 461): “organization is the road to political power, but is also the foundation of political stability (...). The vacuum of power and authority which exists in so many modernizing countries may be filled temporarily by charismatic leadership or military force. But it can be filled permanently only by political organization”. Along the same lines, Duverger (1954, 4) claims that party organization “constitutes the general setting for the activity of members,

the selection of leaders, and decides their powers. It often explains the strength and efficiency of certain parties, the weakness and inefficiency of others”.

The organization provides identity and substance to the party. Moreover, it ensures the predictability and continuity of political and social processes (Harmel and Janda 1982, 42). Party organizations eliminate uncertain and episodic policies and politics by coordinating individual actions within a fixed framework that enhances group responsibility. The organizational dimension involves effort mobilization and coordination of party members to promote party strategies and policies (Harmel and Janda 1982, 43). Moreover, party organizations separate members (partisans) from voters, providing the former with an internally derived identity that allows them to perceive themselves within the party framework (Waller 1996, 24).

The Party Organization and Its Components

The party organization is a broad concept used to denominate a conglomerate of internal structures and procedures such as party units, membership, allocation of resources (e.g. power, finances), decision-making, elite behavior (e.g. unity, leadership continuity), and organizational autonomy (Michels 1911; Schattschneider 1942; Duverger 1954; Neumann 1956; Kirchheimer 1966; Epstein 1967; Harmel and Janda 1982; 1994; Panebianco 1988; Katz and Mair 1992; 1994; 1995; Kitschelt 1995; Kopecky 1995; van Biezen 2000; Gunther and Diamond 2001; 2003; Ishiyama 2001; Randall and Svasand 2002; Wolinetz 2002; Krouwel 2006).

A century ago, the party organizations in Western European democracies developed from the necessity to mobilize and encapsulate voters after the suffrage extension. Initially, they were created to provide a coherent image of the party and disciplined pursuit of its goals (Weber 1948). Over the following decades, the differences between party organizations rested mainly on two dichotomies between: 1) the quality and quantity of party decision-makers and supporters (Michels 1911; Duverger 1954; Neumann 1956; Katz and Mair 1995) and 2) loosely and well-articulated structures on the ground (e.g. territorial coverage and strength of the party through local branches). The first ideal types of parties were sketched along these features, with various combinations leading to different labels. For example, the cadre party involved a small amount of decision-makers and members, and had poorly articulated structure. The mass party was characterized by broader decision-making process, intensive membership, and territorially developed branches.

Although each party type appeared as a reaction to previously existing types (Katz and Mair 1995) and was focused on change (van Biezen 2003), the scholarly debate around these types brings to the fore essential components of the party organization. New party types lay out specific dimensions of the

organization. Panebianco's (1988) mass-bureaucratic and electoral-professional types explicitly add two components of organization: the financing and the importance of the central elite in the internal life of a party. The mass-bureaucratic model – built on Duverger's (1954) mass party and Neumann's (1956) party of mass integration – considers the interest groups as main sources of party funding and emphasizes the central role of a representative bureaucracy. The electoral-professional party relies on organized interests or government subsidies for funding, whereas the prominent role in the party belongs to elected representatives and professionals.

The emphasis on the role of representatives within the party indicates the existence of specific structures. The debates around various types of parties – cadre, mass or cartel – reveal two ways of structuring the organization: hierarchy vs. stratarchy. On the one hand, Michels (1911) portrayed political parties as monolithic organizations in which the power is located in a single place – in the hands of a strong oligarchy. In light of these features, the party is a hierarchical organization in which a few people decide what happens in the party. On the other hand, the idea that power in a political party cannot be located in a single place (Carty 2004) generated the model of stratarchical organization. According to this, the party organization includes a few units enjoying various degrees of autonomy in their particular activities. However, these are interdependent: local units mobilize the voters and recruit members (and candidates), whereas the central units ensure the general integration of the organization and formulate the party policy (Eldersveld 1964; Katz and Mair 1995).¹⁶

As Bolleyer (2011) points out, even the stratarchical structures presuppose some hierarchy in the distribution of power and resources between party units. In their activities, central elites are likely to channel the internal organization. For example, they set the rules according to which the local branches undertake their activities and are expected to invest resources in local infrastructures (Carty 2004). Panebianco (1988) argues that a suitable indicator for party organization is the degree of development of its central organization. This distribution of power within the party organization is labeled centralization and refers to the extent to which the national level of party organization controls the regional and local levels in conducting politics and enforces its decisions on subnational organs (Harmel and Janda 1982, 59-60). A few dimensions were used to reflect party centralization: control over communication, administration of discipline, selection of legislative candidates,

¹⁶ Bolleyer (2011) mentions the federation as a type of structure characterizing the new parties in Western Europe. Such a structure emphasizes the role of territorial units with respect to the locus of power, basic organizational principle, logic of representation, and logic of competence distribution across levels.

allocation of funds, selection of national party leader, formulation of party policy, and nationalization of structure (Janda 1980; Harmel and Janda 1982, 60).

However, a clear division of power between party units and their subsequent autonomy does not reflect the complexity of the organization. It is also important how these subunits interact and their degree of interdependence – the feature of systemness in Panebianco's words (1988). To this end, the three “faces” of parties proposed by Katz and Mair (1990; 1993) fulfill a double task: better capture the power divisions and connections between party subunits and clearly outline features of every subunit. The party in public office includes the representatives of the party in legislative or government, the party in central office is the national leadership of the party, and the party on the ground refers to the territorial units. The relations between these three layers took different forms focusing especially on the relative size of membership, officeholders, and activists from the central office (Koole 1994; Ignazi 1996).

One illustrative example for the interactions of the three faces is the issue of party homogeneity and the means to achieve it. For the party in public office homogeneity means party unity and loyalty of the legislators and government officials (i.e. the extent to which they behave similarly and follow the party line). The national leadership of the party is usually responsible to achieve such ends and employs a variety of means: (candidate) selection procedures disciplining mechanisms, pressures, and socialization (Katz 2001; Davidson-Schmich 2008; Kam 2009; Andeweg and Thomassen 2010). However, the party on the ground can become part of the decision making process. For example, the candidates for legislative elections can be selected – partially or totally – through primaries involving the party members and/or sympathizers. In this case, the effect on the party unity is often mediated. A low cohesion of the party on the ground does not necessarily lead to a heterogeneous behavior of the party in public office (Bolleyer 2009). The control mechanisms of the party in central office can alter the direct effect.

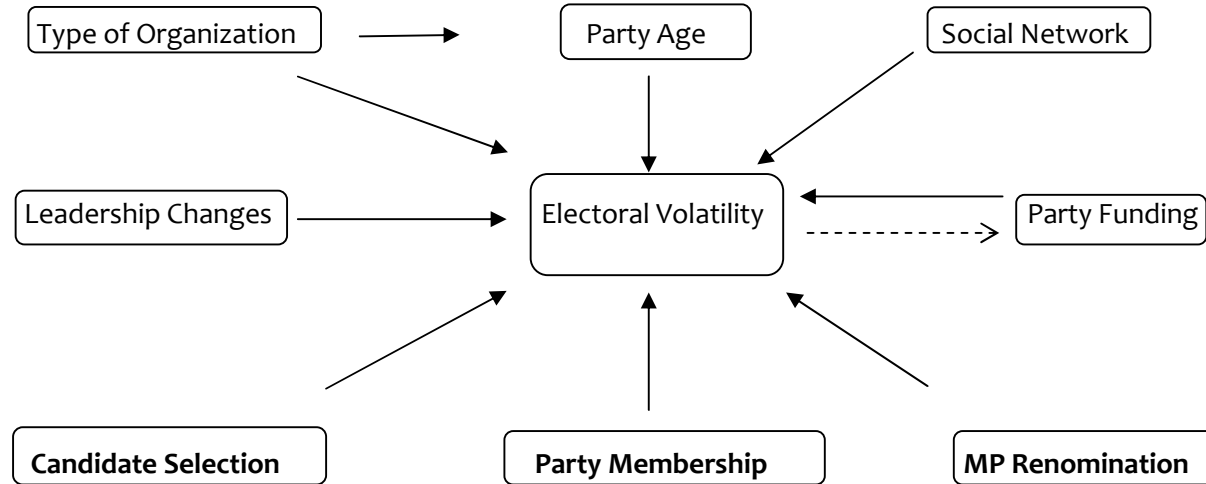
The structure of organizations and the control mechanisms illustrate the role played by elites in the internal life of the party. Connected to their decision-making freedom, general activities, and relationships with the members, the leadership continuity is a relevant component of party organization. Such a claim is even more relevant in the context of accumulated influence gained by contemporary party leaders in the legislature, electorate, and own organizations (Bean and Mughan 1989; Wattenberg 1991; Mughan 1993; 2000; Farrell 1996; Davis 1998; Scarrow et al. 2000). Moreover, the elites in central and public office are the visible representatives of the party. Their political professionalization and behavior can ensure continuity, coherence, and homogeneity to the organization.

The notion of party organization is not limited solely to internal mechanisms. The connections established by the party with other organizations are also relevant. These connections usually target the financial and electoral benefits. The issue of party funding was briefly mentioned in a previous subsection and will be approached in detail in another subsection. The social networks refer to the relationships established by the party organization with non-political institutions in an attempt to mobilize and channel the votes of the population. Putnam (1993) illustrates the increased role played by local associations in political participation in Italy. Political parties that are able to attract the loyalty of such local organizations have more opportunities to reach out to voters and can consolidate their electoral position more easily.

Summing up, the party organizations include a multitude of components important for the internal life of the party: the organizational units and the internal decision-making procedures, the party elite, the membership organization, and the connections established with other organizations (e.g. trade unions, the church). Most of these elements are essential to illustrate the various ways in which party organization is linked with the electoral volatility. Figure 1.2 depicts the major components of party organization and their hypothesized or empirically tested impact on electoral volatility. Two provisions are necessary. First, the figure includes only those elements that can be linked theoretically with electoral volatility. There are more components of party organization (e.g. nationalization of party structure, party unity etc.) without theoretical arguments connecting them with volatility. Along the same lines, some components are very specific. For example, the candidate selection is part of the decision-making process; only this particular aspect is included in the figure due to its potential impact on electoral volatility. Second, the figure is schematic and focuses on the relationships between the components of party organizations and electoral volatility. Thus, it ignores the connections and interactions between the components of party organizations. For example, there is expected to be a general linkage between the type of organization and the social networks established by parties. Moreover, in the CEE context, as it will become clear from Chapter 4, there is an empirical linkage between the type of organization and membership.

In spite of their theoretical relevance, earlier studies or specific examples indicate the absence of empirical evidence to support the relationship between some components and the electoral volatility. The variables at the bottom of Figure 1.2 (bold font) are the ones for which hypotheses are formulated. Age is the only feature of party organization that was not yet discussed and party funding is the only variable for which the relationship with volatility is bi-directional. The logic behind all these linkages and their empirical relevance for CEE are thoroughly discussed in the following subsections.

Figure 1.2: The Components of Party Organization and their Influence on Electoral Volatility



The Type of Organization

In CEE, the type of party organization can explain electoral volatility in terms of differentiated social roots. Three different types of parties were observable at the beginning of transition (Kopecky 2001, 74–75): continuous, revived (with existence before communism and reemerged after this regime fell), and newly emerged parties. Kostecky (2002) nuanced this typology by adding a new type of party to the newly emerged category and by distinguishing between two types in the continuous category. Regarding his additional type, the parties originating out of dissident movements represent a special category. This new type is relevant in terms of the connections these parties are able to establish with voters. Although new, the social roots of these parties are likely to be stronger compared to those of newly emerged parties, as they opposed the previous regime and thus aggregated particular interests.

A further nuance is the division between the satellite and successor parties to better identify the parties associated with the previous regime. The main difference between the two is that successor parties inherited the structure and organization of the communist parties, whereas the satellite parties were somewhat weaker developed during communism and their legacies were less rich in organizational terms. Moreover, given these features, the visibility of successor parties is likely to be higher than that of satellites. The evolution and electoral performance of these parties in the post-communist period were consistent with this expectation: unlike successors, very few satellite parties managed to survive and play relevant roles in politics.

There are theoretical reasons to expect the social rootedness to be higher for successors, satellites, and parties with origins in dissident movements than for the revived and newly emerged parties. The revived parties enjoyed strong electoral and governing performance in the inter-war period; an alternative label for these parties was “historical parties”. As they opposed communism – not at official or formal levels, as their elites were often sent to exile – they were likely to have some social support. However, memories of their existence were quite weak and most of their supporters were very old at the moment of their revival. The newly emerged parties have no electoral experience, often born on the eve of elections, with no appropriate organization and no social roots.

Moreover, political parties with an organizational heritage are better represented at the local level than newly emerged parties that have not had time to develop an extensive web of branches. This was reflected mostly by successor parties (Ishiyama 1999). For example, in the Czech Republic the KSCM and KDU-CSL cover the territory of their country extensively compared to the newer and more electorally successful ODS and CSSD (van Biezen 2003, 140; Kopecky 2007, 135). Similarly, the Romanian PSD and PDL have twice as many local organizations as the PNL (a revived party) and the PRM (a newly

emerged political actor). With these premises as starting point, successor parties are expected to have low electoral volatility, whereas newly emerged parties are expected to exhibit high electoral volatility. An empirical analysis reveals that these differences are relevant only for the first two elections, but with the logic reversed. The evidence shows that newly emerged parties were less volatile than successor or satellite parties as voters remembered the past and punished existing parties for past performance (Gherghina 2008). These differences vanish as time passes and cannot explain variation in electoral support.

Party Age

Party age has been widely considered to be an important indicator for the effectiveness of organizations (Huntington 1968; Janda 1980; Roberts and Wibbels 1999) with effective institutions seen as slow growing. In the life cycle of an organization, there are three phases: genesis, institutionalization, and maturity (Panebianco 1988, 19). The older the party is, the more opportunities it has to reach institutionalization and maturity. Each round of participation in elections makes the party more familiar to voters and creates the opportunities for a regular exchange of votes for policies. Brand new political organizations, emerging from scratch or after a party split, are likely to be more volatile in elections.

It is difficult for parties in the genesis phase to generate stable electoral loyalties as they first must identify and address niches in the political spectrum, acquire experience and visibility, and initiate contact with voters. Following this logic, older parties are likely to be less volatile. In CEE, the type of organization influenced the age: continuous parties enjoy uninterrupted existence for many decades, revived parties have ceased to exist for almost half a century, and newly emerged parties. As the type of organization does not systematically explain electoral volatility, there are low expectations regarding the explanatory potential of age. Indeed, Gherghina (2008) presents empirical evidence showing that party age does not explain electoral volatility at the party level.

The Social Networks

The CEE parties do not have stable connections with local associations. The linkages between Christian-Democratic parties and the Church, for example, are quite loose. In fact, the role of such parties in CEE politics is minimal: in some countries they have a limited presence in parliament, whereas in others they failed to gain parliamentary seats at all for a period of time. In some cases, there are isolated agreements with trade unions prior elections, but they are not durable, nor are they consistent over time.

The trade unions facilitate access to the voters they mobilize on a pragmatic basis. The unions negotiate agreements with political parties willing to do so and simply pick the best offer. For example, in the two most recent legislative elections in Romania, the biggest trade union cooperated with the social-democrats during one election and with their opponents, the liberal-democrats, in the next. Summing up, there are isolated connections between some CEE political parties and other organizations; most examples are limited to the successor parties (e.g. MSZP in Hungary or PSD in Romania) or to political formation with short life (e.g. Solidarity in Poland or CDR in Romania). Thus, the social network factor has weak explanatory potential regarding the shifts in electoral support.

Party Funding

There are two ways in which party funding can influence the electoral volatility. The mechanism at work in both is similar and relates to voter perception of parties. First, the financial dependence of political parties on private donors may cast doubts on the legitimacy of their proposed policies. Instead of pursuing legislation for the public, parties can reward major private contributors by proposing and adopting legislation to their benefit. Accordingly, corrupt or clientelistic allegiances may exist which can negatively affect parties' image in the eyes of citizens. Second, public funding requires detailed justification. Voters are aware that their money is used to achieve democratic goals (Szczerbiak 2001d; Enyedi 2006c; van Biezen and Kopecky 2007). However, there are instances in which extensive campaign spending surpasses the amounts received from the state and parties are unable to (or poorly) justify their revenue. As a result, corruption scandals often influence the result of elections and represent a salient issue in most CEE countries as they also positioned low on Corruption Perception Index (*Transparency International*).

The relationship between funding and volatility is not unidirectional. This is especially the case with state funding. State revenues are allocated on the basis of electoral success and parties have a critical incentive to maximize or at least stabilize their vote share. State funding can either promote electoral approaches based on short-term linkages with the electorate (van Biezen 2003, 40) or the development of permanent links with voters. Once a party achieves a strong electoral performance, its incentive to maintain this level of popular support is high. In other words, parties that are able to achieve a level of electoral support that permits them to receive state subsidies have a financial

incentive to aim for low volatility. Moreover, state funding legislation lacks great variation in CEE.¹⁷

All analyzed countries provide extensive state subsidies¹⁸ (Ikstens et al. 2002; van Biezen 2003; Roper 2007; Smilov 2007; Walecki 2007; Lewis 2008; Gherghina et al. 2011) to political parties, creating almost full financial dependence. This is confirmed by figures from the mid-1990s with the exception of communist successors. Political parties in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland could not rely on receiving more than 10% of their income from members (Lewis 2008, 184). With membership fees and small donations as only a very small proportion of parties' income, the remaining majority of the funding comes from the state. Given the theoretical circularity of the linkage between funding and volatility and the empirical lack of variation, party funding cannot represent a potential explanation for electoral volatility in these six countries.

As these four variables fail to account for variation in electoral volatility, the following three sections discuss the way in which the remaining three components of party organization can influence volatility. Accordingly, three hypotheses are formulated. Unlike some of the aforementioned variables, candidate selection, membership organization, and MP re-nomination exhibit a high level of variation across time, countries, and parties. At the same time, none of these variables has been explored thus far; therefore there are no empirical tests to indicate their explanatory power.

The Centralization of Candidate Selection

Candidate selection is one of the central functions of political parties. The importance of this process had already been acknowledged as early as the first decades of the previous century when Schattschneider (1942, 101) explained, "he who can make the nominations is the owner of the party". Ranney (1981) follows this argument and argues that candidate selection ensures control over party activities. At the same time, candidate selection distinguishes parties from other organizations (Sartori 1976), sheds light on the type of policies to be pursued (Crotty 1968; Cross 2008), and reflects the internal democracy of the parties (Gallagher and March 1988). There is a rich body of literature broaching

¹⁷ Instead, what differs is the extent to which parties operating under similar finance regimes differ in terms of their financial resources. This variation is visible across parties and also over time for the same political party. Consequently, the impact of financial resources on electoral volatility is an empirical question that deserves investigation. However, a recent study on the Romanian political parties illustrates the diversity of financing sources and the difficulty to assess the financial resources of a party (Gherghina et al. 2011). Such difficulties originate in the indirect use of public money and clientelistic networks that are often not visible.

¹⁸ Until 2001 in Bulgaria, state funding was rather symbolic. The main source of funding was private corporate donations.

the issue of candidate selection, ranging from various forms encountered in party models (Duverger 1954; Kirchheimer 1966; Panebianco 1988; Katz and Mair 1995) to the degree of democratization of candidate selection processes (Epstein 1967; Ranney 1981; Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Bille 2001; Rahat and Hazan 2001; Lundell 2004; Lisi 2009).

This study focuses on the level of decision making within the party organization regarding candidate selection. I investigate whether or not the national level exerts more control over candidate selection for the national legislative elections compared to the regional and local levels.¹⁹ This is the reason for which the variable is labeled “centralization of candidate selection”. In the words of previous studies on party organizations, I am interested in observing whether or not the national office leads the selection politics of the party and enforces its decisions upon sub-national organs (Harmel and Janda 1982, 59-60) or it is the other way around. The endeavor is relevant in the context of the list PR systems used extensively in CEE.

How can candidate selection explain volatility? The causal mechanism relates to the perceived responsiveness of the party to citizens’ needs and can be summarized as follows. Autonomy of local branches in intra-party decision-making brings parties closer to the voter. The local branches are often the primary unit of interaction between voters and parties (Freundreis et al. 1990). Thus, the local branches are familiar with voters’ needs and policy priorities. By conducting activities intensively at the local level, parties demonstrate their willingness to respond to problems raised by citizens. Indirectly, they send a message of better representation. Based extensively on personal contacts, local organizations often manage to mobilize voters from marginal categories (e.g. youth) that are not likely to participate in elections unless there is a different type of motivation than the conventional one (Geser 1999, 13). Thus, they enhance the societal penetration of the party, reaching electorates through other means than conventional communication.

If local organizations have autonomy, they will be able to channel societal demands and give them priority. In this respect, local organizations’ views and proposals may fulfill two tasks: they may provide necessary feedback for the central office and they may indicate to the electorate that their voice is being heard. Local organizations need political power to reflect responsiveness and to create an institutional linkage with the voters. Their strength ensures tighter relations with voters. In particular, the selection of candidates for legislative elections at the local level sends a message to voters that problems

¹⁹ I focus on the selection of candidates for the national elections for two reasons: 1) the legislative elections are very important across all examined countries and 2) the candidate selection for the local or regional elections has almost no variation (i.e. there are rare instances in which the central office is involved in).

are addressed by candidates recruited among them. By successfully adapting to specific features of local politics, parties increase their attractiveness to the public and reflect sensitivity to priority issues. The immediate benefit of this to the party is that voters are able to recognize the candidates on the ballot. Through all these procedures parties create more intense and stable communication with the electorate. As a reward, voters may attach long-term loyalty to those parties that show more consideration of their daily problems. These strong and consistent ties with voters allow local party organizations to rely on stable shares of votes irrespective of changes at the national level. Consequently, I suggest that parties selecting candidates for the national elections at the local level are less volatile than the rest.

Along these lines, the autonomy of parties' local organizations makes a difference at the social level and secures minimal electoral stability. Conway and Feigert (1968) identify two types of motivations that prevail at the local level. At urban and suburban levels, ideological motives prevail in making the choice for a particular party, whereas in rural areas, social motivations are salient (e.g. enlarging the field of acquaintances, entertainment in social gatherings, and a feeling of solidarity with members of the community). Territorial party organizations tackle community priorities and transform them into political issues, socializing citizens into the functioning of the party. Local units not only mobilize these orientations, but also act as marketing agencies for the parties, promoting the priorities and leaders publicly (Geser 1999, 11).

CEE is the fertile soil in which such mechanisms can develop. Political parties need stronger connections with the voters. Whereas in most Western European democracies mass mobilization preceded the creation of national party organizations, parties in newly emerged democracies pursued the expansion of their organization after winning the first elections that were based predominantly on elite support (van Biezen 2003, 30). This beginning was followed by the establishment of close ties with the state in terms of financing. As a result, the majority of parties were interested in mobilizing voters *around* elections (Szczerbiak 2001a; Millard 2004) rather than in between them (Rohrschneider 2002; van Biezen 2003; Enyedi 2006a). In this context, party structures on the ground, with decision-making power, may be able to create tighter connections with voters.

The autonomy of local branches can hardly be total as it may negatively influence the coherence of the party. A tightly organized and highly disciplined political party is very likely to behave as a unitary actor in elections and coalition negotiations (Katz 2002, 87). At the same time, parties must send homogenous messages to voters to persuade them to acknowledge the party's capacity to represent their interests. A party with highly autonomous local organizations can be perceived as a less unitary actor, unable to draft and promote national level policies given the existence of multilevel competition

within the party. In this respect, there is a thin line between rigidity and unity in the eyes of the electorate. The perception of rigidity occurs most often when national organizations dominate the activities of local branches and impose policies that do not mirror citizens' needs. The unity of the party is not influenced if the autonomy of the local branches indicates patterns of competition and cooperation between the decision-making levels in the party. If that is the case, the effect is positive and enhances the idea of intra-party democratic procedures. It also provides the sense of responsiveness to various challenges (e.g. government at the national level, people's needs at the local level). The candidate selection process does not have an impact on the unity of the party. Instead, a centralized selection process indicates rigidity, whereas decentralization of selection creates the foundation for voter loyalty in the long run.

Two supplementary arguments illustrate how decentralized selection of candidates for the national elections can enhance the relationship between parties and voters. First, the electorate is more likely to be familiar with those candidates nominated at constituency level. The enlargement of the number of voices to count in the process of candidate selection – mainly through primaries – allowed political parties in old democracies to strengthen their ties with the electorate (Hazan 1997; Carty and Blake 1999; Pennings and Hazan 2001). In the quasi-total absence of primaries and limited involvement of citizens into politics (Lewis 2000; Weldon 2006) throughout CEE, any attempt made by political parties to bring the selection closer to the voters can be rewarded in elections. By providing autonomy to the local organizations in the process of candidate selection, political parties deliver the message that they care about voters' opinions. Second, politicians usually show the greatest loyalty to the locus that influences their re-election (Pennings 2000). The local selection of candidates is likely to enhance further connections between citizens and elected candidates. Corollary, from the voters' perspective, a nominee at local level increases the chances of occurrence for a "psychological constituency", i.e. the group of people who believe they are represented by the candidate (Katz 2001, 279). Consequently, their chances to rely on a core of voters increase as local organizations have extensive powers in the decision-making process.

Following all these arguments, I hypothesize that:

H1: Political parties with decentralized candidate selection have lower levels of electoral volatility than the centralized political parties.

There are theoretical reasons for which the relationship can be formulated in the opposite direction. Thus, the electoral volatility can generate post-election adaptation strategies that can modify the candidate selection process.

However, the post-communist realities justify the hypothesized direction of the relationship. As it will be shown in the analysis from Chapter 3, the CEE political parties rarely changed their process of candidate selection. Even after major electoral losses, the political parties do not modify the distribution of internal power.

Party Membership

Party members are ambivalently perceived. On the one hand, they are seen as advantage seekers and tiresome demanders who negatively influence the democratic process (Seyd and Whiteley 1992, 1). Their party affiliation is considered as driving towards benefits not available for the rest of the citizens. The nominations in public office based on political criteria are illustrative examples in this respect. On the other hand, party members ensure long standing contributions to the political life, provide campaign (including funding) and electoral support to parties, and constitute appreciative audience for party elites. Party members provide financial support and volunteer work on a continuous basis, not solely around elections. The difference between them and regular citizens resides in their political participation pushed beyond the occasional voting turnout. Apart from fees, party members develop local networks and organizations necessary in elections (Kopecky 2006, 133). They are a valuable pool of resources for recruiting and socializing political leaders (Kopecky 1995). The party organizations act as training grounds where actively involved individuals acquire and develop skills for future political careers. Kopecky (2006, 133) shows how in the 1998 local elections parties with minimal membership in the Czech Republic faced difficulties in active involvement as they were unable to field candidates outside the main cities.

Moreover, party members are the primary source of electoral support for any political party. Although the importance of party membership reached its apogee during the era of the historical mass party (Duverger 1954), contemporary political parties continue to rely on the support of their members in elections. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, even after the decline in party membership in Western Europe (Tan 2000; Dalton et al. 2000; Mair and van Biezen 2001; Dalton 2004), its levels in CEE are still much lower than that of their Western counterparts (Lewis 1996; Bielasiak 1997; Kopecky 2001; van Biezen 2003; Millard 2004; Enyedi 2006a; Spirova 2007; Enyedi and Llinek 2008). This low party membership was explained through a combination of contextual elements, communist legacies, and institutional and behavioral components of both the supply (political parties) and demand (voters) sides (Wyman et al. 1995; Mair 1997; Szczerbiak 2001a; 2006; Bozoki and Ishiyama 2002; Innes 2002; van Biezen 2003; Millard, 2004; Deegan-Krause 2006; Enyedi 2006b; Webb and White 2007; Gherghina 2008; Pop-Eleches 2010). In the case of Western European parties, Katz and Mair (1995) identify a fundamental

transformation in the public's sense that parties became associated less with society and more with the state. Thus, the shift from mass to cartel party leads to a lower willingness to attract more members on the part of elites who argue that the costs of extensive membership exceed its benefits. Parties are no longer willing, as Widfeldt (1999) argues, to seek the greatest possible membership.

Post-communist countries never witnessed such a shift given the nature of their formation and the strong ties with the state that existed from the time of their inception. The institutional origins of CEE parties (van Biezen 2003) determined a different dynamic than in Western Europe. Political parties in new democracies have experienced several more phases of development than Western European parties. New democracies feature elite and catch-all party models with no reference to the existence of the mass party in the past (with the exception of the single-party in the previous regime that cannot be a unit of comparison). At the beginning of the post-communist period, parties ignored membership organizations due to the scarcity of time and resources (van Biezen 2003; Millard 2004). Most parties used electoral mobilization, which was faster and easier, but produced contextual and unstable attachments (Mair 1997). The short interval between the negotiations for power transfer and the first free elections did not allow parties to seek membership mobilization (van Biezen 2003, 44).

Additionally, in most of these countries, forced party membership that characterized the previous regime was still fresh in the minds of citizens and new political organizations often avoided calling themselves parties, not to mention asking citizens to become party members. The few exceptions to this were the direct successor parties and the historical revived parties. The latter claimed high membership in Romania and Hungary, with no clear arrangements for party membership (i.e. subscription form, regular fee, etc.) and with most of the members being above 50 years of age at the moment of the first democratic elections. From the beginning of their existence CEE parties used means of communication and technology for direct communication with voters extensively. Moreover, as previously explained, the parties relied on large state subsidies without prior self-funding. All these are reasons for which CEE political parties do not strive for high membership rates. The traditional roles of party members (e.g. to provide financial support) are fulfilled by the state or private donors.

However, there are other reasons for which party membership is relevant in CEE. One of these reasons relates to the creation of a positive image of the party through the active involvement of citizens. In all the analyzed countries, the level of confidence in parties is low (see Introduction). This is partially the result of the anti-party sentiment generated by the previous regime (Kopecky 1995; Mair 1997). Another factor that contributes to this low

confidence is the evaluation of parties on the basis of their poor performance in government and opposition (often perceived as a routine activity with no effective results), corruption scandals, false declarations of politicians pursuing their own interest rather than that of the public (Szczerbiak 2006, 116), and lies. These negative perceptions are fueled by parties' controversial acts, leading to deadlocks. It is a vicious circle in which the initial absence of interaction between the organization and potential members generates adversity and makes further interaction less likely. This is where party members can make a difference. Active involvement in the internal workings of parties may enable some voters to better understand the functioning of the party and to change their negative attitudes.²⁰ Furthermore, as members interact with other voters, this more positive image of the party can be widely spread.

Furthermore, there is an important linkage to be observed, depicted in Figure 1.2. Party membership can influence the level of electoral volatility. There are theoretical reasons to expect such a relationship. As membership is a long-term commitment, networks of support are likely to have an effect that extends beyond only short-term voting behavior. In this respect, party members fulfill a relevant communication function with regard to voters (mostly from their own network) between elections. Members are the carriers of party message and means of persuasion for those connected to them (e.g. a snowball effect). Member positioning and activity at the workplace and in community allows the party to gradually expand and stabilize a core electorate. They create the premises for political enrolling and education in which citizens expand their regular political participation. Their active involvement in politics leads both to a short-term effect – the mobilization of voters at constituency level during elections and to a medium to long-term effect – the dissemination and maintenance of party loyalty feelings among people from their social networks. The permanent anchoring of the party in society through an intensive activity on the ground has the advantage of mobilizing voters' sympathies in the long run.

This process leads to a stronger bond between the party and voters. Duverger (1954) explains how in Western European countries, parties constructed nation-wide networked membership associations that cultivated political identities and mobilized newly enfranchised populations. With an emphasis on enrolment, political education, and encouraging citizens to extend their political involvement beyond merely voting, these mass parties established concrete links with those they claimed to represent (Widfeldt 1995, 135; Scarrow 2000, 79). The same logic can apply to the CEE context. At a general level, the quasi-absence of mass parties in CEE and high values of electoral volatility indicate a potential linkage. In the dry climate of weak

²⁰ This logic rests on the assumption that members are happy with their activity in the party.

societal penetration that characterizes CEE, party members can create strong networks of electoral support in society. In this sense, van Biezen (2003, 43) argues that large membership enhances durable relationships with society and supports the party's stability.

The increased use of technology in voter mobilization does not reduce the importance of party members. Even for the electoral professional parties (Panebianco 1988) the active involvement of members is desirable as they can develop stronger ties with the electorate through specific means. Such means include local level activities, voluntary information collection, and campaigns during elections (i.e. enlarging the circle of voters through personal approach, enrolling new members in the youth clubs or door to door canvassing). The party members are the promoters of a social logic of bounded partisanship in which their personal approach is much more influential than other types of communication (Zuckerman et al. 2007). Such an influence is reflected in the intensity of relations as well as in the durability of achieved preferences. The importance of party members increases in the absence of linkages – characteristic to the CEE space – between political parties and other organizations (e.g. church, trade unions). The creation of a large membership organization may narrow the gap separating the CEE political parties from the voters.

At the same time, a high roster of party members sends the electorate a message of popular legitimacy and sets the bases for a party speech of strong ties to ordinary citizens (Dickson and Rublee 2000; Scarrow 2000. 84). Summing up, membership organizations build an image of legitimacy and create societal linkages between parties and members. The direct consequence of this is stronger attachment of the voters to parties and low electoral volatility. In light of all of these arguments, two aspects of party membership are expected to diminish electoral volatility: the size and the constant number of members. The logic behind the size of membership was explained in the previous paragraphs. I expect parties that broaden their membership base to have lower volatility in comparison with the other political actors:

H2a: Political parties with large membership organizations have lower levels of electoral volatility than the political parties with small membership organizations.

In addition to the size of the membership organization, its longitudinal variations can also explain electoral volatility. The above mentioned mechanisms work best if membership organizations are relatively stable over time. Variations in the share of members can create discontinuities in their approach and require extensive effort from the party to accommodate them. Dramatic modifications in the number of members may destabilize the electoral support of the party. A large increase in membership rates can

represent a major boost in electoral support. A severe decrease in the number of party members usually coincides with a loss of votes, as this is a sign of the decreasing popularity of the party. Such changes affect also the social networks created around the party and the recipients of the party message. As a result, constant rates of membership are likely to correspond to stable levels of electoral support:

H2b: Political parties with low variations of membership between elections have lower levels of electoral volatility than the political parties with high variations of membership.

MPs' Renomination

The MPs are divided in two major categories when speaking about their future in the legislature: those who terminate their term in office once new elections are organized and those who get reelected. Incumbent MPs²¹ are not reelected for one of the following reasons: they do not want to be, they are not successful in their attempts to get nominated by the party or they are rejected by the voters. The first situation is the effect of a voluntary exit of the MPs from the election process. The second instance can have multiple causes: the incapacity of MPs to persuade the party regarding their potential to gain votes, the desire of the party to leave out compromised candidates, or a party strategy – generated by both endogenous and exogenous factors (e.g. electoral system reform) – to renew the candidates. The third situation implies that unsuccessful candidatures can be the result of a party strategy or direct failure of the MPs to gain support. At the same time, in the case of blocked list PR, the MPs are placed by political parties low on the lists, on non-eligible positions. In such a situation, everything depends on the amount of votes cast for the list; there is not much room for maneuver for bottom candidates to increase their chances. For open list PR and single member district (SMD) voting, the failure to get elected can be justified by the incapacity of the MPs to persuade voters.

Conversely, those who get reelected fulfill all the conditions absent in the previous setting: they strive for reelection, persuade a party to renominate them (and eventually to place them high on the party list), and gather enough votes to allow them to return to Parliament. The analysis from Chapter 3 will reveal a variety of nomination procedures across political parties in CEE ranging from totally decentralized to highly centralized manners. As the overwhelming majority of members of the CEE Parliaments have a political affiliation (Enyedi

²¹ At a conceptual level, I follow Norris and Lovenduski's definition of incumbent (1995, 24) and I include in this category those MPs who run for a seat, under the label of the same party or coalition in which their party is part of, in the subsequent general election.

and Toka 2007), legislative careers are dependent on the support of party leaders either at local or central level. In this context, why would political parties renominate incumbent MPs? There are at least four straightforward advantages - all with positive spillover effects for the supporting parties – that incumbents have over challengers. They derive from the (voluntary) exploitation of the office.

1) The representatives who hold the elective office have access to free publicity through media channels. They are often in the spotlight through organized press conferences and interviews aimed to reveal to the public their policy initiatives. Even conflict situations in which representatives engage with other public officials increase their visibility. The unequal press coverage of incumbents and challengers transformed media in the US in a factor triggering the invincibility of incumbents (Herrnson 2004). Moreover, the television broadcasts of the plenary sessions increase the visibility of MPs, especially of those delivering speeches and working hard.

2) Given the resources they have access to, incumbents bring benefits to their constituencies or at least they can always claim to do so. By adding to this situation the extensive access to media channels we get a picture in which incumbent MPs can promote their image (Fiorina 1977; Stonecash 2008). Moreover, MPs have allowances to travel to their constituency and thus interact with local groups and discuss various perspectives. At the end of the day state funding is used to portray a positive image of the MP (Mayhew 1974; Jacobson 2001) in the eyes of the voters and thus creating a direct advantage against any challenger.

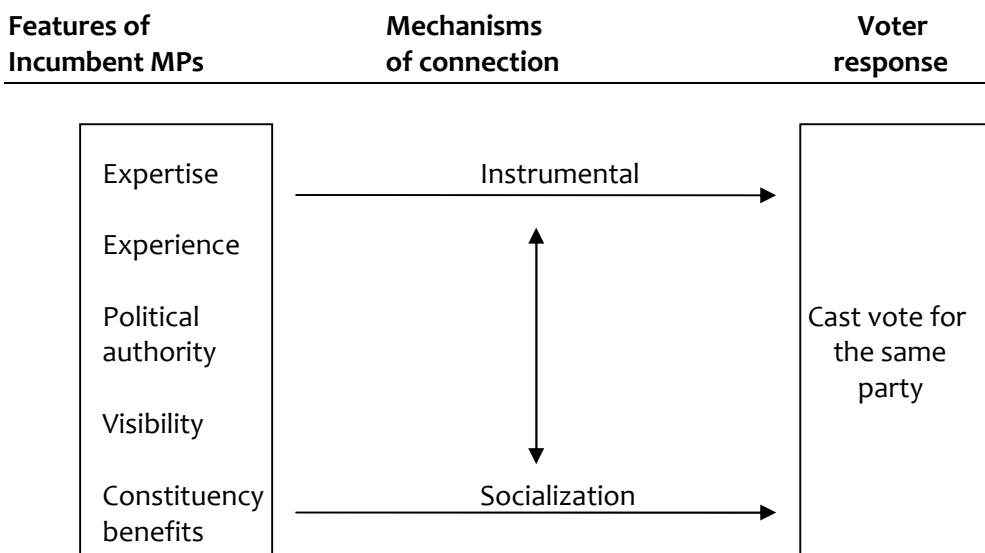
3) On the basis of the MPs experience in office, voters may perceive incumbent MPs as having political authority, status (i.e. influence), and expertise. On the average, incumbents are likely to have higher credibility than the challengers with respect to political issues. Such a situation favors incumbents as elite professionalization appears to be favored by citizens across Western (Cotta and Best 2007) and Eastern Europe (Shlapentokh et al. 1999; Ilonszki and Edinger 2007; Linek and Mansfeldova 2007; Nalewajko and Wesolowski 2007).

4) Incumbent representatives develop fundraising networks (Davidson and Oleszek 2004, 74) and get easier access to campaign donors as they can use their potential influence on legislation and promotion of specific agendas as bargaining leverage (Huckabee 2003, vii). Whereas such a practice is common in the US, there are numerous corruption scandals that involved the CEE MPs in the past two decades having as basis money for campaigns.

As a result of these benefits, incumbents have always had a high success rate versus challengers (Gelman and King 1990; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Stonecash 2008, 3).²² These advantages are not limited to the individuals holding the office but are spilt over the party supporting them. Voters appear to consider candidates mostly as representatives of their parties; they hardly separate between the two even in the electoral systems where a personal vote is expected. Previous research illustrates that the personal vote for incumbents in the UK is modest with most citizens casting their vote for the party (Butler and Cavanagh 1992). Levels of constituency work of individual MPs produce only minimal swings of votes (Cain et al. 1987; Norton and Wood 1990).

The continuity of MPs in the legislative office helps their parties to establish a strong connection with voters and can influence their preferences (see Figure 1.3). There are two interconnected mechanisms of communication.

Figure 1.3: The Schematic Relationship between Incumbent MPs and Voters



First, there is an instrumental role of incumbent MPs who have a great visibility, publicity, and name recognition for the voters. They act as recognizable labels who add a personal dimension to the prior organizational attachment of the voters. The previous section revealed how the individual and party do not represent alternatives for voters but complements. Accordingly, citizens willing

²² There are also downsides of these advantages. One of them is that safe incumbents pay less attention to the needs of citizens and directly diminish the representation and responsiveness (Fiorina 1973; Poole and Rosenthal 1997; Poole 2003; Griffin 2006). Moreover, the scandals have remarkably little effect on incumbents (Palmer and Simon 2008, 43-44).

to cast their votes for certain political parties – based on their policy/message preferences, voting histories, previous performance – have the additional argument of being familiar with the faces and names of those to represent them in the national legislature. It is more likely for citizens to rely on a familiar face when reaching the final voting decision. Elements such as candidates' charisma have additional benefits to the voting decision in this situation.

Second, there is a process of voter socialization. Through their constituency service, MPs accustom voters with the issue of representation and responsiveness to their needs. Although elite circulation is considered to be positive as it is a source of new ideas and brings legitimacy to the political class (Matland and Studlar 2004, 88), the low turnover can provide stability. This is the case especially in CEE countries that are characterized by low elite loyalty towards their parties. Voters get socialized with the mechanism of direct control over the composition of Parliaments. Apart from the negative effects of high levels of turnover on representation²³ (Andersen and Thorson 1984), numerous changes in the composition of Parliament can reflect political instability. For parties, it reflects the inability to maintain a core of voters where they once had them. Consequently, at organizational level, they are expected to promote candidates in the constituencies in which they were successful in order to maintain if not increase their previous performance. As all analyzed countries use list PR (with the partial exception of Hungary), the key point resides in the list making for elections.

Following these arguments, it is expected to have a situation in which more renominated MPs bring more electoral stability to their parties:

H3: Political parties who renominate more MPs for the legislative elections have lower levels of electoral volatility than those parties who renominate less MPs.

The Analytical Model

The analytical model used to test these hypothesized effects is graphically depicted in Figure 1.4. The main variables – decentralized candidate selection, high and stable party membership, and high rates of re-nominated MPs – are expected to have both an individual and an aggregate effect on the electoral volatility at party level.

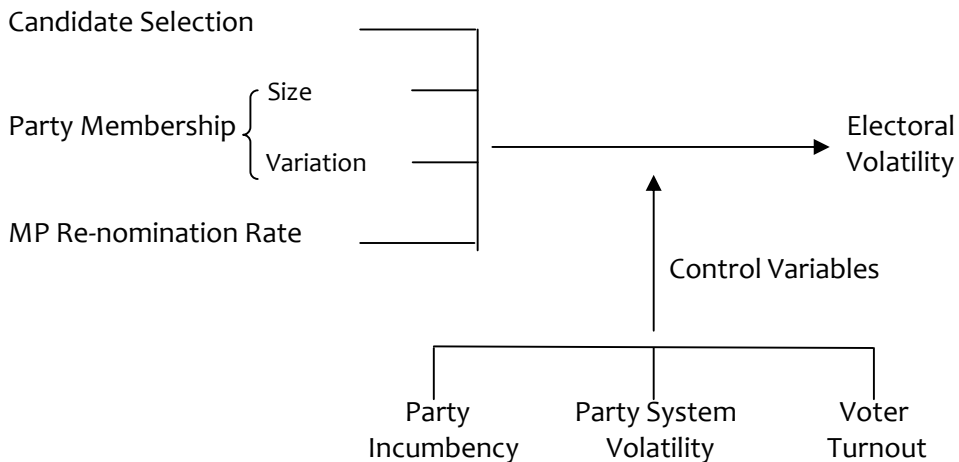
To identify these effects, a two-step research design is used. First, the individual relationships between the independent variables²⁴ (from the left side

²³ It is not often the case in the analyzed context as the composition of the constituency does not dramatically change in consecutive elections.

²⁴ The terms "independent" and "dependent" variables do not apply generally to correlations. However, given the direction and the logic of the earlier presented hypotheses, the components of the party organization can be treated as independent variables; electoral volatility at party level is the dependent variable of this study.

of the figure) and electoral volatility at party level are observed with the use of bivariate analyses (correlations). Each of Chapters 3-5 deals with one independent variable²⁵ focusing on the empirical strength of the relationships, and the cross-country and –party comparisons. In doing so, I aim to provide both general and contextual explanations for observed patterns.

Figure 1.4: The Research Model for Electoral Volatility at Party Level



Second, a multivariate regression model – Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) with robust standard errors – is used for two purposes. Such a model allows capturing the predictive power of each variable for electoral volatility when holding the other variables constant. At the same time, it reveals the aggregate explanatory potential of these variables. The model has the following form:

$$\text{Electoral volatility} = \text{constant} + \beta_1 \text{ Centralization of Candidate Selection} + \beta_2 \text{ Size of Membership} + \beta_3 \text{ Variations in Membership Size} + \beta_4 \text{ MP Renomination Rate} + \mu \quad (1)$$

On theoretical grounds, I test for the effects of three control variables: party incumbency, party system volatility (referring to the environment in which parties act), and voter turnout. While the effect of all these variables is discussed extensively and tested in Chapter 6, the previous sections have already delved into the possible influence of the government incumbency and voter turnout. The only as yet unexplained variable is party system volatility

²⁵ There are three components of party organization and four hypotheses due to the fact that party membership can influence volatility through size or variations in size. Accordingly, Chapter 4, dedicated to party membership, tests both hypotheses.

and its interaction with the party level. Two possible effects of the party system on its components (i.e. political parties) may be at work. First, there is isomorphic mimetism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991) or experiential learning. Political parties learn from each other's experience. Once a party manages to stabilize its electorate, its techniques are known by its competition partners and may be imitated. Second, there is competition for a limited number of votes. Irrespective of the number of parties, the number of voters remains approximately constant within a country. As a result, losses for one party quite often imply gains for another.²⁶ The OLS model including these three control variables has the following form:

$$\text{Electoral volatility} = \text{constant} + \beta_1 \text{ Centralization of Candidate Selection} + \beta_2 \text{ Size of Membership} + \beta_3 \text{ Variations in Membership Size} + \beta_4 \text{ MP Renomination Rate} + \beta_5 \text{ Party System Volatility} + \beta_6 \text{ Voter Turnout} + \beta_7 \text{ Government Incumbency} + \mu \quad (2)$$

Why do the main effects matter over controls? There are both theoretical and empirical reasons that justify such an expectation. A growing body of evidence suggests that voter perception is biased as a result of party or candidate preference (MacDonald and Heath 1997; Wlezien et al. 1997; Nannestad and Paldam 2000; Anderson et al. 2004). The independent variables from Figure 1.4 – corresponding to β_1 – β_4 and in model (2) – emphasize such factors characterizing the relationship between parties and voters. Moreover, the logic behind the hypotheses focused on psychological effects that may determine voting stability. By contrast, the control variables refer much more on formal or mechanical effects that are sometimes unknown to individual voters (i.e. party system volatility or voter turnout). At the same time, the level of measurement is different: all independent variables are measured at party level, whereas this applies to only one out of the three control variables (government incumbency). The other two control variables are systemic and their cross-party explanatory potential is significantly diminished. Accordingly, these variables are likely to shape voters behavior more than the controls that focus more on general aspects of the

Conclusions

There is a great deal of work that has been carried out on addressing the causes of high electoral volatility in CEE. Most of this work focuses on party systems, discussing both their volatile features and determinants of volatility.

²⁶ Even if I do not consider all the parties in a party system (the sum of the votes of the analyzed parties rarely equal more than 80% of the votes cast), the degree of interdependence between the political parties in a national party system remains considerable.

In this context, there is little systematic analysis conducted at the party level. The first two sections of this chapter presented theoretical and empirical arguments in favor of this approach in CEE. Consequently, the differentiation between party system and party level volatility appears to be an analytical necessity. The third section of this chapter illustrated the limited explanatory potential of macro level factors (i.e. party system level factors) in the post-communist political context. Comparisons across time and countries do not reveal any clearly identifiable pattern; the distribution of volatility appears to be random when those determinants are considered. A similar situation is observed with respect to the factors influencing both the party system and party volatility. There is one exception – voter turnout – which has not yet been explored for CEE and is included as a control variable in the empirical test in Chapter 6.

Thus far, party level determinants have been both theoretically ignored and empirically unexplored in the literature. Most existing studies accounted for exogenous determinants of electoral volatility (e.g. electoral system, degree of democratization, voter turnout, etc.). The arguments presented throughout this chapter converge towards the idea that the causes of volatility may be identified within the party itself. The way in which political parties organize can shape the electoral stability of voters. The three factors advanced as major explanations propose different mechanisms by which variation in electoral volatility can be explained.

Candidate selection refers to the enhancement of strong communication with the electorate and adaptation to its necessities. By providing autonomy to the local organizations in selecting candidates, political parties send voters a message that they are receptive to their concerns. Local candidates are more likely than those selected at the central level to be familiar with constituency problems. Membership organizations can ensure the stability of support by means of the social networks developed by members. In addition to direct communication during electoral campaigns, political parties with established membership organizations can also benefit from the interactions between their members and regular voters in the time period between elections. Moreover, members provide an alternative, more personal approach to reaching out to voters than what is generally used by most parties in contemporary times. The re-nomination of MPs can lead to the idea of continuity and professionalization in the eyes of the voters. As it does so, parties also rely on recognizable candidates; a challenger is less visible than an incumbent.

This new perspective has two major implications. From a theoretical point of view, for the first time party organization is considered to be a predictor of electoral stability. So far, studies have focused on the emergence and types of political organizations (Kopecky 1995; 2001; Roper 1995; Lewis

1996; Szczerbiak 2001a; 2001b; Spirova 2007; Webb and White 2007; Enyedi and Linek 2008) or the effect of party organizations on political performance (Agh 1995; Lewis 1996; Ishiyama 2001). This chapter provides sufficient grounds to justify consideration of party organization – either as a whole or as specific constituent components – as a potential determinant of volatility. In methodological and empirical terms, this perspective proposes the investigation of causes at the level of volatility occurrence. The volatility is the change of electoral support for a party or an electoral alliance/coalition. Accordingly, the process can best be understood through an analysis at this level. The empirical evidence in the following chapters provides insight into the party support dynamics in CEE and reveals great variation in terms of party organization.