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

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Chapter 2 | Electoral Volatility in New Democracies: Conceptualization, Measurement, and General Empirical Results

Introduction

The concept of volatility has traditionally been used to describe the electoral instability of democratic systems in Europe and North America (Blumler 1975). The previous chapter highlighted the existence of a general consensus regarding this process in contemporary democracies, not only in CEE. In this respect, electoral volatility is often conceived of as a feature of the political system. However, in analytical and empirical terms, it refers to the preferences of voters towards political formations – parties and alliances – competing in elections.

Variation in electoral support for parties should exist with no clear threshold for what an acceptable level of electoral volatility is. Nonetheless, extreme variation in electoral support is unhealthy for parties in particular and political systems in general. High levels of volatility are symptomatic of party system instability (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Blais 2004; Lawson and McCann 2005) and reveal multiple problems: weak political parties that fail to fulfill their functions, absent partisan cues, and limited party roots in society (see Chapter 1). Similarly, the absence of vote shifts reduces incentives for electoral competition, thereby reducing the level of contestation. The quality of representation is endangered in two ways: a) it is difficult for the newly emerged actors to gain access to the redistribution of power; and b) in the context of stable electoral success, the accountability of politicians and parties and their responsiveness to citizens' needs are reduced (Bartolini 2000).

The main research question of this book is addressed from the perspective of political parties. For parties, low levels of volatility are, generally speaking, preferable to high rates of electoral change. Although electoral gains are always welcome, the arguments presented in the Introduction and Chapter 1 indicate that political parties may strive for less electoral volatility as soon as they reach a comfortable position within the system. Parties are deemed to be relatively 'comfortable' when they gain access to the legislature, take part in coalition governments, or play otherwise pivotal roles within the party system.

This chapter is structured along theoretical, methodological, and empirical lines. The first section presents a theoretical discussion of volatility and a purposive argument in favor of measuring electoral volatility at the party level. Next, several methodological issues are discussed pertaining to the

appropriate tool to be used to measure electoral volatility and other methodological choices that are made throughout the book. Finally, the chapter includes multi-layered empirical observations that shed light on the propensity for and differences in volatility across time, countries, and parties.

Differentiating Electoral Change: Voters and Parties

Volatility occurs due to dynamic and inter-related processes registered at the levels of both the party and the electorate. On one hand, one party cannot perform in precisely the same way over time. Sensitive to the context in which they find themselves, parties either adapt to favorable conditions and improve their performance, or fail to exploit their opportunities and lose votes. Due to their inter-temporal nature, elections are fuzzy and long-term contracts between those governing and the governed (Lane 2007, 174). Citizens have only one means of punishing parties for making false promises, namely voting for a different party in the next elections. As they are aware of this pattern, it is rational for political parties to shape their discourse and adopt strategies to convince the electorate of their capacity to represent their interests.

On the other hand, the electorate cannot freeze its preferences. The structure of the electorate changes and, as a direct consequence of the above mentioned mechanism, its priorities change. Apart from natural sources of change in the composition of the electorate (e.g. mortality rates, migration), electoral behavior is also a reaction to the structure of the political space and to the policy proposals made by political parties (Tavits 2008). In sum, change in electoral volatility is triggered by complex embeddedness in the competition space (e.g. composition, strategies, and prior commitments) and electorates' response to it. Within such a framework, we should investigate whether or not electoral change involves different principles at the two specified levels: the voter and the party.

What we refer to as electoral volatility is solely a technical measurement developed in order to assess the intensity and nature of change in political support. As this support is the direct effect of two interrelated forces – one exerted by the voters as principals and the other exerted by political parties acting as agents – electoral change is measured and calculated separately on the demand and supply sides. First, at the individual level, gross electoral volatility refers to the total amount of vote switching in a party system (Crewe 1985a, 9). This measure basically gauges the electorate's loyalty on a continuum with extremes at a situation in which no voters change their preferences in any way, and at an instance at which every single voter behaves differently than they did in the previous election. By focusing on vote shifts at the individual level, gross electoral volatility attempts to explain processes and phenomena within the political system with characteristics of the electorate

and observed patterns like partisan dealignment and a decrease in party identification in mind.

As individual data regarding voter behavior (i.e. election surveys) are rarely available, net electoral volatility is the appropriate proxy by which to measure political change and reflects the aggregate vote transfers between political parties within a party system in subsequent elections. Net electoral volatility is considered to be the measure that can best capture electoral change between two consecutive elections (Bartolini and Mair 1990, 19). The measurement equivalence rests on the assumption that aggregate changes at various levels over time accurately reflect the corresponding levels in individual volatility (Bartolini and Mair 1990, 27).

Furthermore, there is a strong empirical relationship between gross and net electoral volatility, with up to three quarters of the amount of gross electoral volatility being reflected in the measure of net electoral volatility (Lane and Ersson 1997). I have elected to use net electoral volatility as it provides two important advantages. First, by using a systematic measurement, it allows to map and compare variation in support for political parties both longitudinally and across countries. Second, it extends beyond the electorate's values in providing explanations for vote shifts, allowing institutional and contextual factors to be incorporated (e.g. party organization, cleavages, electoral system etc). Following this methodological line, the next section illustrates the difficulties encountered in measuring the concept of electoral volatility and selects out of the three existing methodological alternatives to calculate electoral volatility.

Measuring Electoral Volatility

The longitudinal and cross-sectional design of this research requires an inter-election net volatility approach (Rose and Urwin 1970; Crewe 1985a, 9). This approach reflects the net changes in the vote share obtained by a political party in consecutive elections (Bartolini and Mair 1990, 19). Several formulas are proposed in the literature to calculate electoral volatility, the most widely used by far being the one proposed by Pedersen (1979). Its properties recommend it against alternative calculations (Taagepera and Grofman 2003). Developed at party system level, the Pedersen Index bears one major theoretical and empirical shortcoming when it is applied at the party level. It weights political parties equally, includes only the absolute change in vote share, and ignores the size of the party. Designed to measure net electoral volatility, the index accounts for the difference in received votes, underestimating change for small-sized competitors (the index subtracts the vote share for election t_0 from the vote share received in election t_1). Crewe (1985a, 9) illustrates the way in which a small party that doubles its vote share

from 5 to 10% exhibits sharper volatility when compared to a large party that increases its vote share from 45 to 50%.

The example presented in Table 2.1 is similar. The scores included in the table belong to two randomly selected parties from different countries – the PRM from Romania and the MSZP from Hungary – in all elections in which they participated and simulations for all mentioned formulas are listed. Looking at the difference between the PRM's performance in 1996 and 2000, we observe that in 2000 the party has four times as many supporters (as a percentage of the total voters) as it did in the previous election. However, Pedersen's formula indicates that the electoral volatility of the party is 15. Similarly, comparing the electoral results registered by the MSZP in 1990 and 1994, we observe that its vote share increases three fold. The formula reveals a paradox: although the MSZP's evolution is less spectacular than that of the PRM, the MSZP's volatility is higher than that of the PRM (calculated at 22.1 and 15 respectively).

Table 2.1: Comparing Measurements of Party Electoral Volatility

			Measure		
Party	Election	Results (%)	Rose and Urwin	Pedersen	Birch
	1992	3.9			
	1996	4.5	5	0.6	7
PRM	2000	19.5	5	15	62
	2004	13	5	6.5	20
	2008	3.1	5	9.9	61
	1990	10.9			
	1994	33	7.5	22.1	50.3
MSZP	1998	32.9	7.5	0.1	0.1
	2002	42	7.5	9.1	12.2
	2006	43.2	7.5	1.2	1.3

A similarly striking situation is registered when comparing the PRM's election results in 2004 and 2008 with those of the MSZP in 1998 and 2002. In the case of PRM, there is a decrease in vote share from 13 to 3%, whereas in the case of MSZP, the vote share increases from 33 to 42%. Calculations based on Pedersen's formula reveal that the two parties exhibit similar volatility (9.9 for PRM and. 9.1 for MSZP). In fact, the net difference is indeed similar, but without reporting it relative to the size of the parties, erroneous conclusions may be drawn. For the PRM this difference meant losing approximately three quarters of its previous support and, thus, failing to enter parliament in 2008. In 2002, the MSZP, a large party in Hungary, experienced an increase in support equal to approximately one quarter of vote shares compared to the 1998 elections.

This pattern is suggestive of the situation described in the previous section in which two parties of different dimensions gain/lose a similar number

of votes, but the volatility differs with a higher impact on the small competitor. The index proposed by Pedersen is not sensitive to these discrepancies. This shortcoming is not diminished in the modified version proposed by Neff Powell and Tucker (2010). Their volatility index accounts for the character of shifts in electoral support: type A reflects the shifts caused by the emergence or disappearance of political parties, and type B corresponds to electoral shifts among existing parties. The separate counting of the two types increases accuracy only at the party system level – at which entries and exits are isolated – but does not change the structural problem highlighted above that is inherent to Pedersen's index of party volatility.

The formula provided by Rose and Urwin (1970) almost one decade before Pedersen captures the trend of party support. They regress the vote share received by parties against time in order to calculate the annual change in party support. Although they focus on the party level, their measure has two major shortcomings that render it inappropriate for use as a calculus of electoral volatility at the party level. On one hand, the formula is not sensitive to modifications in consecutive elections, but detects long-term trends. The examples in Table 2.1 reflect this situation: both parties have the same score in every electoral year. On the other hand, the measure yields errors even when calculating the long-term trend. Following the figures provided in Table 2.1, the average volatility of the MSZP is larger than that of the PRM. The index appears to be sensitive to electoral performance rather to its differences and indicates that the larger party bears higher volatility. In reality, the opposite is true.

Birch (2001) calculates volatility in a relative manner, reporting the difference in vote shares relative to the total votes received by the party in both elections. This measurement eliminates the problems inherent to the other two measures, and accurately describes fluctuations in party support relative to its vote share. For example, the measurement correctly shows that an increase in vote share from 4.5 to 19.5% (PRM in 1996 and 2000) is similar to a decrease from 13 to 3.1% (PRM in 2004 and 2008). Moreover, it reveals that *the* MSZP has a more stable electorate than *the* PRM and shows that the highest volatility of the former is significantly below the highest electoral instability of the latter. Intuitively, and consistent with electoral results, we assert that *the* PRM is more unstable that *the* MSZP, a claim that is revealed by this formula. One more advantage of this measure is that allows for comparability. Unlike Rose and Urwin's index that is biased towards stability of low-performing competitors, Birch standardizes differences that occur at the party level by using party support as a reference, thereby making the scores comparative.

All these arguments favor the adoption of the formula proposed by Birch:

Formula (1): The Electoral Volatility at Party Level

$$V_j = \frac{|V_{t1} - V_{t0}|}{V_{t1} + V_{t0}}$$

V_j = party *j* electoral volatility,
V_{t0} = the share of votes obtained by party *j* in election *t0*,
V_{t1} = the share of votes obtained by party *j* in election *t1*.

Electoral volatility is calculated for the second chamber or for the entire legislature whenever this is unicameral. Data are compiled from various sources, most of these sources being electoral databases and handbooks. The next section complements the methodological information and provides details on case selection, units of analysis, and time period.

Methodological Choices

The most important methodological choice for the analysis employed throughout this book pertains to the selection of parties. In my study, I include those parties that simultaneously satisfy the following two criteria: 1) gained seats in at least half of the legislative elections under study; and b) ran in elections and gained seats in parliament at least once on an individual basis (i.e. without relying on electoral alliances or coalitions). The first criterion is intended to isolate the political actors without electoral appeal – those consistently failing to obtain seats – or those political parties with sporadic or contextual presence in the legislature. In all such instances, volatility is either difficult to calculate or overestimates the electoral stability of the political parties. For example, a political party that obtains 1% of the votes in elections across two decades exhibits low volatility. At the same time, the party in question has low public appeal and little if any relevance to the political system. The second criterion aims to capture electoral support for individual parties. As the book focuses on party-level volatility, and due to the fact that elections in CEE are characterized by numerous electoral alliances and coalitions (see Chapter 3), electoral support for *specific* parties is a key analytical component.

Does this selection process influence the results? As is the case with every methodological choice, the application of these two criteria has a certain impact on the empirical analysis. However, this impact is minimal and does not systematically bias results for at least two reasons. First, the analysis includes almost all parties with a relevant voice in domestic politics during the post-communist era. Quite often, support for the political parties under scrutiny adds up to more than 80% of the vote share in national elections. There are only

three political parties/organizations – NDSV in Bulgaria, LPR in Poland, and PNTCD in Romania – that actively participated in the government of their countries and are not included in this analysis. NDSV and LPR do not display continuity of representation in half of the elections, whereas PNTCD does not fulfill the criterion of running alone in elections.[27]

Second, as Table 1 (in the Introduction) illustrates, for most countries the number of parties included in the analysis is a good approximation of the average number of parliamentary parties present during the entire post-communist period. On these grounds, concerns regarding biased results are not justified. The criteria do not distort the universe of observed cases. Instead, the criteria were designed to limit the analysis to the most relevant political parties and to shed light on their development. Moreover, from a methodological perspective, limiting the analysis to the parties that fulfill these criteria allows for more reliable measurement of volatility. The electoral evolution and stability of political parties with a prolonged presence in parliament and the ability to mobilize voters on their own can be traced without further problems.

Calculating volatility in CEE is not limited to the mathematical operations outlined in Formula (1). Numerous party name changes, splits and mergers, entries to and exits from the legislature, and the formation and disentanglement of electoral alliances are major challenges that precipitate several coding decisions. First, party name changes raise problems only when they are the result of splits and mergers. If political parties change their name in order to become more appealing to the voters or do so following a merger with a minor party (see below), there is no direct influence on the calculus of volatility as the succession can be clearly established. For example, not much changed with the FIDESZ in Hungary in 1995 when it decided, following poor electoral results one year before, to add the Hungarian Civic Party MPP to its name. Similarly, the HZDS in Slovakia made a strategic decision in 2000 to add "People's Party" (LS) to its name. This was done in an attempt to achieve increased membership in the European People's Party (Henderson 2008). However, when a name change is accompanied by more dramatic alterations such as a change in leadership or organization, there is no continuity and parties with new names are considered to be new parties altogether.

Second, frequent splits and mergers complicate the calculation of volatility. In general, for party mergers, splits and name changes, the guidelines of Bartolini and Mair (1990, 311) are followed. For party splits, they mention that "when a party splits into two or more parties, the relevant electoral volatility is computed by subtracting the combined vote of the new parties

[27] PNTCD competed on individual grounds in 1990 when no electoral threshold was in place and thus obtained parliamentary representation.

from that of the original party in the election immediately preceding the split". When parties merge, the vote for the new combination is compared to the combined vote of the merged parties in the previous elections. Given the complicated picture in CEE, I have developed a few specific coding rules that address these issues in a consistent manner. If a party splits after elections t_0 and one party is the clear successor (e.g. maintains party leadership, label, or organization), this party is not considered to be a new party at t_1 and volatility can be calculated in this case. Difficulties occur, however, when a party splits and there is no clear successor party. In this case, I consider the electoral support at t_1 to be a reference indicator.

This can be explained in practical terms as follows, Party A splits after the elections t_0 and the resulting parties are B and C. If B scores very low in the t_1 elections – much lower than expected after the split – and C has electoral success comparable to that of A, then C is the direct successor of Party A as it has maintained existing voter support. In this situation, Party B is considered to be a newly emerged party. One further example helps to illustrate this point. Following the Civic Forum's clear victory (more than 50% of the vote share) in the 1990 Czechoslovak elections, the movement split into four parties to contest the subsequent 1992 election in the Czech Republic. Out of these, ODS was most prominent, gaining 33.9% of the votes. The three remaining parties obtained more modest results: the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) achieved 5%, the Civil Movement 4.4%, and the Club of Engaged Non Party Members 2% (Neff Powell and Tucker 2010, 11). According to my coding scheme, the ODS is the successor of the Civic Forum, whereas the other parties are new.

If the resulting Parties B and C have similar electoral strength after the split, I consider both B and C to be successors. In this case, volatility is calculated by dividing the electoral result of A at t_0 into equal shares. One example illustrates the appropriateness of my choice. In Romania, the National Salvation Front (FSN) split in 1992 and the resulting parties were the National Salvation Front (FSN, later PD) - that inherited the label, office, and the central organization of the original party – and the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN, later PDSR, and from 2001 PSD) that retained most of party elites and local branches of the initial party. Thus, both splinters had advantages with FDSN winning the next election, and the new FSN finishing third.

With respect to mergers, there are two possible outcomes: the continuation of old parties with new partners under a common label, or the emergence of a new party. My coding is best illustrated in terms of the example of the t_1 election with the t_0 election as a reference point. A merger at t_1 is considered to be a continuation when it takes place between one party that won parliamentary seats in the t_0 elections and a minor party that was either recently created or performed poorly in those elections. The party that resulted after the merger is considered to be the continuation of the larger party

irrespective of the label adopted. Accordingly, the calculus of volatility includes the electoral result of the larger party at t_o. Quite often, the change of party's name as a result of a merger is a good indicator of the impact of the merger (i.e. large parties do not generally change their name when merging with small parties). One exception to this observation is represented by the PSD that emerged in 2001. Prior to that date, there existed two different parties: the PDSR – the successor communist party – and the PSDR, a revived socialist party. PSDR only contested elections on its own in 1990. After this point, it joined various alliances: the CDR (with other three parties) in 1992, the USD in 1996, and an alliance with the PDSR in 2000. The PSDR's electoral support is, thus, not high and therefore the result of the merger – PSD – is the continuator of PDSR. A party is coded as newly emerged at t_1 if it results from the merger of two or more parties gaining parliamentary seats after the t_o elections.

Third, the reported national election results in CEE always include the category "other" (Neff Powell and Tucker 2010, 9) which makes tracing the records of political parties more difficult. The most common problem is related to those parties that win parliamentary seats in election t_1 – and thus pass the electoral threshold – without being registered on the results sheet in election t_o. Are these parties newly emerged? Or did they have such a low score at t_o that they belonged to the "other" category? The analysis of party histories plays a crucial role in answering these questions. The documented birth and evolution of CEE political parties (Lewis 1996; Szczerbiak 2001a; Kopecky 2001; Bugajski 2002; Millard 2004; Szajkowski 2005; Spirova 2007; Webb and White 2007; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008) reduce this uncertainty and help distinguish between newly emerged parties that did not participate in the t_o elections, and those existing parties that obtained poor results in those elections. With this in mind, volatility can be calculated accurately when the emergence and trajectory of political parties is known.

Fourth, electoral alliances and coalitions are also problematic for the calculus of volatility. The simplest situation exists when the parties forming an alliance specify the number of seats allocated to each party after elections. For example, the FIDESZ and the KDNP contested the 2006 elections in Hungary as an alliance with a clear division of their mandates. The difficult cases are those in which there is no reference made to the share of votes divided among the constituent components of the electoral alliance or coalition. I use two techniques to reduce the distortion produced by this type of situation and to limit the shortcomings generated by lack of data. Both techniques involve a comparison between the votes received by the alliance or coalition and those received by its constituent parties in the previous election. I weight the parties forming an alliance differently based on the share of votes they received prior to the electoral alliance or coalition formation. For example, if Party A receives 10% of the votes in the t_o election and forms an alliance in the t_1 election with

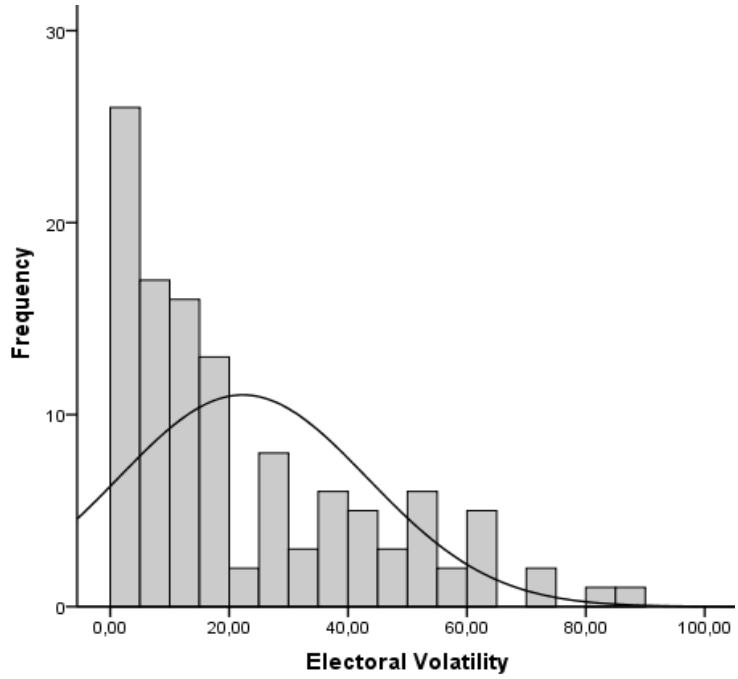
three other parties – extra-parliamentary at t_0 – and this alliance obtains 15% of the votes, the credit for this result goes to Party A. In a theoretical instance such as this, the electoral support for this party did not change dramatically between t_0 and t_1. If, on the other hand, there is an alliance of parties that were not in parliament at t_0, I weight all the members equally. All these decisions are based on the assumption that an alliance is the sum of the votes of its constituent parts, although this is not true all of the time. In this case the electoral potential of the alliance is ignored to better approximate the results obtained by individual parties.

This logic also covers those cases in which political parties join an electoral alliance or coalition between two elections contested on an individual basis. In other words, in those cases in which the parties compete alone at t_0, join the alliance or coalition at t_1, and contest alone again at t_2. The procedures explained in the previous paragraph apply irrespective of our knowledge about the ratio of votes belonging to each party within the alliance or coalition at t_1. The t_2-t_1 volatility presupposes the application of a symmetric principle to the one described for parties entering a coalition. In this case, I compare the votes of the parties exiting the alliance or coalition at t_2 with those at t_1.

Mapping Volatility in CEE

How volatile are the CEE political parties? Figure 2.1 plots the simple frequency distributions of electoral volatility across the national legislative elections held in the six investigated countries for a period of almost two decades (N=116). The vertical axis refers to the number of observations and the horizontal axis refers to the percentage of party-level volatility. In line with existing studies carried out at the party system level, the histogram indicates that CEE parties are quite volatile: the average electoral volatility is 22.30% and the standard deviation is 20.98. The figure illustrates that this is the result of a moderate clustering of parties around the mean – the modal outcome is in the 0-5% array – rather than the outcome of outlying elections. The positive skew (1.07) and platykurtic (0.32) distribution reinforce this observation, indicating that the mass of the distribution is concentrated on the left side of the volatility spectrum, with a wider peak around the mean and relatively few high values. The universe of observations is not very homogenous. The value of the standard deviation indicates a moderate dispersion of the values. At the same time, the range of volatility is quite broad: the minimum value is 0.11% and the maximum is 89.21%. There are indeed isolated instances in which volatility exceeds 70%, but one fifth of the observations falls within the 40-60% category in terms of volatility.

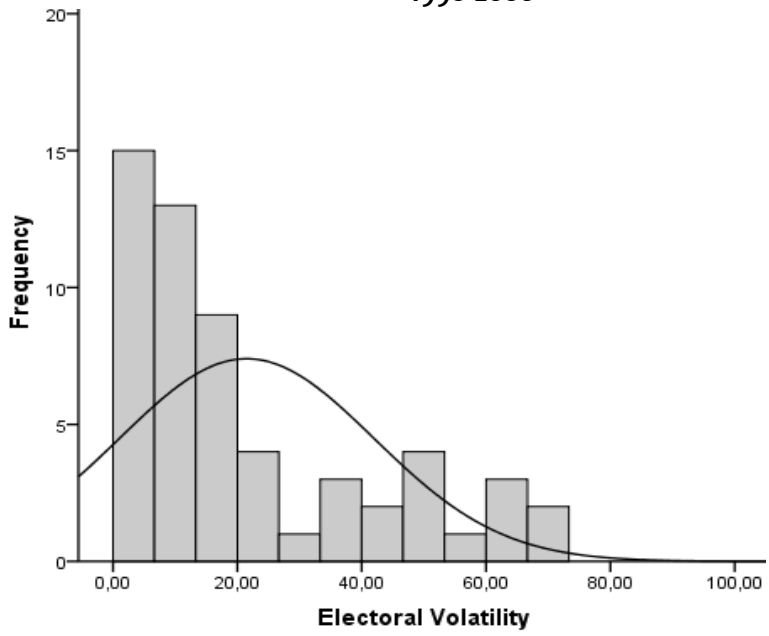
Figure 2.1: The Distribution of Party Level Electoral Volatility in CEE (1990-2008)



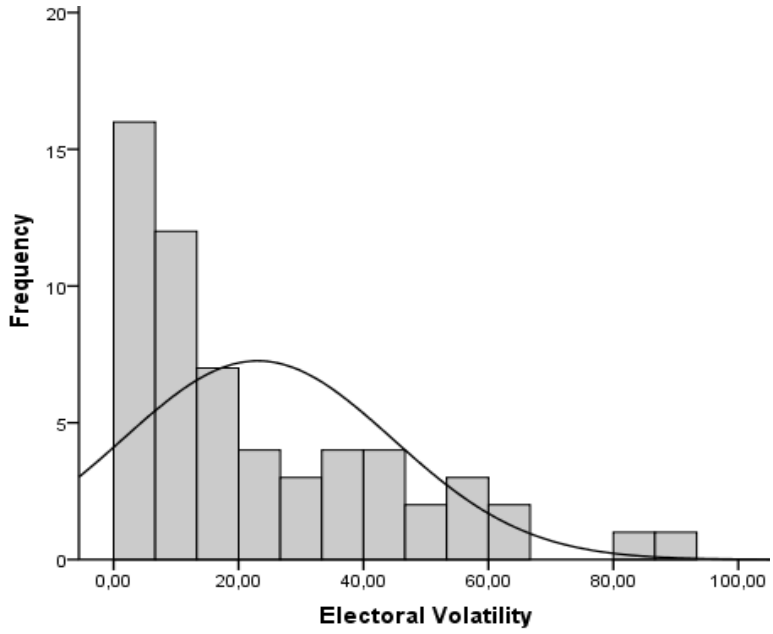
Previous research at the party system level provides mixed evidence with regard to the development of electoral volatility over time. There are a few studies that explain how electoral volatility diminishes after initial elections and how the system stabilizes with time (Agh 1998; Lewis 2000; Tavits 2005; Toka and Henjak 2007). However, other works show oscillations in the evolution of volatility as opposed to indicating the existence of a decreasing trend (Sikk 2005; Enyedi and Casal Bertoa 2011) suggesting that time has no effect on the stability of electoral preferences. Constructed on axes similar to those in the graph above, Figure 2.2 presents the distribution of electoral volatility in the two different post-communist decades to examine whether volatility is modified after a few elections. The distribution on the left side belongs to the 1990-2000 period, with three elections for most of the countries (four in Romania). The distribution on the right corresponds to the 2001-2008 period. Although in temporal terms the first appears to be more extensive, the number of cases is slightly higher in the second (i.e. 59 vs. 57). This is due in large part to the presence of three Polish political parties as of the 2001 election.

Figure 2.2: The Distribution of Electoral Volatility per Decade in CEE

1990-2000



2001-2008



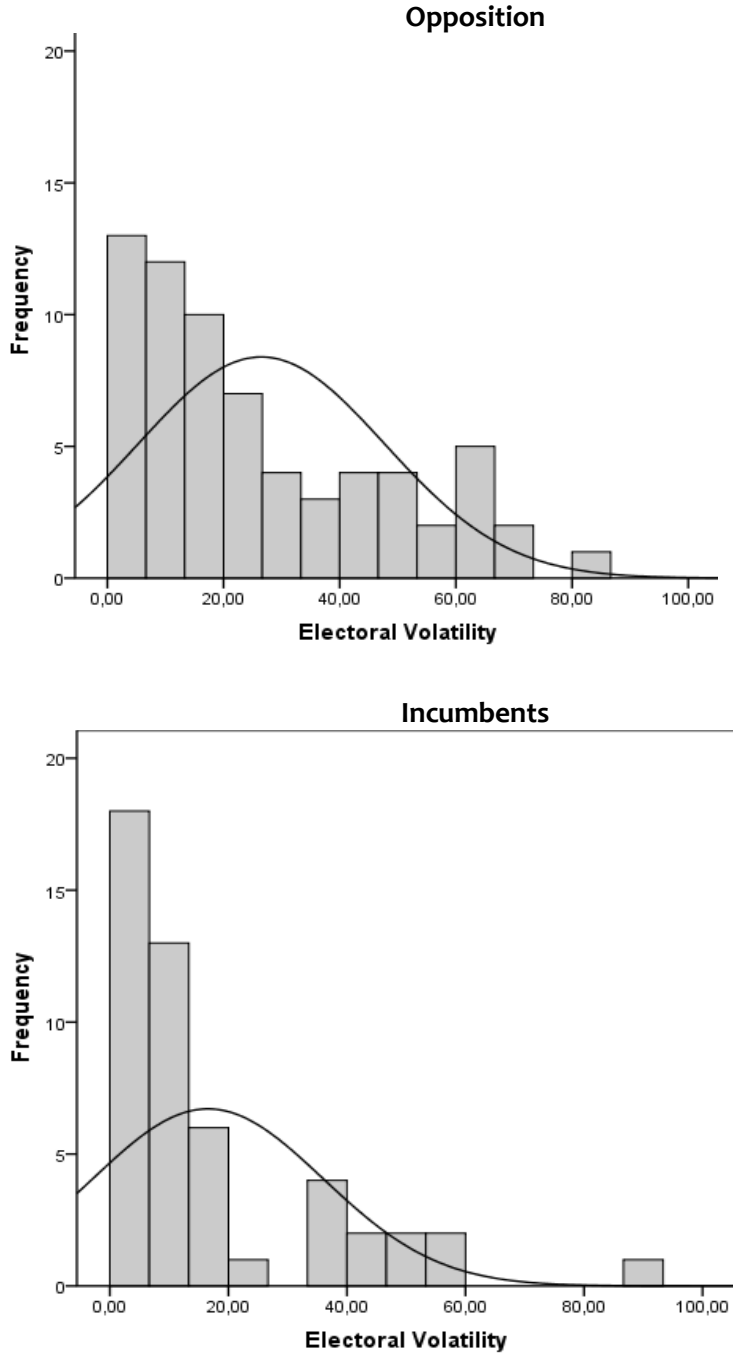
At the party level, there are no relevant differences between the distributions across the two decades. Their averages are similar, being slightly smaller in the

first decade (mean = 21.50, standard deviation = 20.49) compared to the second (mean = 23.07, standard deviation = 21.60). The absolute minimum of volatility among the CEE parties is registered in the first decade (0.11%). However, volatility in the second decade has a comparable minimum at 0.24%. The maximum volatility for the first decade is 70.86%, whereas in the second the absolute maximum in terms of volatility values is registered at 89.21%. Overall, the average, standard deviation, and range of volatility indicate that in the first elections political parties in the six examined countries were slightly less volatile than in the second. Both distributions are right-skewed and platykurtic – with similar values – indicating a concentration of the values around the mean with few values approaching the upper extreme of the volatility range. The visible difference between the two distributions is the existence of more parties above the 60% volatility level in the second decade as opposed to the first. This produces the longer tail of that specific distribution. To conclude, time has no substantive impact on the electoral volatility of the CEE political parties.

For those parties in government before the elections, their activity represents a relevant component of the voting decision (see Chapter 1). Incumbency is expected to influence the volatility of political parties and, as such, is included as a control variable in this analysis. This effect is bidirectional: incumbents are rewarded for their accomplishment and punished for the failures.

With regard to whether or not this is the case in CEE, Figure 2.3 compares the distribution of opposition and incumbent parties across all countries for the entire post-communist period. At a glance, there are three visible differences between the two distributions. First, there are fewer incumbent parties (49) than those in opposition (67). This observation is not surprising given that in most multi-party systems only a few parties form a coalition government, whereas the rest are in the opposition. Second, the distribution of opposition parties takes more values, whereas the incumbent parties mainly cluster within two areas: 0-20% and 35-60%. This situation corresponds to the reward and punishment principles outlined above. On one hand, incumbent parties with satisfactory results gain voters' confidence and, as a result, their volatility remains low. Theoretically, volatility can also increase if a party in government does very well and is able to attract voters who did not support it before. Empirically, this is not the case in CEE.

Figure 2.3: Comparison of the Distribution of Electoral Volatility for Opposition and Incumbent Parties



The high levels of electoral volatility for all incumbent political parties resulted from a loss and not from a win of support. On the other hand, the incumbent parties that fail to deliver what they promised produce a change in voter preference and, as such, their volatility increases. Third, on the basis of the previous observation, there are more incumbent parties that benefit from loyal electorates (i.e. that experience very low levels of electoral volatility) compared to the opposition parties. Approximately half of the incumbent parties are situated in the 0-10% array of electoral volatility, whereas only one quarter of the opposition parties share those values.

The statistical indicators support these observations. The mean volatility for opposition parties is approximately 10% higher that that of the incumbent parties (26.51% vs. 16.54% respectively). The averages tell different stories: opposition parties have modal values around the mean (standard deviation = 21.23) and incumbents cluster in two broad categories to the left and to the right of the mean (standard deviation = 19.41). The lower average of the latter is the result of strong clustering towards the left side of the volatility continuum. In line with this, the minimum value among the incumbent parties is the smallest among the universe of cases (0.11). The more homogenous distribution of the opposition parties is also visible in terms of the range of values: it is 82.42% in their case and 89.10% for the incumbent parties; the incumbent parties have both the absolute minimum and the maximum values.

One final difference is observable with respect to the peak of the distribution. The opposition parties have a platykurtyc distribution (0.42) that is flatter than a normal distribution, with a wider peak and a probability for extreme values that is less than it would be for a normal distribution. For the incumbent parties, the distribution is mesokurtic (2.98), which is a normal distribution in that respect. Both distributions are right-skewed with most values concentrated to the left of the mean with extreme values towards the right. Consistent with the above observations, the value of the skewness is higher for the incumbent parties (1.72) than for those parties in the opposition (0.78). This indicates a greater tendency of the cases to be positioned to the left of the mean. In a nutshell, incumbent parties are, on average, less volatile than opposition parties. At the same time, incumbent parties lack moderate volatility clustering, particularly in the lower or high arrays. One possible explanation for this is that these volatility values may correspond to the reward and punishment attitudes of the voters.

This brief description of the electoral volatility distribution in CEE – and ways in which time and government incumbency shape it – revealed general tendencies visible across countries and parties. The following sections narrow the scope of the discussion and focus on the other two aspects of my analysis: a) country differences examined in terms of volatility distribution and extreme

values; and b) cross-party comparisons conducted in light of their average volatility and elasticity (i.e. a concept used only in this chapter).

Country-Level Similarities and Differences

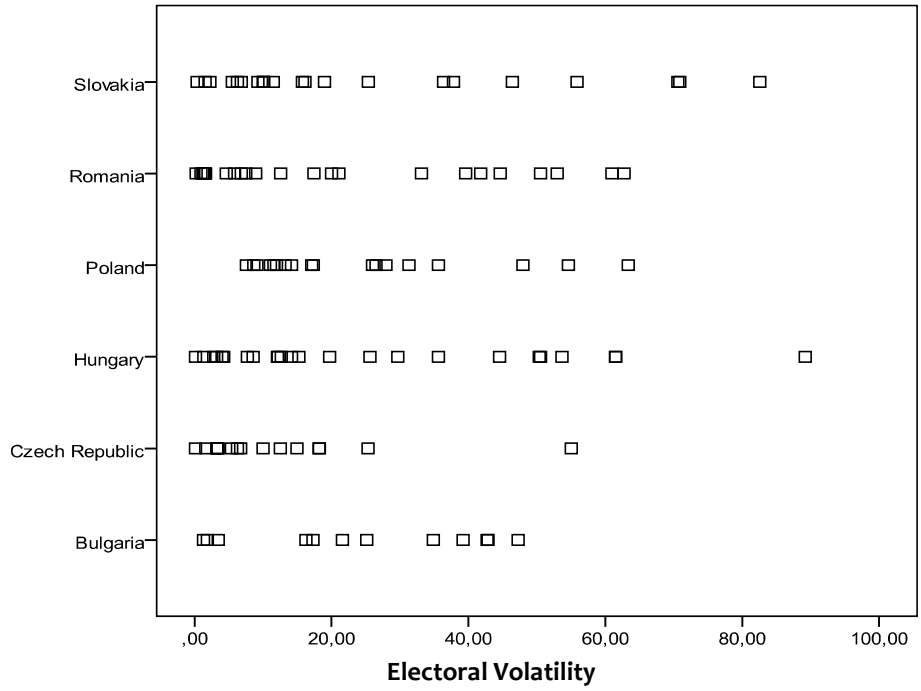
The cross-national focus of this section complements the longitudinal distributions examined so far. Figure 2.4 reflects the clustering of volatility: each square represents the electoral volatility (on the horizontal axis) characterizing a political party in one election. The similarity of all those clusters is consistent with the graphical representation in Figure 2.1. The majority of CEE political parties, irrespective of the timing and country in which they compete, have large volatility arrays. There are at least two major observable differences between the countries, all relevant in the process of understanding the electoral diversity of the CEE region. First, even among the least volatile parties (i.e. those included in the 0-20% category), the starting point and dispersion of volatilities are country specific. In four out of the six countries, there are political parties with volatility close to absolute zero. The Bulgarian and Polish parties are a bit further away from this extreme value with minimums of 1.3% and 8.6% respectively. These same two countries have the lowest density of political parties with low volatility, whereas the highest density is observed in Hungary and Romania. At the same time, the Czech Republic has the highest percentage of its total number of political parties clustered in this low range of volatility (only two values are above 20%).

Second, the homogeneity of dispersion and the maximum values reached by electoral volatility differ across countries. Hungary and Slovakia have the broadest dispersion, and are also the only countries in which political parties register the highest values of electoral volatility above 80%. Apart from the Czech Republic, the countries with the most homogenous distributions are Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania. The shape of these distributions, however, differs. The Bulgarian political parties are divided into three categories that cluster around certain increasing values of volatility: a small group situated around 3%, a larger group around 20%, and the largest group around 40%. The Polish political parties have a similar distribution, but the categories of party clusters are reversed: most parties are positioned around the 15% value, slightly fewer around the 50% value, and the smallest cluster resides close to 65%. One further difference when compared to the situation in Bulgaria is that the categories get closer in terms of value towards the upper extreme of the volatility spectrum. Romania has two main groups of parties – those with low volatility (up to 20%), and those with high volatility (more than 40%) with no values in between.

The visualization of these distributions is complemented by descriptive statistical indicators that confirm these country differences. With the exception of the Czech Republic, which has an average volatility of 11.73% (consistent with

its clustering described above), the mean electoral volatility over all countries is very similar (around 25%). However, the mean does not tell us much without considering the standard deviation. The values of the latter support the earlier observation that Hungary and Slovakia have the highest dispersion of volatility as their standard deviations (around 25) greatly exceed those of other countries. Furthermore, the range of volatility values reaches its peaks in these two countries, at 89.10% in Hungary, and 82.21% in Slovakia. The next country, Romania, follows far behind at 62.50%. Bulgaria has the smallest volatility range (45.97) followed by the Czech Republic (54.88). This confirms the existence of a homogenous sample of parties in both countries. It is relevant to note that without an outlier situated at close to 60% volatility, the Czech Republic would have by far the smallest range with a difference of about 25% between the maximum and minimum volatility. The similarities between the distributions in Bulgaria and Poland are also visible when reporting the indicators of central tendency: there is a striking similarity in terms of averages (24.48 and 24.17) and standard deviations (16.88 and 16.78). However, the observations based directly on the graph were better suited to highlight differences in the clustering (i.e. the categories around certain values).

Figure 2.4: Clusters of Electoral Volatility at Country Level



Summing up, the distribution of electoral volatility across countries indicates a few notable similarities and differences. First, there is a general tendency of

most parties to cluster in the area between 5-40% electoral volatility. Extreme values of volatility – both minima and maxima – are quite rare. Second, the countries pair up in terms of the range of volatility or shape of dispersion. At the same time, differences are identified along the same lines. Even in those instances at which general resemblances are noticeable, a closer look reveals various patterns. Following this line of reasoning, it is useful to analyze the political parties with extreme volatility (both low and high) from these countries. In doing so, I use their average volatility calculated as the mean electoral volatility in all elections in which these parties competed between 1990 and 2008.

Table 2.2 includes these values and provides an indication of the average range of electoral volatility at the party level in CEE countries. These extremes (i.e. the least and the most volatile party in every country) reflect general differences between the observed cases. For example, Poland is characterized by small discrepancies between the parties situated at the ends of the volatility continuum, but their electoral volatility values are high. By contrast, Slovakia widens the gap between the volatility extremes. Furthermore, the least volatile Polish party has higher values than the most volatile Czech party, but Hungary and Slovakia have parties that are more volatile than the most volatile Polish party.

Table 2.2: Extreme Averages of Electoral Volatility in CEE Countries

Country	Political Party / Formation	Average volatility (%)
Bulgaria	DPS	17
	SDS	31
Czech Republic	KDU-CSL	9
	CSSD	18
Hungary	SZDSZ	11
	MDF	45
Poland	PSL	22
	PO	32
Romania	UDMR	3
	PRM	30
Slovakia	KDH	5
	SDL	75

In fact, the parties that exhibit extremely high volatility in Hungary and Bulgaria are not (or are no longer) major political actors. For example, the MDF did not gain access to the 1998 legislature, and the SDS in Bulgaria continuously lost ground in national politics. Two observations can be made on the basis of this general data. On one hand, the level of volatility at the party level is rather high

and partially consistent with previous research that identifies such trends at the party system level in the region. Moreover, the most volatile party in the entire region, the Slovak SDL is no longer in parliament. In the most recent election (2006), SDL did not compete individually as it merged in 2004 with Direction – Social Democracy (SMER which was initially a faction of SDL). On the other hand, consistent with the observations made previously in this section, electoral volatility has a high degree of cross-country variation.

According to the data presented in Table 2.2, there are three types of parties that exhibit the least electoral volatility. First, ethnic parties, with their clearly targeted appeal and focus of representation, stabilize their electorate quite well in two out of the three countries in which they can be found in CEE. The Turkish minority party[28] in Bulgaria (DPS) and that of the Hungarians in Romania (iUDMR) count on a quite consistent body of voters, with the UDMR being the most stable in the region. Its average volatility of 3% is, in large part, the result of a relatively constant share of votes – very closely reflecting the proportion of Hungarians in Romania – in all the elections irrespective of the turnout. This evidence suggests that ethnic Hungarians mobilize to a similar extent as ethnic Romanians. Second, there are two Christian-Democratic parties that appeal to rather stable electorates in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Third, successor parties display divergent paths: they are the most stable in Hungary and Poland, and the most volatile in Slovakia in which the successor party is the most volatile from the party system.

This apparent discrepancy (i.e. the variation in success of successor parties) can be explained by a taking a closer look at cross-country political developments. Comparative analyses indicate that the ex-communist parties in the region generally followed the path of "pragmatic reform" (Ziblatt 1998) and/or made a "nationalistic-patriotic" maneuver (Bozoki and Ishiyama 2002). The first strategy refers to the invocation of the Western social democratic tradition and called for "a sort of pro-capitalist policy 'with a human face'" (Bozoki 1997, 56; see also Sitter 2002). Given their inability to pursue classical redistributive social-democratic policies alongside market-economic transformation, the regenerated communist heirs dressed up their tactics into "the catchy but empty slogans of competence and modernization" (Bozoki 2002, 6). As such, the key issue of their election campaigns became the exclusive claims to political experience and technocratic expertise in administering market restructuring more sensitively and effectively than any (supposedly novice and inept) competitors. Ultimately, this strategy amounted

[28] Due to constitutional provisions, in Bulgaria DPS is not referred to as a "political party"; in Romania, UDMR also avoids the term of party, using instead the term "alliance". However, both political entities fulfill the functions of parties as defined by Sartori (1976) and, as such, the term party is used to refer to both in this work.

to the neo-liberalization of the communist successor parties which tended to pay off for those that managed to radically and credibly reorganize into European social democratic parties into "competent arbiters of change" (Hough 2005, 5). The most notable cases in this regard are the MSZP in Hungary and the SLD in Poland. The achievement of these parties had a positive impact upon the stability and clarity of at least their side of the political spectrum.

However, the successor parties in Bulgaria and Romania (BSP and PSD) are seen as the least compelling examples of communist regeneration. Rather than turning wholeheartedly towards social democracy, these parties "transmuted", or moved away from their leftist traditions and drew nearer to the cultural right, nationalist angle of politics (Bozoki and Ishiyama 2002). Their "patriotic" line of adaptation was not so much the reflection of deep ideological commitments, but rather an opportunistic (and largely successful) attempt to retain power by means of dispersing populist propaganda and making concessions to ultra nationalistic formations. (Pop-Eleches 1999, 132) This tactic amounted to a lethargic and largely simulated transition that essentially sabotaged economic reform and party system consolidation, thereby relegating Bulgaria and Romania to the trenches of progress in the CEE region.

As for the right-wing actors in Central and Eastern Europe, they seem to have opted for a programmatic fusion of (neo-)liberal and various conservative elements in order to gather electoral support and assert themselves in the political arena (see Hanley 2000). The most remarkable case is that of the FIDESZ in Hungary, which capitalized on the fragmentation of the right in the country by forming strategic party alliances and absorbing smaller organizations into a broad and durable block. In stark contrast, the tragic narrative of the Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) in Poland resulted in the disarray of the right, characterized by a great deal of party fragmentation and almost continuous new arrivals on the political stage (e.g. LPR, PIS, or SRP).

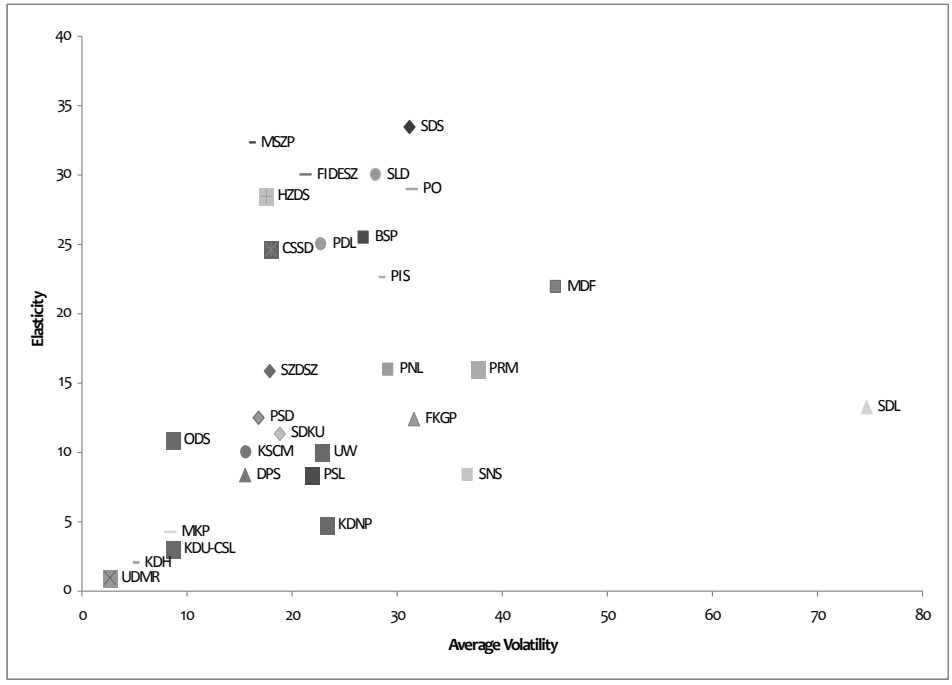
Cross-Party Comparisons

The extreme values displayed in Table 2.2 provide the basis for useful comparisons at the country level. In narrowing down the scope of this analysis, supplementary information is necessary. In this respect, a map of all analyzed political parties in the region helps to sketch an accurate picture. In this respect, the longitudinal distribution of volatility presented above is complemented in this section by a bi-dimensional graph that both illustrates the positioning of political parties relative to one another – revealing commonalities and differences – and particularizes the analysis by associating labels with specific values. The bi-dimensional space consists of the average volatility calculated for some parties in Table 2.2 and a second dimension used

only in this chapter for a general electoral mapping of the CEE parties, namely vote elasticity. Calculated on the basis of the formula proposed by Rose and Urwin (1970), vote elasticity is the difference between the highest and the lowest vote share received by a political party in all the legislative elections in the period under scrutiny. The vote elasticity can also be seen as a function of the size of the party. The measure emphasizes the homogeneity of voters for a specific political party. A measurement such as this accounts only for the difference between extreme performances in all elections in which a party competes (unlike volatility that refers to consecutive elections).

In light of this, a party with stable electoral support scores low both on elasticity (i.e. the vertical axis) and average volatility. Figure 2.5 draws a complex picture in support of previous observations according to which UDMR and KDH benefit from stable electoral support and are thus positioned in the bottom left corner of the graph. At the other extreme, SDL in Slovakia is situated towards the upper right corner, indicating high volatility and elasticity. Before delving into the details, a methodological and an empirical observation deserve attention. Methodologically, there are two parties with similar levels of volatility and elasticity: KSCM in the Czech Republic and DPS in Bulgaria.

Figure 2.5: The Distribution of CEE Political Parties based on Average Volatility and Vote Elasticity



On empirical grounds, there is higher variance on the volatility dimension compared to vote elasticity. The figure depicts a variance in elasticity of up to 34% (SDS in Bulgaria), with more than 60% of parties being clustered below 20%. However, on the volatility scale, the maximum score is 75 and the cut-off point for half of the parties is somewhere around 30. The more homogenous distribution in terms of elasticity is also indicated by the maximum point on the graph (40) compared to that of volatility (80). This variance increases for volatility when analyzing the volatility of electoral cycles. The figures and graphic representations in this section are aggregated and refer to averages and extremes only. More of this diversity is revealed in the following chapters in which the formulated hypotheses are tested.

According to Figure 2.5, CEE parties can be clustered into four different categories. The first category consists of parties with very low volatility and very low elasticity. These are the competitors that are best able to mobilize a stable core of voters across time. Two of these parties were referred to extensively in the previous paragraphs (UDMR and KDH). The other two are the MKP and KDU-CSL. All of the parties in this category are relatively small and, in terms of their electoral performance, obtain an average of 8-9% of the total vote share. It comes as no surprise that this category includes all the ethnic parties as they have a clear target group and convey messages that appeal to a stable core of electorate. Chapter 1 concluded that in CEE cleavages have in general a weak explanatory power regarding the electoral volatility. Whereas such a claim is valid for the broad universe of cases, this first cluster of parties represents an isolated situation in which the ethnic cleavage is a particular explanation for the level of electoral volatility.

However, the cleavage explanation does not cover the Christian-democratic parties. All of them with the exception of the KDU-CSL were unsuccessful in a series of elections, some of them failing to access the legislature over several elections (e.g. KDNP in Hungary). The KDNP secured a rather stable share of votes in the first elections (6.5% in 1990 and 7% in 1994), but it dropped to half of this share in the subsequent 1998 and 2002 elections as its message was taken over by major parties in Hungary. If the KDNP had continued along the same line it did in the first electoral competitions, its score would have placed it in the category of low volatility (elasticity is low).

The second category, which includes more parties, is characterized by low to average volatility and elasticity. The two parties situated in the proximity of the cluster are the KDNP and the ODS. Similar in terms of ideology to two of the parties placed in the first category, the ODS has low volatility and high elasticity brought about by a decrease in support in 2002. One of the two large parties in the Czech Republic, the ODS is one of the least volatile in the region, situated at the same level as the KDU-CSL on this dimension. In fact, the rest of the ethnic and Christian-democratic parties are located within this category,

thus strengthening the argument that their appeal is precisely targeted and usually mobilizes specific voters. The rest of the parties in the category cluster homogenously, with the SZDSZ in Hungary being the most elastic of all.

The third category is comprised of those parties with average volatility and high elasticity. It is a less homogenous category than the previous two and includes most major parties in the region: the BSP in Bulgaria, the CSSD in the Czech Republic, the MSZP and the FIDESZ in Hungary; the PO and the SLD in Poland, the PDL in Romania, and the HZDS in Slovakia. Overall, the major parties can be expected to have higher elasticity for at least two reasons. On one hand, most of these parties were small at the outset and gradually became larger. Thus, the difference between the initial and most recent scores is great. On the other hand, those parties that started out large (e.g. BSP) experienced sudden drops in electoral support.

The fourth cluster of countries is heterogeneous and is characterized by average elasticity and high volatility. It includes parties that, with the exception of PNL in Romania, have failed at least once to gain access to parliament. The average value of elasticity indicates that these parties perform similarly in electoral terms, but the high volatility reveals the more important characteristic these parties share: they are rather small parties that occasionally register very good electoral results. Both parties that fail to enter parliament after 2000 – FKGP – reside in this category. In fact, counter-performance such as this triggers high levels of volatility, irrespective of the homogeneity of a party's range of electoral results.

One final relevant point revealed by Figure 2.5 is related to the dispersion of parties within the same party system. There are rare occasions on which parties from the same country follow similar patterns. In Poland, the PO, the PIS, and the SLD reside in the third category. In Romania, the PNL and the PRM reside in the fourth cluster. In the vast majority of cases, political parties from the same country perform differently on the two dimensions, revealing once more the need to study them closely in order to fully understand the dynamics at work. In this respect, the most illustrative case is that of the PSD and the PDL in Romania. These parties emerged after the 1991 split within the FSN (i.e. the umbrella organization that played a major role in the 1989 regime change). Their development over the course of two decades differs significantly. The PSD registers stable levels of support and keeps the discrepancy between its best and worst performance to a minimum.

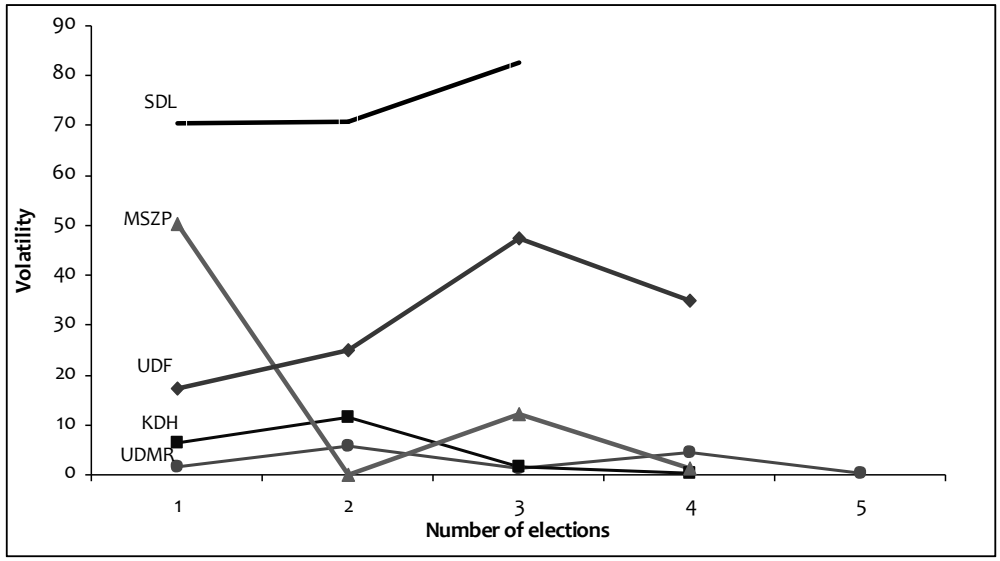
Unlike the PSD, the PDL ran in elections in multiple coalitions (only in 2000 and 2008 it run on its own) and its performance varied greatly. With average results in the first three elections, the party became larger as of 2004 and managed to maintain relatively stable core of voters (although it performed more poorly than PSD). The real difference between the two parties can be expressed in terms of elasticity: the PDL oscillates between the 7% it

received in 2000 and the 32% it received in the most recent elections. Conversely, the PSD has a narrower interval of electoral support (21.5% in 1996 and 24% in 2004).

The Role of Extremes within Party Systems

As a final point, the emphasis has been placed on specific cross-party differences derived from Figure 2.5. In doing this, the five parties positioned at the extremes of the volatility and/or elasticity axes are selected and their development between elections is briefly analyzed. Beginning with volatility trends, the parties with extreme values are examined from the perspective of the role they play within party systems. The observation of trends in volatility implies a return to the initial calculations based on formula (1). Throughout this book, the unit of observation is the political party/election and – unless specified as in the previous sections – the analysis employs calculations at that level. Figure 2.6 traces the evolution of levels of electoral volatility (Y axis) for each party in consecutive elections (X axis)[29].

Figure 2.6: The Outliers' Development in terms of Electoral Volatility



Note: The elections included on the horizontal axis refer to 1994, 1997, 2001, and 2005 in Bulgaria; 1994, 1998, 2002, and 2006 in Hungary; 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, and 2008 in Romania; 1994, 1998, 2002, and 2006 in Slovakia.

[29] The numbers on the horizontal axis mark the election in which volatility is calculated. Thus, the number 1 corresponds to the second election in which the party competes.

The selected parties are the UDMR and the KDH[30] (low elasticity and electoral volatility), the SDL (medium elasticity and high volatility), the MSZP (low volatility and high elasticity), and the SDS (medium volatility and high elasticity). Given the profiles of these parties, their volatility trends are expected to differ considerably. Figure 2.6 confirms this expectation with the two least volatile and elastic parties having low volatility values with little variation across time. At the other extreme, SDL has consistently high levels of volatility. With the exception of the first period (between election one and two on the graph), the intermediary cases of the MSZP and the SDS display similar volatility trends at various levels. The following paragraphs attach meaning to these values and tendencies and explain the role played by these political parties within their systems.

UDMR is the high performer of the CEE region in terms of volatility and elasticity. Formed on the same day on which the Ceausescu couple was sentenced to death and executed –Christmas Day, 1989 – the UDMR refers to itself as an alliance rather than a party. In practice, this is connected not so much with anti-party feelings amongst citizens, but with the institutional origins of this political actor. It initially included sixteen different parties and associations that were able to preserve their status inside UDMR. This was made possible by the internal organization of the party which grouped local caucuses into autonomous county[31] branches (Bugajski 2002, 865).

The party statute granted decision-making power to the local branches. The common denominator between all component entities was that they ran under the same label, proposing a unitary list of candidates in the national legislative elections. With a message focused on the representation of Hungarians in Romania, this party consistently gravitates around 7% of the vote share. The quest for a legal framework in which collective rights for national minorities would be secured determined the UDMR to seek inclusion in government coalitions. Its stable electorate allowed the party to play a pivotal role in Romanian politics. After two terms in opposition (1990-1992 and 1992-1996), as of 1996, the UDMR either took part in government coalitions with various partners or maintained a "silent agreement" with the minority cabinet (2000-2004). Its party discipline, capacity for adaptation, and loyalty to the government coalition[32] transform it into a reliable partner. Thus, with the

[30] The two parties are selected because they have similar average volatility and electoral elasticity scores.

[31] The county is the main territorial-administrative unit of Romania, it corresponds to the constituencies in the legislative elections.

[32] UDMR joined the government coalition led by CDR between 1996 and 2000. When its term of office was close to an end, one of the coalition partners (USD) defected and CDR created a minority government relying on the suport of UDMR. A similar situation, with more or less the same actors, was recorded in 2007 when PD (half of USD) left the coalition government created

exception of the extremist PRM, most parties are willing to take UDMR on board when forming governments.

This pivotal role of the UDMR is made possible by permanent discourse adaptations. The goal of UDMR to represent the interests of the Hungarians both from the perspective of their particular ethnic background and ideological perspective (Bugajski 1994, 18) provides room for maneuver. The party was always a mixture of radicals and moderates and experienced ongoing internal disputes. Although the leaders of the party were generally moderates, the beginning of the UDMR's existence was marked by radical action that was largely a response to the nationalist acts on the part of Romanian leaders. For example, in 1992 an autonomy manifesto of the Hungarian minority was launched as a response to the anti-Hungarian measures adopted by the mayor of Cluj-Napoca (Bugajski 2002, 868). This is the main city in Transylvania in which Hungarians make up almost one fifth of the population. These internal divisions characterized the party throughout the entire post-communist period, but no defections were recorded (Millard 2004, 136). Although the moderate approach granted the party access to coalition governments, workable compromises between internal factions became more difficult to achieve as the party became a solid pillar of the Romanian party system. The party has made slight modifications to its discourse in recent years in response to numerous signals that it would lose votes to a more radical faction to be formed within the Hungarian minority (i.e. the Hungarian Civic Forum) (Gherghina and Jiglau 2008). The achievement of internal balance cleared the path towards low levels of volatility in elections.

Similar to the UDMR in terms of elasticity and average volatility, the KDH shows a stability pattern only as of the third election in which it participates. The curve in Figure 2.6 indicates that these two parties follow paths similar to that of the UDMR at a lower level of volatility. The party garners more electoral support than the UDMR, with results around 8.5% of votes in elections with a peak in 1994 at which point it obtained 10% of votes. Founded in 1990 by a Catholic dissident from the communist era, the party combines the tradition of Slovak pre-WWII political Catholicism and the ideology of Western European Christian democracy (Szajkowski 2005, 527). Based on this close connection with Christian Democratic parties around Europe, the party was a strong supporter of the European and Atlantic integration project throughout the 1990s (Bugajski 2002, 308; Henderson 2008, 286). In the second post-communist decade, the Catholic ideological roots of the party gave rise to conditional support for the EU, and the contention that accession should be accompanied by active involvement. For example, in 2003

with PNL (part of CDR back in 1996) and UDMR. The latter two parties supported a minority government that finalized its term in office without early elections.

KDH supported a motion in parliament on the sovereign right of EU member states to decide on cultural and ethical issues (Haughton 2004b).

In organizational terms, the KDH faced two relevant splits that weakened its appeal to voters. This is particularly true in that the most recent split took place in a period of electoral apogee. Two years after its formation, in the aftermath of the 'velvet divorce' from the Czech Republic, a nationalist faction split from the party (Bugajski 2002, 306-307). The second split took place in the wake of the 1998 elections at which point disagreement between two leaders of the KDH about the future of the party within the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) led to the separation of the Mikulas Dzurinda faction which led to the creation of a new party – the SDKU. The most recent split partially explains the KDH's shift in ideology during the second decade. Its orientation towards conservatism and soft Euro-scepticism was meant to provide a contrast with the attitudes of SDKU (Henderson 2002, 2). In spite of splits, ideological changes, and relatively low electoral support, the party remained a consistent actor on the Slovak political scene. Its electoral stability coincided with the KDH's reliability as a partner in all coalition governments in which the HZDS did not take part, as the two political actors were in fierce opposition. Thus, the KDH was in the coalition government after the 1998 and 2002 elections.[33] In 1998, they led the broad five-party coalition and provided the prime minister in the person of Dzurinda, whereas in the latter they left the government at the beginning of 2006 due to an international dispute between Slovakia and the Vatican over a religious issue.

As a successor of the Slovak Communist Party (KSS), the SDL inherited extensive membership[34], nationwide organizations, and a recognizable label. Its popularity has suffered from dramatic oscillations, transforming the party into the most volatile in CEE. Without outstanding electoral results (see the low level of elasticity in Figure 2.5), this party did not manage to maintain a stable core of voters between elections. Its evolution is characterized by high oscillations: achievements in terms of voter support were immediately followed by major drops in support and electoral success emerged after a disappointing performance. What were initially good results in 1992 (14.5%), were followed by a drop in the subsequent 1994 early elections to half of that share. However, in the 1998 elections, the party gained a similar amount of votes to those it gained in 1994. After the second major drop in 2002 (1.4% on common lists with two other parties), SDL merged with another political party

[33] KDH also took part in one government before the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and its leader, Jan Carnogursky was prime minister between 1991 and 1992. For details, see Henderson (2007, 287).

[34] In 1991, SDL decided to initiate the re-registration of members and, as such, dropped from an initial amount of more than 100,000 inherited members to 20,000 volunteer members. For details, see Bugajski (2002, 298).

(SMER), losing its label and identity. This drop was produced by the major split of a moderate faction led by Peter Weiss and Milan Ftacnik who formed the Social Democratic Alternative (Szajkowski 2005, 532).

Although it is one of the few Slovak political parties with consistent presence on the political arena next to the HZDS and the KDH, high electoral instability is only characteristic of the SDL. At the same time, it is the only Slovak party among the three that did not safeguard a key role in the political evolution of the country. It was included only once in a government coalition following the 1998 election at which point it achieved its highest electoral performance, and an invitation to engage in a cooperation agreement with the Meciar government towards the end of its second term in office. This situation was mainly the result of consistently lower antipathy shown towards HZDS by the elites of SDL compared with the other opposition parties (Deegan-Krause 2006, 104). Although this agreement to support a minority government was not enforced (Pridham 2002), it highlights the SDL's susceptibility to blackmail at that particular moment, very close to their 1998 electoral peak. Although the average electoral performance of SDL is higher than that of KDH, the trends they exhibit in the context of Slovak politics differ considerably. Ideology can play an important role in explaining these trends, but it is quite unlikely to be the key explanatory factor in this case as both the SDL and the KDH have broad views that should allow for coalitions with multiple competitors. At the same time, the SDL was not marginalized and the KDH did not display a coherent ideology throughout the investigated period. There is definitely an association between the roles in Slovak politics and electoral volatility: the more involved KDH benefited from a stable core of voters and could thus continue its activities at comparable levels across elections.

From the same category of successor parties as the SDL, the MSZP tells a different story. It is the successor of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and it is one of the two large parties in Hungary. With low electoral volatility, the party has high electoral elasticity due in large part to the results of the first post-communist election in which it attracted only 10% of votes. As the average vote share received in the second election (1994) was around 35%, the volatility is large only at the beginning and drops again by the third election. This situation is reflected in Figure 2.6. From that moment onwards, the MSZP's volatility level can be compared to those of the UDMR and the KDH. The party formed a coalition government in 1994-1998 as well as in the most recent two terms in offices (2002-2006 and 2006-2010). Recent scandals involving the president of MSZP, and then prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsany, revealed lies and manipulation during the electoral campaign. As a result, their coalition partner (SZDSZ) withdrew and the MSZP formed the first minority government in Hungary that lasted until April 2009 at which point Gyurcsany resigned and

the new prime minister, an independent, Gordon Bajnai, was supported by the MSZP and the SZDSZ.

The MSZP is the political party that transformed the Hungarian political life into a play with two main characters. It shaped three out of five governments until 2010, won every election but the initial ones (in 1998 it did not govern though it obtained the highest share of votes and number of seats), and represented a significant governing alternative in the form of a major opposition party during the FIDESZ government in 1998-2002. MSZP encapsulates, on a relatively constant basis, the preferences of more than one third of the electorate. Its presence in the party system coincides with the consolidation of a broad electorate.

The SDS was founded in December 1989, as a union of 11 political organizations in opposition to the Communist government (Bugajski 2002). Its composition changed immediately afterward and, in 1990, six more parties were incorporated (Waller and Karasimeonov 1996). In February 1997, SDS transformed into a single unified party. The 1990s were the years of glory for the party that reached its peak in the 1997 legislative elections at which point a coalition called United Democratic Forces (ODS) was formed around the SDS. The coalition government remained in power until 2001 and represents the only time at which SDS took part in government. During these two decades, the SDS ran only once in elections without coalition partners (1994) and their volatility is quite high. Moreover, as its scores oscillated heavily, the difference between its worst and best performance is very high and that is why the SDS is positioned at the extreme in terms of elasticity in Figure 2.6. Its support in the first three elections (1991-1997) is situated around 33%, whereas in the most recent two elections its vote share decreases to 10%. This discrepancy is reflected in the shape of the volatility curve that increases between the elections in which SDS lost a large proportion of its voters (1997 vs. 2001) and stabilizes at both ends (1991 vs. 1994 and 2001 vs. 2005). Once a major actor in Bulgarian politics, SDS consistently lost ground and succeeded in entering parliament only by joining new electoral alliances or coalitions.

This sub-section primarily illustrates the important roles played by the five parties that register extreme values in terms of volatility and elasticity within their respective party systems. Most of these parties are relevant political actors participating in coalitions and represent more than marginal forces on the political scene. However, there are a few visible differences between them with substantial implications in terms of volatility. There is a positive association between the importance of a party to the party system and electoral volatility over time. Given the dual nature of such a relationship in which volatility can be either the cause or the effect of importance within the party system, no cause-effect conclusions can be derived. Nevertheless, this systematic observation indicates that neither volatility nor importance is

influenced by the level of electoral support. Both the highly popular MSZP and the specifically-oriented UDMR shape the political environment decisively through their involvement in a number of government coalitions. In general, the more volatile parties participate in coalition governments less often. Most of the time, these parties are in opposition, although their ideology allows them to collaborate with other political actors.

Conclusions

Can volatility be measured only through individual-level voter changes? The answer to this question is negative. Relying on theoretical arguments from the literature, the first section of this chapter explored the reliability of an indicator that accounts for the aggregate change in votes in consecutive elections. At the same time, unlike previous research conducted the party-system level, this chapter argues in favor of the necessity of calculating volatility with the primary unit of political representation (the political party) as the reference point. In doing so, there are a few methodological choices that must be made in terms of the relative measurement of vote shifts and the identification of political support for individual actors following splits, mergers, or an electoral alliance formation and disintegration. In addition, the focus on individual parties requires the estimation of changes in electoral support relative to the size of the party.

The descriptive analysis presented in this chapter justifies the analytical endeavor in the four chapters to follow. There exists great variation in electoral volatility across countries and parties. Aggregate and party-level data (Figures 2.4 and 2.5) reveal important differences between political actors in terms of electoral support. In this setting, time does not influence the stability of voter preferences. This empirical evidence supports the refutation of the democratization argument presented in Chapter 1. The time passed from the moment of regime change means the achievement of democratic performances for these countries. Moreover, it coincides with an important component of institutional democratization – the experience of free elections. As post-communist citizens were deprived of the right to choose their representatives for more than five decades, their behavior was expected to be chaotic at the outset and stabilize over time. This is not the case with the parties included in this analysis. The distribution of volatility in the two post-communist decades is very similar with a slight increase in the number of stable voters in the first rather than the second decade.

Government incumbency appears to make a difference with respect to voter preferences. This observation allows for the formulation of two propositions. On theoretical grounds, voters appear to behave in a manner that is consistent with the reward or punish strategy with regard to incumbent parties. In empirical terms, incumbency may explain certain variation in party

volatility and its inclusion among the control variables is justified by these general findings. The cross-party differences, although calculated here on the basis volatility means and electoral elasticity, encourage the quest for an explanation of their dispersion. Furthermore, the analysis of the outliers revealed an association between high levels of volatility and importance of the party in the context of the political system of the country. These are the general premises on which I design and conduct the empirical tests to identify the impact of specific features of party organization on electoral volatility.