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

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Chapter 4 | A Mobilizing Network? Membership Organizations and Electoral Volatility

Introduction

The theoretical arguments presented in Chapter 1 point in the direction of a linkage between party membership organizations and the stability of electoral support. The two hypothesized relationships refer to the positive effects that large size (2a) and minimal variation in size (2b) of membership organizations can have on the level of electoral volatility at party level. This chapter provides an empirical test of both hypotheses. In doing so, it combines a bivariate statistical analysis with qualitative assessments. The latter describe the longitudinal development of party membership in CEE. At the same time, such qualitative insights investigate the cross-country and cross-party differences regarding party membership.

This chapter follows a deductive logic, starting with a section that describes the general development of membership organizations. It also presents several aggregate data that reveal cross-national and cross-party comparisons. The following section includes the empirical testing of the hypothesized relationships (H2a and H2b) between membership organizations and electoral stability. The general results indicate that size of membership has a limited role in explaining electoral volatility, whereas the variations in membership size are not related to the stability of electoral support. The third section focuses on cross-parties development of membership organizations and qualitatively assesses the relationship with electoral volatility. The final section includes two single case studies – the BSP in Bulgaria and the SLD in Slovakia – as illustrative ways in which the membership organizations are marginal in electoral volatility.

The Phases of Membership Development in CEE

Chapter 1 briefly explained why the expectations for large membership organizations in the post-communist countries are unrealistic. That is why instead of contrasting ideal types and searching for their applicability (e.g. cadre, elite, mass etc.) this section emphasizes the longitudinal development of membership organizations departing from the existing differences at the beginning o the post-communist period. As previously mentioned, the successor parties had the advantage of an organizational legacy when compared to the political competitors starting as intellectual clubs, like-minded circles of friends, passionate units of anti-communist fight, or revived parties.

The Initial Differences

In the aftermath of regime change, mostly due to the extensive membership pursued by the communist parties, the newly emerged political actors considered membership as a legacy of the past. Their discourse responded to and further fueled the existing anti-party feelings. The avoidance of the party label, of issues resembling party discipline, structured bureaucracy, and office-seeking behavior were symptomatic for most newly created umbrella organizations. For example, the Czech Civic Forum (OF) adopted "Parties for party members – Civic Forum for everybody" as one of main slogans for the first free elections in Czechoslovakia (Toka 1997, 5). Such attitudes combined with the structural and membership heritage (Kitschelt 1995) of the successors resulted in visible differences between the membership organizations of the political parties at the beginning of the post-communist period.

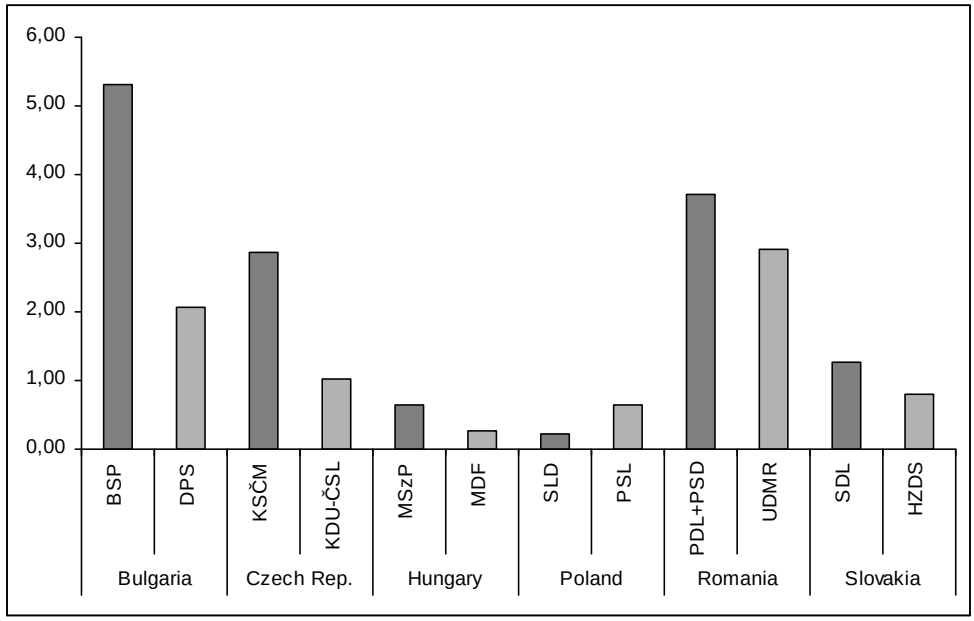
Apart from the public discourse of the newly emerged parties, their formation did not allow a lot of room for maneuver. Many actors were initially created as discussion partners for the communists in the Round Table Talks (Walsh 1994; Ester et al. 1998). This meant the legalization of parties operating as dissident/intellectual clubs, groups and circles in a clandestine manner during communism (Szczerbiak 2001a, 13) and the creation of anti-communist umbrella organizations gathering the opposition forces. The registration of these formations did not imply their conversion into articulated organizations. These political parties or electoral coalitions could rely neither on membership nor on extensive territorial organizations in the first elections. The poor membership and organizational structures was due to their embryonic form, loose organization, and ideological diffuseness (Berglund and Dellenbrant 1994).[40] At the same time, the revived parties (for details, see Kopecky 2001) failed to establish the organizational continuity with their previous existence and they could rely solely on the political memory as basis for mobilization (Waller and Karasimeonov 1996, 135).

Figure 4.1 depicts the levels of party membership of successor and newly emerged parties in the first elections. Among the newly emerged political actors, I selected those parties in the study with the highest membership rates (the vertical axis represents percentage of party members from the electorate). Even so, differences are visible: except of Poland, in all the countries the successor parties have considerably higher percentages of members compared with the best performer among the newly emerged category. The biggest discrepancy appears in the Bulgarian case where the BSP has the highest membership rate among the successor parties in the region. A

[40] One exception to this situation was Romania where the FSN also took the shape of an umbrella organization. Instead of anti-communist forces it brought together the successors (Ishiyama 1995; Ishiyama and Bozoki 2001; Bozoki and Ishiyama 2002; Pop-Eleches 2008, 466).

high level of membership is registered in Romania where the rates of the two successor parties are added (as they competed together in the 1990 elections). The successor parties from the Czech Republic are close to 3% membership of the total population, whereas the SDL in Slovakia appealed to slightly more than 1% of the population. The MSZP in Hungary and the SLD in Poland are the least successful successor parties in securing membership, the latter being the only case in the region with a smaller membership rate than another party in its country.

Figure 4.1: Levels of Party Membership (%) in the First Elections



Note: The figures for the Czech and Slovak parties are from 1992.

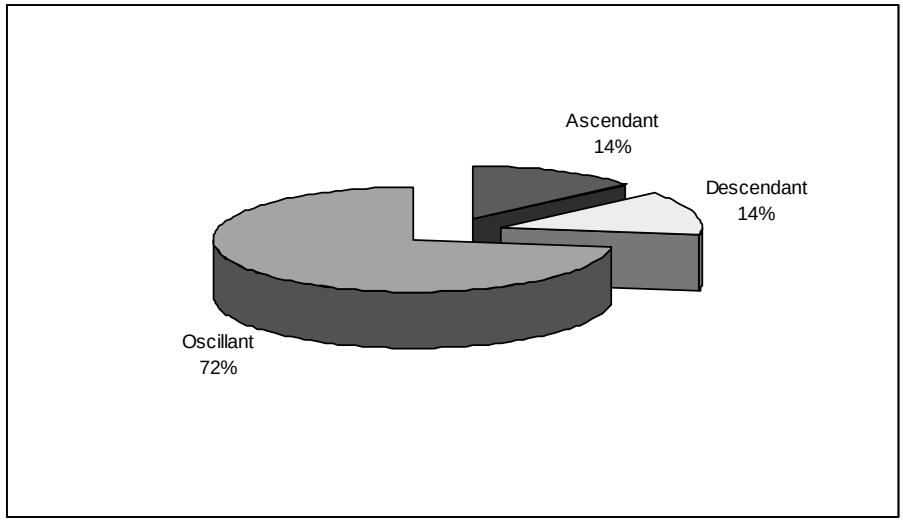
The relevant observation in Figure 4.1 is the high membership rate of the UDMR in Romania, with a level slightly higher than that of the KSCM, the third successor as membership performance in the region. The paradox for the UDMR was that the anti-party discourse determined many ethnic Hungarians to enroll and thus become members. By avoiding the party label and adopting a position in which the Alliance dissociated from political parties, the elites transformed their formation into an attractive entity for citizens. In reality, the functions fulfilled by the UDMR are those of a political party, starting with the electoral competition and ending with the policy proposals and implementation. As revealed in the next section of the paper, this was the highest membership rate they had. There are two possible explanations for the apogee of party membership in its initial period of existence: 1) the enthusiasm

of ethnic Hungarians and confidence in a new force to represent them after half decade and 2) the lack of alternative groups to promise the same thing. The appearance of other political formations targeting the same group and the disillusionment of ethnic Hungarians with the performance of the UDMR (Gherghina and Jiglau 2008) appear to be the explanations for the decrease of membership across years.

The Oscillating Paths of Membership Organizations

Despite a very good start in terms of membership organizations, none of the successor parties succeeded to maintain such high levels. In fact, most of them registered declines and oscillations. As Figure 4.2 reveals, 14% of the analyzed parties have ascendant trends, no successor party falling in this category. On the contrary, two of them (BSP and SDL) registered descending membership rates in the past two decades. A similar percentage of 14% constantly lost members between elections. Almost three quarters of the CEE political parties (72%) have oscillations regarding their membership rates, the favorable periods (i.e. gains of members) alternating with significant losses.

Figure 4.2: The Evolution of Membership Organizations for the CEE Parties



The general explanation for decreasing membership rests in the disappointment of people involved and party's inefficiency and ineffectiveness in tackling such attitudes. Most of the parties in this category (i.e. UDMR in Romania, MKP in Slovakia, and SDS in Bulgaria) initially mobilized large amounts of members, but as time passed the enthusiasm went down especially that the rhythm in which policies were implemented differed considerably from the initial expectations. The ethnic parties went down on membership as soon

as their activities did not meet to the level of expectations. Their trend is peculiar when compared to the general tendency of membership for all investigated parties: the average level of membership increased from the first (0.8%) to the second election (0.9%) and then decreased below the initial level (0.7% for the third election and 0.65% for the fourth). The apogee for party membership in a comparative perspective was between the first and second elections. As the vast majority of studied parties last from the beginning of transition, this evidence supports the theoretical underpinnings and descriptions for the region (see Chapter 2).

The first elections were often held in a tensed environment, immediately after the negotiations and the development of political parties could be observed only after setting the first government, with the first legislature at work, and with a constitution on the working table. Thus, in the second elections parties benefited of most members compared with the rest of their development and most of them are not able to maintain this level. Only 14% increase their membership rolls out of which almost three quarters are parties established after the mid-1990s. Thorough explanations for this situation are provided in the following section delving into the national contexts.

The key observation at aggregate level is the absence of stable longitudinal trends. This general picture bears relevant implications that contrast previous findings. Mair and van Biezen (2001) illustrate how party membership generally decreases over time at country level. Their findings are valid also for the CEE countries, with more people getting involved into party activities at the beginning of the democratization period. This conclusion does not hold when looking at the party level for the entire post-communist period at regional level.[41] The relevant parties from the political scene (i.e. those included in this study) are not characterized by the decrease of membership organizations. Instead, progresses in attracting members are followed by drops and vice versa. There are only isolated instances (e.g. ODS or MSZP) in which the oscillations are smooth, with relatively small discrepancies between elections. Such situations indicate consistent attitudes of the parties towards members, keeping a rather constant number of people actively involved in the internal life.

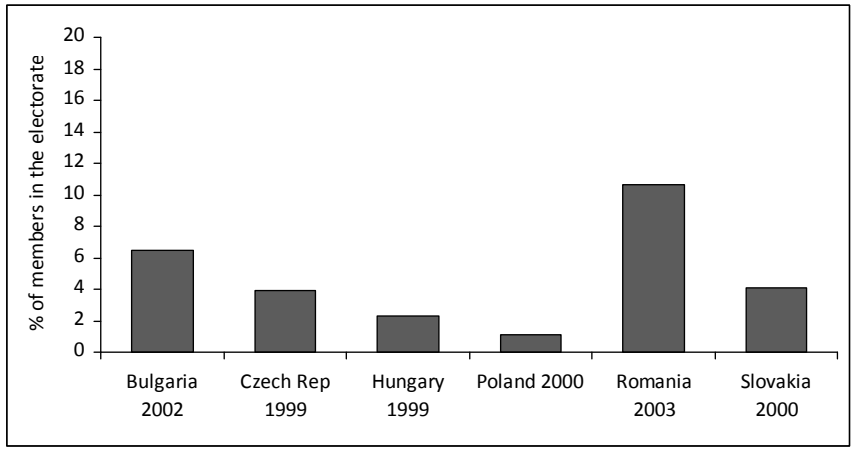
Low Membership Rates

Figure 4.3 shows country-level membership rates after three post-communist elections. These are the cumulated percentages of all parties within the political system. Romania has the highest membership rate, with slightly more than 10% of its voting population being enrolled into political parties. Without

[41] The following section indicates major oscillations at country and party levels.

diminishing the efforts of the Romanian political parties in developing membership organizations, this percentage is augmented by the election laws and counting accuracies. Various laws during the post=communist period require parties to have a few thousands members (10,000 to 25,000) to register in the electoral competition. Furthermore, most parties do not update their database and even if they have as a requirement the payment of a monthly fee, members who do not comply are not thrown away. To conclude, the high percentage of party members in Romania may have procedural bases rather than substantive meaning.

Figure 4.3: Levels of Party Membership (%) across CEE (Country Level Data)



Source: Mair and van Biezen (2001), Szczerbiak (2001a; 2001b), Official Party Registry in Romania (2003), Weldon (2006), Spirova (2007).

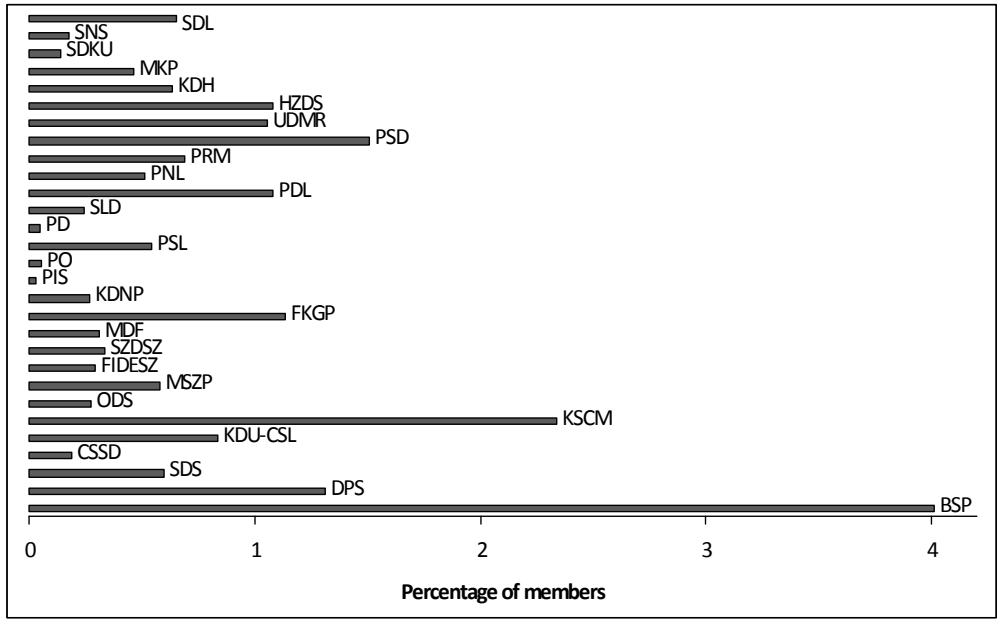
At the other extreme, Poland has less than 1.5% of its voting population enrolled in a political party. This percentage comes as no surprise as the interest and involvement into politics is generally low in post-communist Poland. It is the only state in the region where the turnout was constantly below 50%. Szczerbiak (2001a, 63) provides three possible explanations for the low membership in Poland, all being encountered at regional level as emphasized in chapter 1. First, the political parties see the enrolled electorate as a worthless electoral asset and see their recruitment and retention as inefficient use of resources. Second, there are poor logistic resources that hardly allow parties to properly recruit members and to support local initiatives. Third, the hostility and lack of trust in the political parties is still widespread and thus diminish incentives to enroll into political parties.

Figure 4.4 illustrates the average size of membership organization – calculated as percentage of party members from the electorate – for each political party. The distribution of membership in CEE allows drawing three

main conclusions. First, the vast majority of political parties has a minimal membership organization. The members of most parties account for less than 1% from the total share of voters. Only two political parties (BSP and KSCM) have more than 2%. However, their average size of membership organizations is distorted by the initial high numbers of members (both are successor parties). Moreover, their membership is in decline starting with the first or second election. Consequently, this indicates that no claim regarding mass membership is supported by empirical evidence in CEE.

Second, despite relatively low levels of membership, there is wide variation between the organizations established by political parties. Such variation is recorded both across countries – thus complementing the trends observed in Figure 4.3 - and across the political parties within the same party system. Third, all parties with large membership organizations were formed at the beginning of the post-communist period. Some of them are either revived (FKGP) or successors (BSP, KSCM, PSD, or PDL). In general, the organizational legacy of the former communist parties helped the successors to reach higher levels of membership compared with the rest of competitors.

Figure 4.4: Levels of Party Membership across CEE Political Parties (Average Percentages)



However, as illustrated by Figure 4.4 and by the case study of the SDL, being a successor does not always guarantee a large membership organization. Instead, the moment of formation and the length of existence on the political

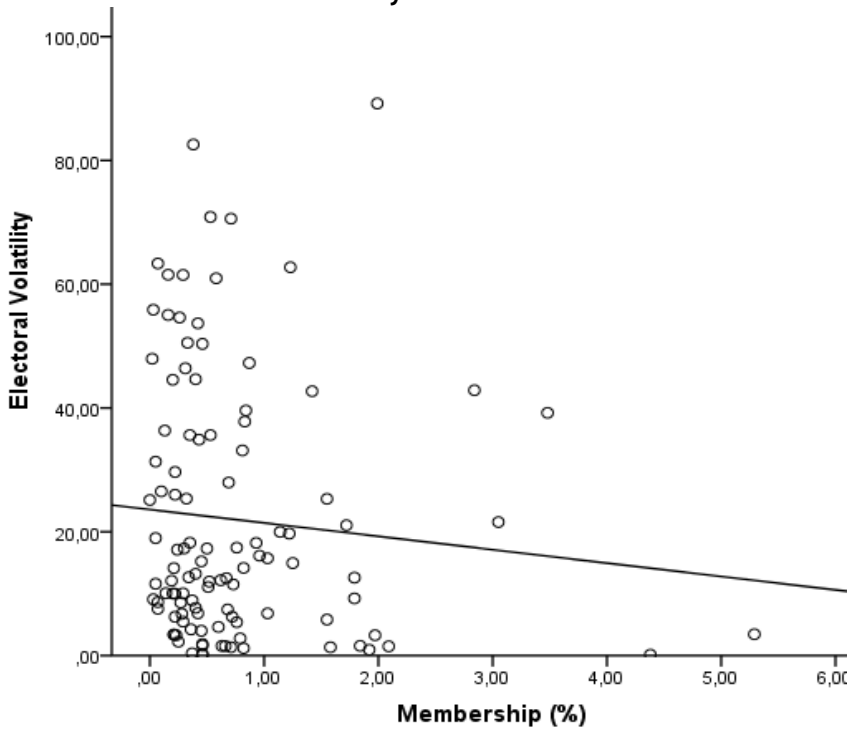
scene appear to be goo explanations for large size membership organizations. Practically, none of the parties emerging along the way managed to develop their membership organizations. The PRM is one of the performers in this category, whereas the PIS or the PO have the lowest membership rates in CEE.

In light of these general trends and figures, the next section investigates the relationship between the size and variation in size of membership organizations and the electoral volatility at party level.

Party Membership and Electoral Volatility: A Weak Link

Overall, the relationship between party membership and electoral volatility is weak. Figure 4.5 graphically depicts the distribution of the CEE political parties on two dimensions: the electoral volatility and party membership. Membership is calculated as the percentage of party members from the electorate. This distribution allows a general observation that may explain the absence of a strong relationship between party membership and electoral volatility.

Figure 4.5: The Distribution of Parties According to their Size of Membership and Electoral Volatility



There are minor cross-party differences in terms of membership size. As already pointed out in the previous section, the levels of party membership tend to be low for the vast majority of CEE parties. Figure 4.5 illustrates how

most political parties have less than 1% members. At the same time, there are major cross-party differences with respect to the electoral volatility. There is considerable variation of electoral volatility among political parties with similar percentages of membership.

The broad picture reveals the existence of a weak negative relationship that goes in the hypothesized direction. The political parties with large membership organizations have slightly lower levels of electoral volatility than those with very limited percentages of members. In this sense, it can be observed that most political parties with membership organizations larger than 1% have relatively low levels of electoral volatility. The parties with the highest percentage of members have very low levels of electoral volatility. However, this tendency is quite weak. The statistical analysis confirms this visual observation.

The statistical analysis reveals a weak negative correlation (-0.10) between the size of membership and the electoral stability of political parties, both at general and country level (Table 4.1). A large membership organization rarely coincides with lower levels of electoral volatility. The relationship also lacks statistical significance. A closer look at country level may explain why this is the case. With the exception of Hungary, there is weak empirical support for the hypothesized relationship (without statistical significance). The weakest correlation is observed in Poland (the value of the coefficient is -0.10). This is mostly due to the fact that some of the recently emerged political actors (PIS and PO) are not successful in creating large membership organizations (see Figure 4.4), but have relatively lower levels of volatility compared to the rest.

Table 4.1: The Relationship between the Size of Party Membership and Electoral Volatility

	Correlation coefficient	N
General	-0.10	109
Bulgaria	-0,15	11
Czech Republic	-0.20	16
Hungary	0.25	22
Poland	-0.10	18
Romania	-0.26	20
Slovakia	-0.16	22

Notes: Reported coefficients are *Pearson's r*.
****** statistical significance at 0.01 level.
***** statistical significance at 0.05 level.

The correlation coefficients are generally small with slightly higher values in the case of Romania and Hungary. In Romania the sign of the coefficient indicates a negative relationship between the party membership and the electoral

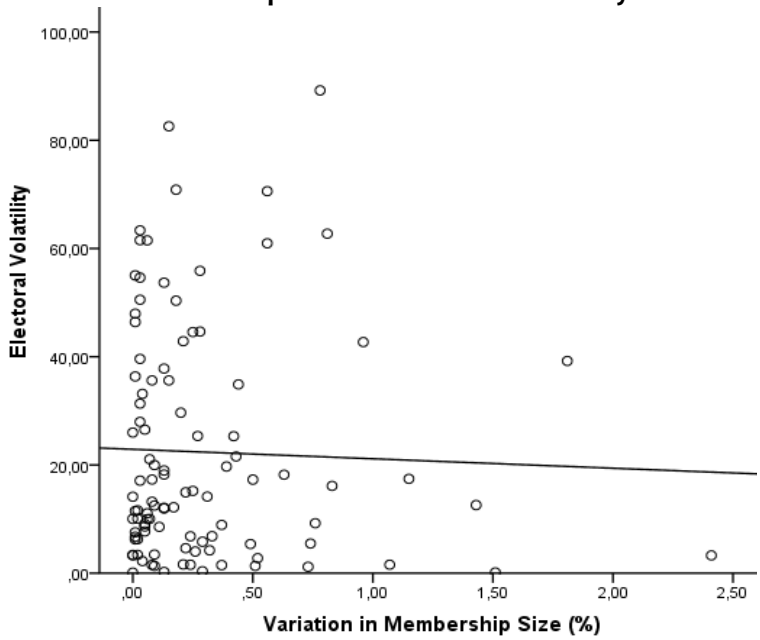
volatility. Those political formations that develop stronger membership organizations reduce the volatility. In Romania, the electoral stability of PSD and its increased claims to become a mass party together with the stable performance and high membership of the UDMR lead to the above mentioned result. Furthermore, the development of the PDL and its increasing stability in the electorate represents an asset for a stronger correlation in future elections.

The relationship has a similar strength in Hungary, but in the opposite direction. This result is counter-intuitive as Hungary was the usual suspect to observe a positive relationship between membership rates and level of electoral volatility. Given the complex electoral setting in Hungary, such small differences may count both in the networking among other voters and in electing MPs in the single member district where every vote counts. Although there are no large discrepancies between parties in terms of party members, those with less members are less volatile. The correlation coefficient would have increased if the FKGP, the largest in terms of membership, would have maintained the trend observed until 1998, its failure to enter the Parliament in 2002 dramatically increased the electoral volatility. At the same time, the FIDESZ and the MSZP, the two stable political parties in Hungary had for long time small levels of membership.

This evidence shows weak support for the hypothesized relationship between the size of membership and electoral volatility (2a). The empirical test of hypothesis 2b illustrates that even this weak linkage vanishes. Figure 4.6 graphically depicts the distribution of the CEE political parties according to the variation in membership size (calculated as difference in the percentages of members) and electoral volatility.

The vast majority of parties register small variations in the size of their membership across time. There are isolated political parties for which the percentage of members varies greatly from one election to another (e.g. BSP in 1997 or PDL in 2000); the maximum variation is almost 2.5% (KSCM in 1998). All these major differences are drops of membership (see the following section). The points in Figure 4.6 indicate a broad variation of the electoral volatility for the political parties with similar (little) variation in their size of membership. This empirical observation may explain the absence of a relationship between these two variables (see also the line in Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: The Distribution of Parties According to their Variation of Membership Size and Electoral Volatility



The statistical analysis confirms the above specified empirical observations. Table 4.2 includes the correlation coefficients between the variations in membership size and electoral volatility. Overall, there is no empirical relationship between the variation of membership organization size and the electoral volatility.[42] The value of the correlation coefficient is very small, with no statistical significance. The absence of an empirical relationship between these two variables complements the statistical results of hypothesis 2a in illustrating the limited role played in CEE by the membership organizations in diminishing the level of electoral volatility. Whereas size of membership brings marginal benefits with respect to electoral volatility, the variation in size appears to have no impact on it. Consequently, referring to electoral volatility, the CEE political parties are better off if they pursue the increase of their membership organization than its stability. In light of these poor results, the theoretical benefits of membership mentioned in Chapter 1 appear to find no correspondent in reality. When members create mobilizing networks, their effect is rarely visible for more elections.

[42] The number of cases differs from the previous table due to some missing values.

Table 4.2: The Relationship between the Variation in Membership Size and Electoral Volatility

	Correlation coefficient	N
General	-0.03	102
Bulgaria	0.50	7
Czech Republic	-0.23	16
Hungary	0.19	21
Poland	-0.12	18
Romania	0.01	19
Slovakia	0.01	21

Notes: Reported coefficients are *Pearson's r*.
****** statistical significance at 0.01 level.
***** statistical significance at 0.05 level.

At country level, the cases can be divided in three categories: no relationship, weak relationship in the hypothesized direction, and evidence against the hypothesis. In Romania and Slovakia the variation in membership size is not related with volatility. The political parties in the Czech Republic and Poland have a very weak tendency to have large variations in the size of their membership organizations when they have lower levels of electoral volatility. The Bulgarian and Hungarian parties display the opposite trend: the relative constant number of members is correlated with higher levels of electoral volatility. The relationship for Bulgaria is problematic given the small amount of data, only seven cases being available. The high value of the coefficient indicates a medium relationship in the Bulgarian case. The empirical evidence does not support the hypothesis 2b. A closer look at the developments of party membership across time and parties provides valuable insights that may explain the weak or lack of empirical support for the expected relationships (hypotheses 2a and 2b).

Membership Organizations and Electoral Volatility: A Cross-Party Perspective

This section focuses on the development of membership organizations at party level. By using a country level approach, it shows the similarities and differences observable between the political parties from the same political system. The comparisons include both the absolute number of members and the share of membership as a proportion of the electorate.

Bulgaria

Table 4.3 includes the available figures for the Bulgarian parties. The party with the highest membership rate is the BSP, the successor party: it starts as the party with most members in the 1990s and maintains until 2005 significant differences between its membership rolls and the rest of the analyzed parties.

If we compare the percentage of members from the electorate belonging to the BSP (Table 4.3) in 2001 with the country's aggregate percentage of members (Figure 4.3), this party alone enrolls more than half of the Bulgarian members. Its importance in terms of membership organization is also reflected on the political scene. The BSP has the most relevant electoral performances and presences in government among the three Bulgarian parties included in this analysis.

Table 4.3: Party membership in Bulgaria

	Absolute numbers				
	1991	**1994**	**1997**	**2001**	**2005**
BSP	365,567	370,333	253,802	210,961	191,000
DPS	140,000	n/a	n/a	32,000	95,621
SDS	n/a	35,000	n/a	60,000	29,000
	Percentage of the electorate				
	1991	**1994**	**1997**	**2001**	**2005**
BSP	5.38	5.29	3.48	3.05	2.84
DPS	2.06	n/a	n/a	0.46	1,42
SDS	n/a	0.50	n/a	0.87	0.43

Sources: Ishiyama and Breuning (1998), Millard (2004), Spirova (2005), van Biezen and Mair (2009), and the official party records.

The DPS had before the 2005 elections over 95,000 members, being the second party in the country after the BSP. Its continuity and presence into government represent possible incentives for ethnic Turks to join the party. Similarly to UDMR, it started with a very high number of members, probably enthusiastic of the idea of political representation. The rolls decreased to less than a quarter until 2001 and increased until 2005. The high number of members in 2005 can be seen as the result of four years in government. This high number was not influenced by the fact that three other Turkish political formations oppose DPS's politics. Although they have united to form the Balkan Democratic League, their support is reduced and failed to enter Parliament in the 2005 elections. At the latter, the DPS came third and entered the coalition for a second consecutive term government next to the BSP and the NDSV.

Unlike the UDMR in Romania, the DPS membership registered a relevant increase between two electoral moments. As previously mentioned, this corresponds to the government period of the party. Following the 2005 apogee of their membership rolls, the DPS secured an unprecedented 20.3% in European elections in 2007. Its strong mobilization of the addressed target group appears to be linear with the capacity to increase membership rates. The BSP registers an opposed trend, losing more than one third in its absolute

membership figures in approximately one decade (between 1994 and 2005). Such a trend can be explained by the terms spent out of office by the BSP between 1997 and 2005, the confidence and support of Bulgarians in the party being altered. Even with these losses, the party continues to have the highest membership in the country and being surpassed at regional level only be the Romanian Social Democrats. As a comparison, in 2005 the BSP had more members than all the Hungarian parliamentary parties (see Table 4.5).

The SDS is the party with the lowest membership rate in Bulgaria in 2005. It started in 1989 as a union of 11 political organizations opposing the communist regime and in 1990 six more parties joined (Waller and Karasimeonov 1996). This conglomerate is a possible explanation for their initial membership of 35,000, quite significant for a newly emerged political formation. The turbulent life of the party (i.e. splits and mergers, perceived government failures, corruption allegations etc.) did not transform the SDS into a popular party (Kolarova 2002) and its electoral success following the 1997-2001 term in office remained limited. In this environment, the party could not develop a strong membership organization. Table 4.3 illustrates the low SDS levels of membership, the major problem being again the few data points to draw substantial conclusions.

Czech Republic

Similarly to the Bulgarian case, the KSCM is the party with the highest membership organization in the entire party system. Its lowest number (from 2006) is slightly lower than the sum of members coming from the three other parties. The initial high level presented in Figure 4.2 is maintained throughout the entire period. In fact, between 1992 and 1996 the party registers a relevant increase in the number of members, also as a consequence of the separation from Slovakia and strong positions occupied by the KSCM in that matter. At the same time, throughout the entire post-communist period, the KSCM employed with priority the constituency representation rather than being animated by electoral catch-all strategies (Hanley 2001; 2002).

Furthermore, its organizational legacy allowed the party to build on solid bases and to enhance its membership. The KSCM managed to create a strong linkage with its members and thus create a relatively stable mass membership on which it relied for many years (Ishiyama 1999; Grzymala-Busse 2002b). Despite such mobilizing effects, the party witnessed a continuous exodus of party members starting in the second part of the 90s. In approximately two years, between 1996 and 1998, the party lost almost 200,000 members, a disproportionate share compared to what happened with the other four relevant parties in the system where gains and loses were considerably less (Mair and Van Biezen 2001, 17). The membership dropped to approximately 77,000 members around the 2006 elections and it is likely that

those remaining loyal to the party organization to belong to the older generation, with a strong leftist ideology (McAllister and White 2007).

Table 4.4: Party membership in the Czech Republic

	Absolute numbers				
	1992	**1996**	**1998**	**2002**	**2006**
CSSD	11,500	13,000	18,000	17,079	17,569
KDU-CSL	80,000	100,000	62,000	55,306	38,312
KSCM	222,000	350,000	160,000	128,346	77,115
ODS	22,000	22,000	19,000	18,432	29,429
	Percentage of the electorate				
	1992	**1996**	**1998**	**2002**	**2006**
CSSD	0.15	0.16	0.22	0.21	0.21
KDU-CSL	1.03	1.25	0.76	0.67	0.46
KSCM	2.87	4.38	1.97	1.55	0.93
ODS	0.28	0.28	0.23	0.22	0.35

Sources: Lewis (2000), Mair and van Biezen (2001), Kopecek (2002), van Biezen (2003), Toole (2003), and van Biezen and Mair (2009).

The KDU-CSL has the second strongest membership roll with an apogee coinciding with that of the KSCM (1992-1996). With an ideology dominated by Catholicism, this party is quite similar to the Communists with respect to its traditionally well-developed organization (it is a revived party) with solid grass-roots foundations at local level and material assets from the past (Klima 1998, 498). These resemblances may justify why these two political actors are the only that can be considered mass parties in the Czech Republic (Vlachova 2001; Kopecky 2006, 132-133). With a continuous increase of electoral support between 1992 and 2002, the KDU-CSL could rely on the eve of the 2006 elections on approximately one third of the members it got ten years before. Apparently, the initial stronger ties between the party and its members ended up in a less severe drop of membership compared to that of the KSCM. However, this situation had some downsides during the post-communist period, the party being less flexible in the negotiations with coalition partners due to wishes of its members (Deegan-Krause 2006, 105-106).

The two other parties from the Czech party system have minimal membership and there were a few occasions in which this issue influenced their recruitment procedures. For example, the ODS and the CSSD had to fill their lists with independent candidates (van Biezen 2003, 143). High problems occurred in the local elections where independents dominate (Brokl and Mansfeldova 1995; Kopecky 2006; Linek and Outly 2009). For example, in 1994, the KDU-CSL and the KSCM fielded candidates in more than 2,300

municipalities. In comparison, the ODS fielded candidates in nearly 1,700 municipalities, whereas the CSSD in nearly 800 municipalities (Deegan-Krause 2006, 261). The organizational procedures can contribute to this general problem: the local branches of the ODS and the CSSD meet less often than those of KSCM (van Biezen 2003, 143).

The emergence of the CSSD as an alternative to the KSCM (Hlousek and Kopecek 2008) and its stable success (Hanley 2004; Deegan-Krause 2006) did not increase significantly its membership organization. Instead, its rank-and-file stabilized around 18,000 for the last decade. The low electoral volatility and high stability of the CSSD membership partially explains the correlation coefficient for the Czech Republic in table 4.2. The ODS has a similar story of electoral success and weak membership organization. Although its initial number of members was twice higher than that of the CSSD, it slightly decreased until 2002 to approximately 18,000. The 1997 split of the party may have affected the initial membership roll, noticing a loss of 3,000 members between 1994 and 1998. The four years spent in the "real" opposition[43] between 2002 and 2006 did not only secure the winning of the subsequent elections, but also allowed a relevant increase of the membership organization with more than 50%.

Hungary

The Hungarian political parties are characterized by low and extremely low membership rates that sometimes raise difficulties in filling lists of candidates (Ilonszki and Kurtan 1995; Ilonszki 1999; van Biezen 2003) or in the penetration of local politics in villages (Enyedi and Toka 2007, 149). The membership figures from 2006 are not very different from those of 1990 with no great fluctuations in between. This picture indicates a general lack of mass membership; voters are reluctant to get involved in the internal working of the institutions they vote for.

The two parties dominating the Hungarian political life – the MSZP and the FIDESZ – have in 2006 the highest membership rolls. Although the MSZP built on the organizational grounds of the former communist party, it was usually second until recently. The hesitant electoral start, mainly caused by the difficulty to shake off its communist image, coincides with a loss of members. The difference between the 1990 and 1994 rolls has a few alternative explanations. On the one hand, the initial reported figure includes some of the people who were enrolled in the former communist party and did not have time to withdraw until the official figures were released. On the other hand, it is possible to have members dissatisfied by the way in which the MSZP shaped

[43] In 1998-2002, ODS was also in the opposition, but signed the Opposition Agreement through which it provided support to the CSSD government of Milos Zeman.

its ideology in the post-communist period and thus left the party. Irrespective of the reasons, it is quite clear that the MSZP can count on a low but stable membership organization between 1994 and 2006 (e.g. oscillations of 1,600 people).

Table 4.5: Party membership in Hungary

	Absolute numbers				
	1990	**1994**	**1998**	**2002**	**2006**
MSZP	50,000	36,000	37,000	37,600	36,000
FIDESZ	5,000	15,000	13,000	16,500	39,932
SZDSZ	15,000	35,018	16,000	27,000	20,000
MDF	21,000	27,000	23,000	25,000	11,000
FKGP	40,000	64,378	98,000	120,000	n/a
KDNP	3,500	28,203	26,500	n/a	17,000
	Percentage of the electorate				
	1990	**1994**	**1998**	**2002**	**2006**
MSZP	0.64	0.46	0.46	0.62	0.71
FIDESZ	0.06	0.19	0.16	0.27	0.79
SZDSZ	0.19	0.45	0.20	0.45	0.40
MDF	0.27	0.35	0.29	0.42	0.22
FKGP	0.51	0.82	1.22	1.99	n/a
KDNP	0.04	0.36	0.33	n/a	0.34

Sources: Agh (1995), Toka (1995), Balazs and Enyedi (1996), Korosenyi (1998), Toka and Enyedi (1999), Mair and van Biezen (2001), van Biezen (2003), Toole (2003), Spirova (2007), and the Annual Official Report of Political Parties (2001-2006).

The membership of the FIDESZ follows a similar pattern with its electoral success. Founded in 1988 by 37 young intellectuals as a liberal alternative to the communist regime (Batory 2007, 268), the FIDESZ grew rapidly and by 1990 had 79 candidates for 136 single-member districts (Lomax 1996: 35; Millard 2004: 159). At that moment, the party could practically rely on 5,000 members. The party approached the second elections with a membership organization of 15,000 (Spirova 2007: 128). It gained popularity with the ideological shift towards conservative positions until the 1994 elections, but this caused also a split with the opponents of this measure leaving the FIDESZ before the 1994 elections (Lomax 1996: 38).

As a result of the shift, the FIDESZ occupied the MDF's previous place on the political scene (Lomax 1999) and became successful in the consequent 1998 elections when it also led the coalition government. When holding office its membership slightly increased to 16,500 members. Its changes of labels in

1995 into the FIDESZ-MPP and the FIDESZ-Hungarian Civic Union (MPSZ) in 2003 went along with the formation of a centre-right identity capable of attracting voters from multiple societal segments (Enyedi and Toka 2007, 150). The latter modification is accompanied also by a relevant increase in the membership rolls: the FIDESZ double the number of members between 2002 and 2006 although it was in opposition.

The MDF, the FKGP, and the KDNP formed the first government of post-communist Hungary. In less than a decade, their electoral fortunes knew a dramatic shift with the MDF and the KDNP being able to get into Parliament only after coalitions with other parties. The initial membership of MDF and FKGP was among the highest in the initial elections. The conservative-nationalist MDF attracted a reasonable amount of members due to its protest discourse in 1989. Its membership organization was relatively stable for more than a decade. A split of the party – with most MPs leaving the party – before the 2006 elections reduced the number of members to less than half.

Although the figures indicate the FKGP as the party with the largest membership in Hungary, there are at least two problems. On the one hand, the part had a regionally concentrated membership base that did not allow it to field candidates in every single-member district (Enyedi and Toka 2007, 151). On the other hand, its reports are suspected of gross inflation. For example, according to these figures, not even half of their 2.2% members in the electorate cast its vote for the party as it got 0.8% in the legislative elections. Re-emerged after the fall of communism as a historical party, the FKGP was characterized by internal conflicts that eventually led to splits in 2001 (Sitter and Batory 2004). The KDNP started with the smallest organization and things did not alter dramatically since then – in 2006 only the MDF has a smaller organization than the KDNP. The stable electoral support in the first two elections was accompanied by a steady increase in membership to slightly less than 30,000 members. The failure to enter parliament and the necessity of a coalition with the FIDESZ is reflected in a loss of members to the level of 17,000 in 2006.

The SZDSZ started as a party opposing the communist regime and the second place received at the 1990 elections suggests its strong appeal. It is the party characterized by continuous oscillations in terms of membership. Until the 1994 elections the SZDSZ doubled its number of members, but got to the initial level four years later. The party is characterized by two periods of electoral stability: one at a relatively high level around 20% in 1990 and 1994 and another at low level of success around 5% between 1998 and 2006. The oscillations of membership appear to be indifferent to such stability trends. Instead, the SZDSZ losses members when it governs. Both increases of membership took place when the party was in opposition and whenever it was incumbent the losses were as relevant as the previous gains.

Poland

The Polish parties surveyed in this book pursue rhetorical commitments to developing party membership bases and establishing basic organizational networks on the ground (Szczerbiak 2001b). However, none of them had organized a central membership recruitment drive nor had explicit development strategies at national level (Szczerbiak 2001a, 113). Only the isolated case of the PSL is empirically consistent with claims related to mass membership. Formed in 1990 as the organizational successor of the United Peasant Party (ZSL), a satellite of the former communist party, the PSL traced its tradition to the peasant movement dating back in the 19th century (Szczerbiak 2001c, 96). Thus, the party combines organizational assets from its communist-era predecessors with a relevant rural base ending up with the most impressive membership roll within the Polish party system. Moreover, the party maintains strong connections with the Voluntary Firemen Association, a network that represents a stable the source of votes and members (Jasiewicz 2007, 103). Stability appears to be the characteristics of the PSL not only in terms of votes – its performance evolves around 8-9% with quite low volatility – but also in terms of membership. This was relatively constant above 150,000 members with a drop in 2005.

Table 4.6: Party membership in Poland

	Absolute numbers					
	1991	**1993**	**1997**	**2001**	**2005**	**2007**
PIS				2,500	6,000	22,000
PO				5,000	15,000	32,000
PSL	180,000	190,000	150,000	150,000	120,000	160,000
PD	15,000	18,000	14,000	22,000	10,000	1,800
SLD	60,000	60,000	60,000	87,000	80,000	72,000
	Percentage of the electorate					
	1991	**1993**	**1997**	**2001**	**2005**	**2007**
PIS				0.01	0.02	0.07
PO				0.02	0.05	0.10
PSL	0.65	0.69	0.53	0.48	0.40	0.52
PD	0.05	0.07	0.05	0.07	0.03	0.01
SLD	0.22	0.22	0.21	0.30	0.26	0.24

Sources: Gebethner (1996: 130), Mair and van Biezen (2001), Szczerbiak (2001a; 2001b; 2001c), Grzymala-Busse (2002a), and Jasiewicz-Betkiewicz (2003).

The SLD was initially a conglomerate – dominated by the Social Democracy of the Republic of Poland (SDRP) – including several trade unions, youth, women's, and social organizations that enjoyed benefits during communism

(Zubek 1995; Szczerbiak 2001c, 95-96). Its membership was built on this cluster of various organizations and on the inherited organizational structures from the communist Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR). Apart from the human resources, the SLD also took over the infrastructure (e.g. buildings) of the PZPR (Grzymala-Busse 2002a). On these grounds, the SLD could rely on a significant roll of members driven by their interest to avoid change (Szczerbiak (2001c, 116), but still did not reach a comparable level with the PSL. Its ideological monopoly on the left of the political spectrum for over a decade (Jasiewicz 2008) may explain the relatively stable amount of members. The organizational transformation and change of name in 1999 marked an increase in the membership rates with almost 50%. This was the last increase of the number of members as the following elections of 2005 and 2007 witnessed gradual losses.

Rooted in the Solidarity trade union, the PD did not persuade relevant amounts of voters to become members. The numerous splits and organizational transformations made unlikely a major boost of the membership in the PD across time. There are minor oscillations in the membership rolls until 2006 when it dropped dramatically to 1,800. Its merger in 1994 with the Liberal Democratic Congress (KLD) affected the already low number of members that decreased below the initial level. Although the following period – coinciding with a term in government – marked a slight increase, in the eve of the 2001 elections a few prominent members left the party to join the PO. The PD failed to enter Parliament in 2001 and its membership decreased to less than half until 2005. A new restructuring of the party in 2005, when it got its current name, appears to have lead to a severe loss of members until 2007. Emerged in 2001 from parts of the AWS, the PIS and the PO have a remarkable positive evolution in terms of membership between elections with figures in 2007 nine and six times higher than the initial levels. Both parties dominated the Polish arena in the most recent decade and this may be an explanation of their rapid development in terms of membership. Despite this trend, the levels are still very low compared with the performers PSL and SLD.

Romania

The Romanian political parties are characterized by various approaches towards the issue of party membership. With the most specific regulations about members in the CEE region, the absolute figures of membership are among the highest in the region. This situation is influenced by the fact that the successor party (FSN) split early in the transition and thus generated two organizationally strong competitors: the PSD and the PDL. By 1996, both parties had more than 300,000 members. However, their different approaches towards organization were visible from the separation. FSN's split in 1992 followed the divergence of opinions within the bloc: Petre Roman, recently dismissed from the prime-minister position at that time, won the elections

against president Iliescu's ideological group. Roman's party remained FSN (further PD and PDL), whereas the losers of the FSN internal elections formed the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN, later PDSR, and finally PSD) (Crowther 1998; Pop-Eleches 1999).

In theory, the PDL inherited FSN's organizational structure and membership. In practice, the departure of key figures of FSN determined a massive migration of members and local organizations to the splitter (PSD). The latter proactively worked to form its organization and was oriented towards the enlargements of its membership base. The result was a slow increase of the membership rate until 2004, the following four years being marked by a sudden drop. The PDL was less active, being satisfied with the remnants of the FSN membership. The consequence was a severe decrease of their membership with two thirds in a period when they governed the country.

Table 4.7: Party membership in Romania

	Absolute numbers				
	1992	**1996**	**2000**	**2004**	**2008**
PDL	n/a	330,000	135,288	148,992	153,333
PNL[44]	n/a	n/a	120,115	73,185	116,134
PRM	15,000	72,000	218,002	210,827	106,797
PSD	60,000	309,000	304,713	385,481	290,116
UDMR[45]	301,000	267,000	145,000	110,000	85,000
	Percentage of the electorate				
	1992	**1996**	**2000**	**2004**	**2008**
PDL	n/a	1.92	0.76	0.81	0.84
PNL	n/a	n/a	0.68	0.40	0.63
PRM	0.09	0.42	1.23	1.14	0.58
PSD	0.37	1.79	1.72	2.09	1.58
UDMR	1.84	1,55	0.82	0.60	0.46

Sources: Ishiyama (2001), the Official party Registry (2003; 2007), Preda (2005), Soare (2007), and data supplied by parties' headquarters.

In fact, with the exception of the UDMR that registers constant decrease of membership from its creation, the 1996-2000 period is the only time when a party in government losses members in Romania. For example, the second term of the PDL in government (2004-2008) marked a small increase of approximately 5,000 members. Their level of membership stabilized starting

[44] In the process of data collection for this book, the PNL officials declared that they were not aware of their membership levels for 1992-2000 since no central national register of members was maintained.

[45] UDMR had 500,000 members in 1990 when it was formed.

2000 when the party was reformed and a new leader – successful in getting two terms in office as president of the country – replaced Roman. Consequently, in 2008, the first two parties in terms of membership size are the PSD and the PDL with the former having twice as many compared to the latter.

The troubled organizational history of the PNL during the 90s (see Chapter 3) explains why records of membership were hard to keep. The first figures are available since 2004, one year after the most recent merger. The party was reorganized in 2001, with a new president who was supposed to avoid low electoral results like the one from 2000. Although not much was done explicitly with respect to the approach towards membership, the party became attractive in the eve of the 2004 elections and registered an increase with 50% of its membership organization while in government (2004-2008).

The remaining two political parties display contradictory patterns. On the one hand, for previously explained reasons, the UDMR dropped from half a million members in 1990 to less than 100,000 in 2008. This happens also on the background of not many formal requirements imposed by the UDMR to its members, the regulations being the most relaxed in CEE. On the other hand, PRM started with the smallest membership organization that increased five times by 1996, being also favored by a short-term presence in government. Its apogee of membership organization coincides with the best electoral result obtained by the party in 2000. Such increase is fueled by the discourse of its leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor who considers large membership as a source of legitimacy. Following those elections, the MP floor-crossing were accompanied by many local organizations changing together with their members the political affiliation. In 2008 when the party failed to reach the electoral threshold the membership was reduced to less than half compared to 2000.

Slovakia

The Slovak political parties have similarly low records of membership to the Hungarian parties. With the exception of the HZDS and the SDKU, the Slovak parties have in 2006 less members – both in absolute numbers and percentage of the electorate – than in the beginning. Half of the Slovak surveyed parties display constantly decreasing trends in the percentage of their members from the voting population (SDKU, SNS, and SDL). In this respect, Slovakia is unique across CEE as none of the previously examined countries had so many parties with continuous losses of members over time. Similarly to the successor parties in other CEE countries, SDL started with the largest membership roll due to its organizational legacies. However, throughout the 90s, the party was characterized by tensions between the intellectual modernizing leadership and old membership base (Haughton 2004a, 180). The evolution of membership in relation to the internal struggles and electoral performance is discussed in detail in the following section.

Table 4.8: Party membership in Slovakia

	Absolute numbers				
	1992♦	**1994**	**1998**	**2002**	**2006**
HZDS	30,000	40,000	72,200	40,000	35,370
KDH	26,352	27,888	29,541	27,400	15,297
MKP		40,000	11,600	12,034	10,500
SDKÚ			5,489	5,396	8,569
SNS	7,000	2,000	11,500	13,000♦♦	1,370
SDL	48,000	27,600	22,482	21,233♦♦	
	Percentage of the electorate				
	1992	**1994**	**1998**	**2002**	**2006**
HZDS	0.79	1.03	1.79	0.96	0.83
KDH	0.70	0.72	0.73	0.66	0.37
MKP		1.03	0.29	0.29	0.25
SDKÚ			0.15	0.14	0.13
SNS	0.19	0.05	0.32	0.31	0.03
SDL	1.27	0.71	0.53	0.38	0.37

Sources: Malová (1997), Haughton (2001), Ishiyama (2001), Kopecek (2002), Deegan-Krause (2006), Rybar (2006), and Rybar and Deegan-Krause (2008).
Notes: ♦The number is from 1993.
♦♦The number is from 1999.

The HZDS started with the second membership organization and had the largest in 2006. The longitudinal distribution of membership is symmetrical having the year 1998 as a peak. That is the year that coincides with the end of the HZDS domination in Slovak politics. Membership rates are related to the practices of the HZDS when in government: the party recruited numerous employees from the state administration with the promise of securing their jobs (Deegan-Krause 2006, 33). Such an explanation of the membership augmentation is plausible as the following four years when the HZDS ended up in opposition the level of membership decreased to the value of 1994.

Although in 2002 the HZDS was the largest single party in elections, it got into opposition mostly dues to its lack of coalition potential – apart from SNS there was not political party in Slovakia willing to get into a coalition with Meciar's party. This isolation was not beneficial for the membership rolls that continued to decrease. In fact, the nationalist and populist approach characterizing the HZDS (Carpenter 1997) and the SNS (Ramet 1997; Cibulka 1999; Mudde 2005) do not appear to attract numerous members. SNS has a modest membership organization that reached in 2006 a minimum of 1,370 members. The party claims to be the ideological heir of the historical party with the same name active from the second half of the 19th century until 1938. Not

even its continuous presence in Parliament (only in the 2002 elections SNS did not pass the electoral threshold) and terms in office helped improving the membership figures.

These country insights indicate various developments taking place within and across the party systems. Membership gains or loses can be associated to multiple events in the life of parties: organizational changes, incumbency, electoral alliances, splits or mergers etc. Overall, three general conclusions can be drawn. First, there is at least one party in each political system to pursue the enlargement of its membership base or to maintain the existing one within reasonable variation. Dramatic increases are rare in all examined countries especially in the direction of increasing membership. The attractiveness of political parties remained generally low and without specific incentives voters do not join parties.

Second, no systematic factor appears to be connected to the size and variations in size of the membership organizations. For example, although it explains the evolution of membership for particular parties, incumbency does not make a great difference across CEE. The statistical test (see chapter 6) reveals no empirical relationship between membership and incumbency. Furthermore, parties to the left do not appear to have necessarily more members than those to the right. It is more a spurious relationship in which the real cause is represented by the past of those parties. Connected with the last observation, there is a general tendency of the parties starting off with a large membership to maintain along the way. Most of the times, these parties are those with an organizational heritage (the successor parties). More importantly, the relationship between membership and electoral volatility appears to be weak. This was indicated both by the statistical analyses and cross-party comparisons from this section. What are the reasons for such a weak linkage? The following section tries to provide an answer by exploring the development of two successor parties with different electoral evolution and approaches towards membership.

Where Does the Mechanism Collapse?

The Introduction to this book explained that the purpose of the case study sections is to reveal how the statistically identified relationships work in particular contexts. The empirical evidence presented in this chapter indicated only marginal support for one of the two hypothesized relationships between party membership and electoral volatility. Accordingly, this section aims to illustrate how and why the membership organization was eclipsed by other organizational (e.g. leadership style or splits) and systemic factors (e.g. party competition) in shaping the stability of electoral support. Each party history illustrates how membership longitudinal development coincided only to a limited extent to that of the electoral volatility.

The two political parties presented in this section were chosen on the basis of their different levels of success in securing large membership organizations. Both BSP in Bulgaria and SDL in Slovakia are successor parties and inherited similar organizational assets. However, the former managed to maintain a high number of members and to remain an important actor in a system characterized by numerous entries and exits. On the contrary, SDL gradually lost more than half of its members and eventually disappeared from the political scene after a merger with a party created by one of its factions.

BSP: Between Members and Voters

Starting with the early days of transition, the BSP has been one of the most influential actors in the Bulgarian post-communist politics. Apart from the PSD in Romania, the BSP was the only successor party in CEE winning the first elections following the regime change. Since then it showed a remarkable capacity to persist as a main contender on the political stage despite harsh defeats in three rounds of elections (1991, 1997, and 2001). Despite winning the first elections, it lost power after being toppled by a general strike in late 1990; then lost the early elections of 1991. It spent three years in opposition, returned in government between 1994 and 1997, and ousted again in the context of poor economic performances. However, it showed considerable capacity to rebuild and returned to government in 2005.

The BSP's link with the Bulgarian Communist Party brought both advantages and disadvantages in the newly created context. The first years of transition saw the BSP trapped in the discourse of its predecessor, unable or unwilling to distance itself from its legacy. After Todor Zhivkov was ousted in late 1989 following an internal rebellion of the reformers, the new leadership broke ties with the former elite of the party, but did not embark a decisive path towards "social democratization". Until losing the elections of 1997, the discourse and program of the BSP maintained numerous references to the benefits of state economy, attacked capitalism, and developed a significant nationalist dimension. Moreover, the party made ambiguous references to NATO and EU membership (Spirova 2005; 2008). It was labeled as partly reformed (Ishiyama 1999, 97) and considered to adopt a leftist retreat strategy (Ishiyama 2006, 24).

The BSP took over the bulk of membership and infrastructural resources of the former communist party (Spirova 2008, 483). Among the 42 parties competing in the 1990 elections, only the BSP had consistent organizational structures throughout the entire country (Karasimeonov in Spirova 2005, 603). The transfer of membership organization did not happen by default. During the transformation phase (from a communist to socialist party) there was a renewal of membership affiliation to the party through the

participation in the referendum to decide the name change[46] (Baeva 2001, 245). This referendum illustrated a decline in membership – in April 1990 the party kept 73% of its members compared to 1989 – but remained nevertheless very significant in numerical terms: 726,000 members (Kumanov and Nikolova 1999, 122); this was almost 10% of the country's total population.[47] However, figures from the next year, when the party also lost the legislative elections, indicate a sudden drop to approximately half of this number (see Figure 4.4).

The inherited organizational infrastructure and membership of the former communist party provided the BSP leverage compared to all the other Bulgarian parties. Despite a constant loss of members, as Figure 4.4 illustrates, the BSP still maintained a higher number of members compared to any other political actor – 210.000 in 2001, 191.000 in 2005. It continued to be the wealthiest in terms of properties and financial resources (Spirova 2005, 606-608; Spirova 2008, 486). Moreover, newly-emerged Bulgarian parties saw the strong organizational structure as a successful strategy to win elections or at least to maintain political influence (Spirova 2005). Accordingly, they perceived the BSP as a trend-setter in the early stages of multiparty politics in Bulgaria.

The dynamic of membership organization can be divided in two different periods according to the amount of loss. The year 1997 appears to be the critical juncture. Prior to 1997, there is a dramatic decrease in the share of members – the party loses approximately one third of its membership organization. The harsh defeat in the 1997 elections forced a decisive change in leadership and style. A new reformist and pragmatic team of leaders, led by Sergey Stanishev, took the top seat in 2001 (and is still of the party today), after the former chairman, Georgi Parvanov[48], was elected as president of Bulgaria, and gradually set the party on the path towards real transformation into a European-style social-democratic one. This evolution was acknowledged by the Party of European Socialists that accepted the BSP in its ranks, after rejecting it since 1990 (Spirova 2008, 491-492).

The BSP benefited from this newly created public profile by slowing the pace of membership loss and regaining votes that promoted them in government in 2005. In this respect, an essential element meant to diminish the drop in membership was to change the way it regarded the form of membership. The BSP maintained the "traditional" members as a base for the

[46] In March 1990, the new leaders of the Bulgarian Communist Party asked all members of the party to vote in an internal referendum concerning the change of the name into "Socialist".

[47] We should also mention a second successor party in Bulgaria: the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union. It had been a satellite of the communist party before 1990. However, the party was affected by no less than 11 splinters in the first decade of democratic politics; therefore its relevance is minimal compared to that of the BSP (Spirova 2005, 604-605).

[48] Previously, the party had only two other presidents after the post-communist transformation began: Aleksandar Lilov (1990-1991) and Zhan Videnov (1991-1996).

party, but also tried to build around it a more flexible group of supporters (Krusteva 2003 cited in Spirova 2008). The decisive re-orientation of the party towards European-style social-democracy and the confirmation of this trend through gaining PES membership made the party more appealing to the younger generation and intellectuals. These new orientations contrasted with the nostalgic leftist discourse from the 90's and thus provided new ideological sources to potential members, activists, and voters. Moreover, the party appeared to benefit from the eight years spent in opposition (1997-2005) with respect to its relationship with the youth. By 2005, a small share of the young electorate remembered the Socialists for their poor economic performance or previous nationalist discourse during the early 90's. Instead, many became familiar to its image as an exponent of European social-democracy. Nevertheless, according to the Bulgarian media outlet *Dnevnik*, in 2005 only 9.4% of the BSP's members were aged below 35 (Website Dnevnik).

A supplementary organizational feature may further explain the dynamics of party membership. Such a feature is particular to BSP among the Bulgarian parties and refers to the creation of ideological platforms or factions within the party (Krusteva 2003 cited in Spirova 2008). One of these factions was DEMOS that caused the only splinter within the BSP. It left the party in 1993 and later became the Bulgarian EuroLeft, the only competitor alongside the BSP on the left side of the political spectrum. However, it did not manage to threaten the position of the official successor party, but gained additional defectors from the BSP, beside the initial members of the faction (Spirova 2008, 490). Millard (2004, 55) also notes that the internal divisions within the party have always been high, yet it managed to keep its unity. A potential explanation for the constant high number of members, compared to its internal opponents, is the undisputed dominance of the BSP over the left side of the ideological spectrum.. With the notable exception of the EuroLeft in the mid-90's, no other party came close to challenging the BSP's strong position. Furthermore, the electoral strategy of the BSP prevented any major internal dissent and migration towards other political parties. It participated in broad electoral alliances with smaller parties, it facilitated their access to Parliament, and consolidated its position as the main voice of the Bulgarian left.

The hypothesized relationship between membership organization and electoral volatility is well illustrated by the BSP in the first decade of its existence. Between 1991 and 1994 both the membership organization and electoral performance of the BSP were stable. The party gained 5,000 members between the two elections, a small number compared to the total of 370,000 displayed in 1994. The BSP had slightly better results in the 1994 compared to the 1991 election, with very low volatility. The large membership decrease from 1994 and 1997 is associated with a large volatility in the 1997 elections (39.22). The dramatic loss of members – almost one third of the total

share – corresponds to weakened support in society. The electoral support dropped to 22% for the alliance formed around BSP; thus, the electoral appeal of the party was even lower. As the membership organization continued to shrink from approximately 250,000 to 210,000 members, the party also lost electoral support. The 2001 electoral result was the worst in the entire post-communist history of the BSP. Summing up, for more than a decade the party membership and electoral support for the BSP followed similar trends. Major changes in the membership organization coincided with high levels of electoral volatility.

However, following the 2001 elections the leadership changes and discourse modifications were the measures that interrupted this linkage. Until 2005, the membership decreased to a level of approximately 190,000 members; according to the previous trend, the electoral volatility for the 2005 elections was expected to be smaller than in 2001. However, it increased given a boost in the electoral support for the BSP. Together with its allies, the BSP obtained 31% votes and formed the coalition government. The 2005 volatility is also the highest registered by the party. It was for the first time when the electoral performance improved on the background of decreasing membership.

Overall, the case of the BSP allows three relevant observations. First, despite a continuous loss of members, it secured the largest membership organization in Bulgaria and in CEE. In this respect, the party ensured the continuity of its organizational legacy. Second, the membership rates appear to influence the electoral performance of the party. Between 1991 and 2001 there was an immediate reaction of the voters to the changes in the membership organization. As soon as other elements got in the picture (e.g. leadership change), the size of membership could no longer predict volatility. At the same time, the relatively large membership organization (3-5% of the voting population) prevented the party from obtaining poor electoral results. The members developed social networks on which the party could rely even when the competition was fierce (e.g. 2001). Moreover, it ensured a solid electoral base on which the party could start building its comeback on the political scene in 2005.

SDL: The Lost Legacy

For the communists in Czechoslovakia, the end of 80s was marked by the rise of reformists among party's leadership. Peter Weiss, who later became one of the exponents of the Slovak social democrats in the '90s, was one of the main vectors of internal reform. In January 1990, his faction pushed for a significant change in the name of the party, adding the acronym SDL to the official communist label of the Slovak component (KSS). A year later, the party dropped the communist part of its name completely and remained as SDL,

while the KSS continued to exist as a radical communist splinter. The SDL broke all ideological ties with its communist predecessor and centralized its decision-making mechanism. It asked all the nostalgic elements of the former communist party to join its radical splinter – the KSS (Grzymala-Busse 1999). Weiss pushed for a reshuffling of the party's leadership, narrowing the membership of the Central Committee from 260 to 90 and later on concentrating the power in the hands of just 11 people, coordinating the entire local infrastructure (Grzymala-Busse 2002b, 94; Haughton 2004a, 179).

This structural reform was easier as the SDL took over the formal organization from communists. The centralized decision-making allowed the SDL to rapidly change its position on matters such as the economy or secularism when it felt that this would bring better electoral results. This change in discourse took place faster than in the case of other successor parties, such as those in Bulgaria, Poland, or Romania. SDL had initially a moderate position towards the free market in 1990. It switched to an openly liberal vision in 1993 and then back to a more critical discourse in 1995 (Grzymala-Busse 2002b). The SDL promoted through its discourse and programs the idea of a strong commitment to democratic values, in order to distinguish itself from the ruling HDZS, seen as populist, anti-minority and with authoritarian tendencies.

The membership organization had a special story. As part of the effort to break away from the past, the SDL leadership initiated a process of re-registration of the former communist party's members and to sign a declaration of support towards democratic values (Rybar and Deegan-Krause 2008, 504). For the BSP the re-registration was automatic for those members who participated in the referendum for the name change. The SDL opted for a different re-registration process based on the expressed willingness of the people to get involved. Following the re-registration, the SDL managed to attract less than a quarter from the members of the communist party (Kopecek 2002, 253). Thus, in 1992, it had 48,000 members (1.27% of the voters), the largest in Slovakia at the time.

Although the membership organization was not directly inherited, almost all SDL's members have also belonged to the communist party (Kopecek 2002). In this respect, the organizational and leadership heritage of SDL influenced people's decision to join the party. However, the fact that the re-registration took place on voluntary basis would suggest the existence of a rather stable number of members in the years to follow; this was not the case. By 1994, this number shrank to almost half and registered continuous decrease until 2002 when the number of members was around 21,000 (see Table 4.8). In absolute terms this number is not high, but it remains one of the highest in Slovakia. In 1998 and 2002, the SDL was the third party in terms of membership, following the HZDS and the KDH.

The SDL followed a sinuous path within the Slovak party system, itself marked by a high degree of instability. This is reflected in the volatility scores from the first 1992 elections until its ultimate failure in 2002: 70.59 in 1994, 70.86 in 1998, and 82.57 in 2002. Starting 2004 the SDL steadily transferred its membership and properties towards SMER (Rybar and Deegan-Krause 2008, 501).[49] At a glance, there is a relationship between the decreasing number of members and the increasing electoral volatility. The party relied on fewer members every election and this predicted its ultimate failure. However, there are two empirical dilemmas. First, there are other Slovak parties with more dramatic loss of membership (e.g. MKP) and still survived the electoral competition. Second, the loss of members does not always coincide to loss of votes, but with volatility (which marks also major gains). The severe decrease of membership organization between 1992 and 1994 (from 48,000 to 27,600) coincided with a major loss of electoral support. The explanation consistent with the statistical findings from this chapter is that the few members left in SDL were not able to mobilize a stable core of voters and that is why the party registered major oscillations. In practice, there were at least two intervening variables that can explain the instable electoral performance of SDL: the context of competition and the internal divisions.

The electoral performance in the 90's was heavily influenced by the strong position of the HDZS within the party system (Haughton 2004, 180-184). For instance, the ideological proximity to a party benefiting of large popular support could only harm SDL. In economic terms, the SDL's discourse was very similar to that of HZDS: the privatization combined with social equilibrium. In addition to what claimed by the SDL, the HZDS promoted a much more aggressive nationalist dimension that resonated with the population's newly discovered sense of identity. This originated in the independence and in the ongoing quarrels with the 10% Hungarian minority concentrated in the South of the country. SDL's strategic decisions to form a coalition with three other small left-wing parties were not fortunate. They did neither strengthen its role on the political scene nor establish it as the main voice of the left. The "Common Choice" coalition gained 10.41%, barely crossing the 10% electoral threshold for coalitions, the electoral input of the smaller parties being insignificant. An additional element that hampered the SDL's ability to evolve in a strong actor within the Slovak post-communist party system was the "more hard-line nature of the communist regime" in Czechoslovakia (Fisher 2002, 116). The population was reluctant to the SDL's appeals because of more negative feelings associated with the former regime and distrust transferred towards the SDL as

[49] Following the merger between the SDL and SMER, in 2005 a new Party of the Democratic Left, with the same acronym – SDL – was formed. This party is brand new, it cannot be considered the successor of SDL; it failed to gain any seats in the 2006 elections.

the main successor party. This may be also one reason for which almost half of the members left the party in less than two years following the independence.

Apart from the HZDS dominated structure of competition in the early '90s, the electoral performance of the SDL was also affected by the ongoing internal struggles. In 1994, before the early elections called by a new caretaker government dominated by the right, but in which the SDL was part, the first post-independence splinter took place, after Jan Luptak, a popular SDL figure, chose to leave the party and form the Workers' Association of Slovakia (ZRS). In only a few months after its birth, the new party gained 7.34%, presumably taking over part of the SDL's potential voters. In this context, the membership dropped by 43% compared to 1992. There were numerous internal divisions within the SDL emerging by the mid 90's. Peter Weiss, Robert Fico, Brigita Schmognerova, and Jozef Migas, who succeeded Weiss as president of the party in 1996, led competing factions within the SDL (Deegan-Krause 2006, 264-265). Migas' win in the party elections in 1996 illustrated a different distribution of power within the party: while Weiss's reformist win promoted centralization, Migas' support relied on strong influential local organizations (Deegan-Krause 2006). This de-centralizing trend within the party continued towards the end of the '90s, as the divisions within the central leadership deepened (Borz and Enyedi 2007; Rybar and Deegan-Krause 2008, 504).

These internal tensions continued after the 1998 entrance in the Christian-Democratic dominated government, a bitter personal struggle emerged between Weiss's pro-European camp and leftist hardliners. Robert Fico left the party in 1999 and formed *Smer*, who later became the main party in government, following a similar pattern of discourse as the HZDS's in the '90s. In November 2001, a new president, Pavol Koncos was elected, and forced Schmognerova, the finance minister, to resign, despite having the support of the prime-minister. Following her resignation in February 2002, she joined Peter Weiss in the formation of a new party, called the Social Democratic Alternative (SDA). Smer managed to gain 13.46% of the vote in the 2002 elections, taking over a quarter of the SDL's electorate from 1998, while the SDA failed to pass the threshold, with only 1.79%. However, the SDL performed even poorer, receiving only 1.36% of the votes (Haughton 2004, 186-187). Rather paradoxically, despite the two splinters between 1998 and 2002, the party lost only 1.000 members, counting 21.233 members at the time of the 2002 elections. Surprisingly, the first splinter of the SDL, the radical communist KSS, which had a poor performance during the '90s, managed to gain over 6% of the vote and enter Parliament. Between 1994 and 1998 the SDL continued to lose members, despite not undergoing another splinter within the party. At the time of the 1998 elections, it counted only 22.482 members.

These competition and organizational factors transformed the SDL in a unique case among the successor parties in CEE. It is the only successor party

that did not manage to persist on the national political stage. Its organizational legacy got lost along the way. The SDL did not adapt to the political competition, took wrong political decisions, and faced numerous internal divisions. On top of these features, the membership organization slowly shrunk. With its decision to re-register members, the SDL severely reduced the membership organization. The SDL practically traded size for legitimacy and active involvement of the interested citizens. Such a strategy was not helpful and the party registered weak electoral performance in 1994 and vanished in the aftermath of the 2002 elections. Unlike the BSP, the SDL's inability to cultivate its organizational heritage - including the initial amount of members originally in the communist party – lead to its failure in elections.

Conclusions

The analysis of party membership in CEE allows several empirical observations. The most general refers to the fact that the CEE political parties are far from the mass membership organization. The vast majority of the 29 investigated parties do not have an average share of members (calculated as a percentage of the electorate) larger than 1%. At the same time, the longitudinal study indicates that more than two thirds of the CEE parties are characterized by a non-linear development of their of the membership organizations. Oscillations in the share of members are common. There are very few parties that manage to increase their membership organizations over time. Usually, the increases are marginal. There is an equal proportion of parties (14%) that register constant increase or decrease during the entire post-communist period. Such development trends are neither country specific nor depending on the membership size.

In spite of these low levels, there is variation in the extent to which parties grow their membership organizations across countries and parties. The country-level figures indicate large discrepancies between the countries with most (Romania) and least (Poland) party members. Regarding the variation of membership organizations within the same party system, it appears to be no contamination effect. In each country there is at least one party that has a much more developed membership organization than the rest of the actors. There are rare instances in which political parties imitate the forerunner and start building similar membership organizations.

The statistical analysis indicates very weak empirical support for the one of the two hypothesized relationships. In general, the political parties with large membership organizations have slightly lower electoral volatility compared to the rest of political actors. The correlation lacks statistical significance. The strength of the relationship varies across countries; its extreme values appear to be related to the share of party membership in the population (Figure 4.3). The relationship between party membership and

electoral volatility is the weakest in the country where few people become party members (Poland). The strongest relationship is observed in the country with the highest percentage of party members in the population (Romania). Apart from these observations, one country deviates from the general trend. In Hungary, the relationship goes in the opposite direction: the MSZP and the FIDESZ are the political parties with relatively small membership rates and low volatility.

There is no discernible difference in terms of electoral volatility between the parties that experience dramatic variations in the size of their membership organizations and the rest of political actors. The cross-party comparisons within the countries reveal mixed results that increase the difficulty of substantial conclusions. One possible explanation for these statistical results is represented by the small differences in membership organizations. The majority of the CEE political parties have small membership organizations and their variations are often marginal (see Tables 4.3-4.8). The only partial exceptions are represented by those parties with relevant organizational heritage (i.e. the successors).

The quantitative tests were complemented by qualitative insights into the longitudinal evolution of membership organizations and the relationship with electoral volatility. The comparative assessment highlighted several relevant distinctions between parties from the same political system. These differences explain the size and variation of membership size across time. In some instances, the evolution of membership organization was somewhat related to the electoral support for the party. This marginal influence is best observed in the detailed analysis from the case study section where the electoral volatility of both BSP and SDL – parties with contrasting membership tracks – was influenced by other factors.

Unlike the centralization of candidate selection for national elections, the membership organization marginally explains the variation of electoral volatility at party level in CEE. The following chapter tests the relevance of the MPs' renomination rates for the electoral volatility. Whereas this chapter emphasized the role of members in creating an extensive social network within the electorate, Chapter 5 shifts the focus towards party elites. The empirical testing departs from the argument that the visibility and continuity in the public office can lead to stable preferences of voters over time.