

Understanding Cleavages in Party Systems: Issue Position and Issue Salience in 13 Post-Communist Democracies

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Abstract

There has been considerable debate about the characteristics of political cleavages underlying post-Communist Central and East European party competition, with views ranging from ‘no structure’, to ‘one dimensionality’, to ‘structured diversity’ to entirely *sui generis* country-specific approaches. Much of the disagreement, we argue, results from the failure to take seriously the distinction between issue position and issue salience. Taking this into account, we present a model of party cleavages that synthesizes the various arguments into one comprehensive model. We provide empirical evidence for our argument derived from an expert survey of 87 parties in 13 post-communist democracies. Theoretically, our study provides a much more positive picture of the character of party cleavages and of democratic responsiveness in post-Communist states than is generally accepted.

1. Introduction

Party cleavages – the nature of the issues over which parties compete - are rightly at the center of analyses of party systems. They affect the ways that voters are politically mobilized. They shape the stability of party-voter relationships. They provide the content of political competition for parties and voters alike and, at least potentially therefore, impact on the formulation of public policies. Studies have therefore paid considerable attention to the development of political cleavages within party systems in new democracies, such as in Germany and Italy after World War II (Barnes 1967; Baker et al. 1981), Spain after 1975 (Barnes et al. 1985), or Eastern Europe after 1989 (Whitefield 2002; Tucker 2002; Lipset 2000).

However, there have been surprisingly few comparative analyses that examine the nature and sources of political cleavages at the level of *parties* themselves. The absence of such studies is the more to be regretted since the predominant view of parties and party competition in the region is fairly negative (Tavits 2005; Kreuzer and Pettai 2003; Rose and Munro 2002; Lewis 2000; Elster et al. 1998). So, in this paper we set out systematically to investigate the following questions. Do parties divide over issues and, if so, in what ways and in how many ways? What factors give rise to party cleavages?

To address these questions, we use data from an expert survey conducted by the authors that examines domestically relevant political cleavages in 2003-2004, and the positions of 87 parties in 13 post-Communist countries on these divisions. Expert surveys have been used increasingly in recent years to estimate party stances, including in Central and Eastern Europe (Inglehart and Huber 1995; Gabel and Huber 2000; Benoit and Laver, 2006; Marks et al. 2006.) While numerous important insights have been gained from these studies, we argue that aspects of measurement of party stances in other surveys has made it difficult to consider the central questions of this paper.

There are two chief reasons why we know relatively little about political cleavages across party systems in CEE states. First, and most important, there is an absence of appropriate

comparative data about party stances on economic, political and social issues. One of the theoretically most innovative studies to date limits its reach to four nations (Kitschelt et al. 1999) and it uses information about party positions from the mid-1990s—a time when party systems were arguably still in formation. Another study argues that party competition is structured by two dimensions (Marks et al. 2006): one centered on economic cleavages, with a second dimension reflecting some variant of a post-material cleavage (but see our critique of its methodology below). A third study is mainly concerned with describing party positions globally and sheds little light on the theoretical questions addressed here (Bennoit and Laver 2006). Cumulatively, this literature—with the notable exceptions just mentioned—sheds little light on the nature of party cleavages in the region as a whole.

Second, generalizations about party systems in the region are usually based upon analyses of mass behavior. These have generated valuable insights into the nature of electoral competition. Comparative analyses of the social bases of partisan choices suggest the emergence of cleavages over basic choices among party constituencies, such as distributional, religious, and ethnic issues (Evans and Whitefield 1995; Miller et al. 2000; Tucker 2006). However, since these analyses do not examine party stances directly, they are of limited value in informing us about the nature of cleavages among political parties themselves. All in all, given the state of the art in the literature, we see a need to systematically examine the nature and sources of party competition in the post-Communist region 15 years after the transition.

We hope to make several contributions to the literature. First, by describing the nature of party competition among 87 parties in 13 post-Communist countries, our study provides a systematic overview of the main cleavages among political parties. Secondly, we hope to make a theoretical contribution by advancing an explanation why there is such a range of seemingly conflicting interpretations regarding the number and character of party cleavages in CEE states: (1) that there are no coherent party cleavages (White et al. 1997, Elster et al. 1998) or only multiple, country-specific cleavages depending on national contexts (Lawson et al., *passim* 1999);

(2) that there is one single ideological cleavage in the region as a whole over support for, and opposition to, liberal regime change (Kitschelt 1992, 1999; Marks et al, 2006); and, (3) that there exist a number of common cleavages across the region supplemented by some national specificities (Evans and Whitefield 1993; Miller et al. 1998).

We suggest that these diverging interpretations can be reconciled to a large degree by systematically distinguishing between issue *position* and issue *salience*. On one hand, we show that party positions are actually tightly structured—as argued by several scholars. On the other hand, the salience of issues - which specific issues receive the most attention by parties - depends on national conditions (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Lijphart 1979; Budge et al. 1987). We therefore disagree with a view that the "variance of issue salience across parties is not a terribly interesting phenomenon" (Kitschelt et al. 1999: p. 196).

This pattern of structured issue positions and responsiveness to national conditions in their salience is, in our view, significant evidence that political parties in the region function actually reasonably well—a view that runs counter to much of the existing negative literature on parties in the region. The concept of party government assumes that parties present clear and manageable issue cleavages to citizens, and that they address the most important issues extant within countries (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Klingemann et al. 2006). Our findings clearly show that party positions are tightly structured along one dimension only; and that country-conditions influence which issues parties focus on when communicating with publics. This may be the most important theoretical conclusion emerging from our study of party cleavages.

To examine how we arrive at this rather positive assessment about the way parties function, this paper is structured as follows. We first consider the nature of party cleavages given the historical context in post-Communist CEE. We then introduce the expert survey conducted by the authors in 2003-2004 and show which cleavages dominated 13 party systems at this historical juncture. Then, we will develop several hypotheses about how national conditions affect the nature of party cleavages and provide evidence as to their plausibility.

2. Party Systems and Political Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies

Political cleavages are important because of their role in providing bases of support for parties and thus in structuring the content of party competition and political conflict more generally. In mature democracies parties played a major role to condense the myriad of conceivable issue conflicts into a small set of manageable policy choices (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Dalton et al. 1984; Budge, et al. 1987). Over time, these policy cleavages among parties crystallized in ways that can be succinctly summarized by a small number of ideological dimensions, in particular, the economic left-right division (Budge et al. 1987). Clearly, some political cleavages that reflect intractable social and ideological differences can also create potentials for intense conflict that may make democracy less stable (Gunther and Mughan 1993). However, the presence of political cleavages may also contribute to democratic stability by solidifying party-citizen linkages and increasing the predictability of political outcomes (Lijphart et al. 1993).

There has been considerable debate about whether – and in what ways – political cleavages among parties (and their links to citizens) might be structured in CEE states. Specifically, one may identify three basic approaches (Whitefield 2002).

Model 1. 'No Structure or No Common Structure'

Some scholars argue that post-Communist politics have characteristics that inhibit the emergence of party cleavages (White et al. 1997; Elster et al. 1998). Prolonged Communist rule supposedly eradicated many of the social divisions that provide the anchor in Western Europe around which political cleavages among parties might emerge (Whitefield 2002; Evans 2006). In turn, organizational fluidity and voter volatility in East-Central Europe may make it difficult for parties to signal to voters where they stand (Bowler 1990; Tavits 2005) and for voters to follow what parties try to communicate. Furthermore, party organizations are sometimes not even seen as a prerequisite to win elections because state-based resources supply candidates with resources they need during an election (Hale 2006). These conditions suggest that parties do not compete

over a clearly identifiable set of ideological cleavages. Others, alternately, point to the complex interaction between country-level factors, including economic development, pathways to democracy, ethnic and religious cleavages, when arguing that there is no common structure to party competition in the region (Lawson et al. 1999; Innes 2002). Unfortunately, however, much of this literature is based on single country studies that privilege the particular histories and details of national party development, or the role of individual entrepreneurs. It is therefore hard to evaluate the empirical veracity of this ‘no (common) structure’ model.

Model 2. ‘Uni-Dimensional Party Competition’

Another approach suggests that party competition is structured along one dimension, pitting pro-market, pro-democratic, pro-Western and ethnically liberal parties against those with the opposite views on each of these issues (Kitschelt 1992; Marks et al. 2006). Parties, in this view, merge various axes of competition into a single, overarching policy dimension. This was because the nature of the struggle against Communist rule meant that support for markets, under conditions of Communist rule, necessarily entailed opposition to authoritarianism as well as support for Western and European integration and openness to the demands of ethnic and national minorities for freedom from Soviet hegemony. As a consequence, unlike in Western Europe, where leftist socio-economic positions tend to correlate with support for more democratic procedures, political parties in post-Communist societies will link markets to democratic reform (Marks et al. 2006; Kitschelt 1994). Parties seeking to uphold the old order, by contrast, and especially those which represent the economic and political losers in the new order, will tend to reject democratic politics and market competition. This ‘uni-dimensional structure’ model is clearly much more optimistic than the ‘no (common) structure’ model about the capacity of parties to formulate concise policy packages in the long run.

Model 3. ‘Structured Diversity’

As Lipset and Rokkan said of comparable efforts to understand the cleavage structure of West European party competition, while the ‘no (common) structure’ approach runs the danger of

getting “lost in the wealth of fascinating detail ... the [uni-dimensional structure model may] succumb to facile generalities” (Lipset and Rokkan 1967: p. 36). A third approach, however, attempts to identify the general thrust of party competition and, simultaneously, to do justice to relevant country-specific detail. We label this the ‘structured diversity’ perspective. This model takes as its starting point the historical fact that all countries face the economic challenge of marketization and democratization: they must design economic and political institutions, which in turn creates issues that are roughly comparable across nations. In addition, all countries face common legacies of Communist rule, such as the presence of a (more or less) well-organized Communist-successor party that competes in elections against newly founded parties on the center-right. Given this historical backdrop, it is expected, and informally observed, that certain types of parties package policy alternatives in comparable ways; reform parties tend to be on the center-right; anti-reform parties at the left-end of the ideological spectrum.

Overall, there is considerable common ground between the ‘uni-dimensional’ and ‘structured diversity’ models, which would agree that a common reform dimension defines the differences between parties. In contrast, the ‘no (common) structure’ model adopts the most discrete position by positing the absence of any cross-national consistency or even consistency at all. The following hypothesis, thus, provides a first test to sort out these differences among the three models:

Hypothesis 1: Party positions on the main lines of conflict constitute one pro versus anti-liberal and democratic dimension.

This prediction, however, raises a question which lies at the core of the differences between the uni-dimensional and structured diversity models. If positions connect on a single dimension, how can one reconcile this pattern with any observed variation in the nature of party cleavages? Advocates of structured diversity recognize that the nature of party competition and the political cleavages associated with it may be impacted by specific conditions that obtain in some but not all states (Whitefield 2002; Evans 2006). Thus, for example, ethnic divisions and

ethnic parties exist in some post-Communist states but not all; Catholicism and religiously based parties are more or less present. These factors are expected to impact on the character of cleavages in predictable ways, leading to some issues being bases of party competition in some countries but not in others. Can the uni-dimensional depiction be reconciled with the greater variation posited by proponents of the structured diversity model?

As with so many questions pertaining to the formation of party systems, Lipset and Rokkan's essay (1967) already contains the seeds for an answer to our question when they describe why variation across party systems in Western Europe emerged. They argue that the "decisive contrasts among the Western party systems clearly reflect differences in the national histories of conflict and compromise..." (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, p.35). What Lipset and Rokkan's discussion explicitly suggest is that a political cleavage remains *salient* where, for whatever reason the issues have not been satisfactorily resolved.

In this spirit, we would argue that the cross-national diversity in party systems emerges because of which issues parties *stress* when communicating with citizens, not what position parties *take* on issues. In our view, if one systematically distinguishes between salience and position, then it is possible to reconcile the (uni-dimensional) portrayal of party stances with the observed empirical diversity of the character of party cleavages across countries. Put simply, where, for example, societies are ethnically divided we expect ethnic issues to be more salient to parties in their communication with voters than when societies are ethnically (relatively) homogenous. Where democracy is unconsolidated, we expect democracy to be more salient to party competition. Where the economy is less developed, we expect parties to add greater weight to the economy in their appeals. Crucially, therefore, the 'structured diversity' position is compatible with the 'uni-dimensionality' perspective at the level of the stances of parties on issues. Where the two perspectives differ, however, is in the salience that parties will attach to issues, which will depend on shared and divergent national contexts. As a first step, therefore, to

sort out whether uni-dimensional or structured multi-dimensional models are more appropriate, we test the following proposition:

Hypothesis 2: The salience of party stances is more diverse than that of party positions.

Finally, we examine the degree to which cleavages in democratic party competition tend to focus on unresolved aspects of national political development as Lipset and Rokkan have suggested. Clearly, there is a broad range of possible national conditions which define the incentives for parties to emphasize certain issues and downplay others. While we do not rule out the possibility that the precise design of democratic institutions – presidential or parliamentary, proportional or district electoral systems – may have an impact on salience, we also see some reasons to think that the foci for salience in new democracies may be most plausibly related to the main sources of economic and social division and political development (Miller et al. 1998). These include the emergence of markets and economic development, the democratic transition and extent of consolidation, and ethnic and national differences within new states. Theoretically, these stimuli have been singled out by both party-centered approaches (Kitschelt 1995) that highlight the importance of Communist regime type for the ways that parties will seek to mobilize and differentiate themselves on issues and by society-centered approaches (Evans and Whitefield 2000) that highlight the importance of social divisions as the main cues for party competition.

Our final hypothesis, therefore, is:

Hypothesis 3: Issues will be stressed to varying degrees because they relate to national conditions that vary across states. In particular, gradations in levels of economic and market development, forms of democratic transition and levels of consolidation, and the extent of ethnic division will impact on the salience attached to the economy, democracy and ethnicity.

Summary. In line with the research literature, we expect the positions of parties to form one general dimension: parties that are pro-reform on one dimension are also pro-reform on other

dimensions. We reconcile the simplicity suggested by this argument with the evident diversity of party competition by stressing the distinction between party positions and their salience.

3. The 2003-2004 Expert Survey on European Integration

In order to measure party stances, we use data from an expert survey conducted by the authors in late 2003 and early 2004. (Details on the precise question wording from the expert survey and sources for the additional measures are found in Appendix A.) Our expert survey includes thirteen East European states, comprising the post-Communist states scheduled for EU accession in 2004 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia), EU accession in 2007 (Bulgaria, Romania), as well as states that are not scheduled for entry at all (Moldova, Russia and Ukraine).

For each country, we assembled a master list of experts containing 264 names. We included experts on our list if (1) they had published in English on either party systems or European integration; (2) were recommended to us by known experts in the field; (3) were known to us from our own contacts. The survey achieved 111 respondents (42 percent)¹, giving us, therefore, an average number of respondents per country of more than 8.5 – with no country having less than six. Inglehart and Huber (1995) suggest that one should target a minimum of five experts per country. While any minimum N is somewhat arbitrary conceptually, their strategy is validated by Gabel and Huber (2000) who find that the Inglehart/Huber left-right indicator is closely related to data from other sources, including public opinion and party manifesto data.

¹ We consider this a conservative estimate of the response rate because it considers all experts, including those with multiple email addresses who never replied to our email (we used the last email known to us). If these respondents are excluded from the denominator, then the response rate exceeds seventy percent.

An important question is whether the results of our expert survey produce valid results. A way to do this is correlate indicators from our survey with those of others. Fortunately, about 9 months before we went into the field a group at Chapel Hill conducted an expert survey on party stances about European integration in East-Central Europe (Marks et al. 2006). The two surveys overlap with 57 of the same parties (in 9 countries). In order to validate the quality of the two expert surveys, the two teams combined datasets and analyzed the relationship between the most similar and relevant measures (Whitefield et al. 2007). This analysis shows that (i) regarding the ideological left-right placement of parties, both surveys place parties at nearly identical points - Pearson's $r=.865$. Furthermore, on European integration—a focus of both expert surveys—the two surveys produce closely related estimates of party stances on political ($r=.965$) and market integration ($r=.868$). This evidence strongly suggests that the two surveys produce reliable information about party stances in post-Communist countries.

In light of this convergence, then, why did we conduct our own expert survey? As pointed out in the introduction, our survey allows us to address our central research questions in ways that other expert surveys, as well as manifesto studies on Europe, do not. First, the survey conducted by the UNC team does not allow the analyst to investigate various theoretically possible policy dimensions that may divide parties. This is so because the questions put to respondents *pre-assume* a two-dimensional structure comprised of economically left and right, on the one hand, and a composite GAL-TAN (green/alternative/libertarian versus traditionalism/authority/nationalism).² While these are important dimensions and our results therefore overlap to some degree with those produced by Marks and Hooghe (2006), we also show below that there are empirically relevant dimensions that can only be captured with our more refined measurement instrument. Second, Benoit and Laver (2006) and the UNC team ask

² Their green/alternative/libertarian indicator, (p. 157, fn 3) is clearly derived from a reform factor based on the postmaterialism literature in Western Europe (Marks et al. 2006, p. 156).

experts about a relatively narrow range of possible issues which limits the extent to which their data set can actually reveal important variation about party stances across nations. Particularly important in the context of this paper is that these data sets allow the main dimensions of party competition only to be inferred from summing the salience of individual party positions on specific issues. In contrast, we allow respondents to say directly and *all things considered* what the main dimensions are underlying party systems as a whole and then to locate each party on that dimension. Our measurement strategy, therefore, allows us to identify instances where (most) parties fail to address an issue that is viewed as important by experts (and electorates).³ All in all, while these data sets significantly contribute to our knowledge about party competition, we see a need to supplement these data sources with our own measurements.⁴

4. The Character of Party Cleavages

In order to examine the nature of party competition, we first asked experts to broadly indicate the main lines of conflicts in party systems:

“We would like to begin by asking about the party system as a whole. Some countries may have multiple political cleavages, others only one, and some of course may have none at all.”

³ For example, most major parties in Western Europe did not address environmental issues in the 1970s and early 1980s even though the issue dimension was important to electorates.

⁴ We note also that the manifesto data study (Klingemann et al. 2006), as neatly pointed out by Benoit and Laver (2006, p.153), fails adequately to distinguish between issue position and salience. For many of the actual code categories in the manifesto project fuse party positions and issue salience into a single measure. This complicates a systematic and separate construction of indicators for party stances and their salience.

Based on a list of several conflict dimensions we assembled (see the appendix), experts ranked the four most important issues that best capture the main cleavages between political parties in a given country. Our list includes the welfare dimension, the conflict over economic regime alternatives, the degree to which party systems debate alternatives to democracies, ethnic issues, social rights, regional divisions, and the communist legacy. Experts were able to supplement the list, though none selected this option.

Table 1 presents the mean scores for each division for the region as a whole. The scores range from 1 (indicating a first-ranked issue conflict) to 5 (if an issue conflict was not selected as one of the top four conflicts by an expert). As the table makes plain, by far the most important conflict between parties is centered on distributional issues. The pro-welfare versus anti-welfare dimension constitutes the most important cleavage in nearly all party systems (mean=2.03). Note that this conflict dimension specifically asked about controversies that occur *within* a market economy. This pattern is encouraging with respect to the development of the market system because the main economic cleavage is not constituted by a division over the existence of the market economy per se. However, each of the next three conflicts does involve regime level issues. In second place are conflicts over the economic system (mean=3.47), followed by issues of nationalism (mean=3.7), and democratic institutions (mean=3.8). In fact, a pessimistic interpretation might stress that three of the four most important lines of party divisions involve either directly the nature of regimes, or the scope of institutional authority (nationalism).

--Table 1 about here--

These broad strokes necessarily omit the finer gradations of the nature of party competition within party systems. Heeding Lipset and Rokkan's advice on general trends and "fascinating detail", Figure 1 conveys some of the specific flavor of each party system without obscuring a broader view with myriad country-specific particulars. On the x-axis, the figure contains the position of parties on the most important issue conflict in that country. A "1" represents the anti-reform position; a "7" the pro-reform stance. In Bulgaria, for example, the

welfare dimension constitutes the most important dimension so party positions on that dimension are displayed on the x-axis. The y-axis displays the position of parties on the second (the dimension listed on the left side of the figure's legend) and third most important issue conflict in each country, in that order. In Bulgaria, the second most important conflict dimension according to our experts is over the economic regime, followed by the democracy dimension. The figure, therefore, accomplishes three objectives: to show (1) the most important conflict lines within each party systems; (2) the position of individual parties on these dimensions; (3) the overall clustering of policy positions within each party system.

--Figure 1 about here--

Even a quick glance indicates that the socio-economic dimension is in the top list everywhere. Expectedly, we find that parties carry out debates over socio-economic conflicts in all nations. Beyond this commonality, we find two cross-national patterns. Focusing on the top two conflicts, there are several nations where a non-economic issue structures party competition. The democracy dimension is among the top two in Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Other top conflicts are ethnicity in Latvia where the Russian minority clearly poses a perceived threat to Estonians, nationalism (Hungary), religiosity in church-dominated Poland, and the urban-rural dimension in Lithuania. We conclude that just as in Western Europe, where social class is a common denominator whereas religious and ethnic conflicts introduces diversity across nations, *economic issues constitute the common basis for party competition in the region and other conflicts add a country-specific flavor.*

5. The Dimensionality of Party Positions and Issue Salience

The figure also suggests a considerable degree of coherence among party stances. Parties that are pro-markets are also pro-democracy (where the dimension matters, such as Estonia), liberal on the ethnic dimension (e.g., Latvia), and support internationalist policies (e.g., Czech Republic). Communist parties are typically located in the quadrant representing a leftist,

nationalist position. This initial interpretation holds up for the entire region if we submit party policies to a confirmatory factor analysis. While we cannot include all issues in the same analysis--this would reduce the number of parties to 18⁵--we are able to include six issues for which we have information about 56 parties; this number is increased to 76 when ethnicity is excluded. Because the factor structure is substantively the same for both sets of analyses, we present the results including ethnicity. These analyses are based on six issues, including the most important conflicts for all party systems.

Table 2 presents the results of several confirmatory factor analyses that test various models discussed in the literature. We first estimated a one-factor model (model 1) which underlies several important arguments in the literature. As the various fit indices suggest (Hoyle and Panter 1995), this model fits the data quite well. The individual loading for ethnicity is a bit at the lower end, but on the whole, the patterns suggest that parties coalesce around a pro-reform versus anti-reform dimension, supporting the arguments of several writers (Marks et al. 2006; Kitschelt 1992; Whitefield 2002; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2007). We then estimated a two-factor model where the two dimensions are orthogonal. This actually lowers the various fit indices, suggesting that it would be incorrect to argue that there are multiple and unique issue positions which discriminate among parties in the region. Finally, we estimated a model with 2 correlated factors (data not shown for reasons of space). While this specification slightly improves the overall goodness of fit⁶, the two factors are highly correlated ($r=.78$). In the interest of parsimony, and the strong relationship between the two factors, we interpret this evidence, on

⁵ If a conflict was not selected by experts, they did not rate party positions on this dimension.

Thus, if a dimension was only important for a single country (e.g., religiosity in Poland), we have party positions for only that country.

⁶ Goodness of Fit=.89; Non-normed fit index=.92; Incremental fit index=.87; and Comparative fit index=.92.

balance, as supporting a one-dimensional model—party positions tend to reflect a pro-reform versus anti-reform dimension.

--Table 2 about here--

We also hypothesize that the dimensionality of issue salience is more complex depending on the specific national context. Thus, here we ask: to what extent do parties emphasize the same issues?

Table 3 shows the results of a confirmatory factor analysis of the issue salience. In contrast to party positions, a one-dimensional solution is clearly inadequate (model 1). The poor fit of the model to the data as indicated by various fit indices suggests that the salience attached to various issue dimensions is not driven by a single, underlying factor.⁷ Clearly, parties that stress the economic regime dimension also emphasize the welfare dimension. At the same time, as the low loadings of all the other indicators in model 1 suggests, economic salience tells us little about how much weight parties attach to the other issue dimensions. Parties may, or may not, emphasize the design of effective democratic institutions, or the rights of ethnic minority groups, along with economic issues. Thus, arguments that would stress the presence of only one relevant dimension of party competition in the region do not adequately model party competition in the post-communist region.

Model 2 therefore presents a two-factor model (orthogonal). Note first that the fit indices improve substantially, now reaching levels that are generally considered acceptable (Hoyle and Panter 1995). In addition, the loadings for the non-economic reform indicators on the second dimension improved substantially over their loadings on the one factor model. This clearly means that one salience dimension is purely economic in nature; and the other salience dimension, viewed generally, captures parties' emphases on non-economic reform issues. This dimension

⁷ The same pattern emerges if the ethnicity indicator is excluded and a larger set of parties (N=79) is analyzed with the 5 remaining issues.

includes the extent to which parties stress the need to build democratic institutions, along with the need to deal effectively with the communist legacy, and minority rights.⁸

--Table 3 about here--

Summary. These analyses go some way in clarifying the nature of party competition in post-Communist democracies. They unambiguously show, in support of hypothesis 1, that party positions form one single dimension: parties that are pro-reform on one dimension are also pro-reform on another one. This finding conflicts with the ‘no (common) structure’ argument in the literature and is more consistent with the uni-dimensional and structured diversity models. However, the structured diversity approach receives more support than the uni-dimensional model from our analyses of the salience of party appeals. These are multi-dimensional, though we also observe a clear pattern. Economic issues are most strongly salient, followed by a non-economic reform dimension. Thus, variation across party systems is created through the different emphasis parties attach to issue domains, not through a lack of coherent party stances.

6. The Contextual Sources of Party Stances and their Salience

Why should there be multi-dimensionality with respect to the salience attached to issues? Our answer is that it results from the different incentives given to parties by the national conditions in which they compete for votes. A more direct test of the extent to which positions are similar whereas salience varies is one that relates party appeals to their contextual conditions. Parties, we

⁸ We also tried to estimate a two-factor model with correlated factors but the model was underidentified. Note, however, that this model would fit the data even better than one with orthogonal factors. In addition, given the very low loadings of the non-economic reform indicators on the 1st factor in model 1, it is unlikely that the correlation between the two factors is substantial.

argue, respond to national conditions—not by re-packaging issue positions on multiple dimensions but by altering the salience of issues.

We should be point out that we do not provide a multivariate model of these relationships, for theoretical reasons. As has been pointed out by many scholars of post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe (Kitschelt 2003; Hellman 1998), states that are more market oriented are also more likely to be democratically developed as well as integrated with Western and European institutions. We therefore argue that we are dealing with a *syndrome* of conditions impacting on the salience of issues and look to see if the underlying pattern is consistent with hypothesis 3 – that is, salience of issues is associated systematically and predictably with levels of economic and democratic development and with ethnic diversity.

--table 4 about here--

Table 4, therefore, presents the bivariate relationships between socio-economic, democratic, ethnic, and a reform factor on both position and salience. We combined the two economic indicators given their very high correlation for positions ($r=.91$) and salience ($r=.83$). We separated the ethnic dimension from the remaining reform positions because we uncovered one important difference in correlations in more refined analyses (see below).

We include a variety of measures of socio-economic conditions, including the UN Human Development Index (HDI), sectoral strength of agriculture, industry and service sectors (which we proxy as measures of economic development) and unemployment. (Other measures of the economy were also considered but did not change the overall pattern of our results.) In addition, we include two measures of democratic transition and development; first, following Kitschelt et al's (1999) study, we code countries according to whether the prior Communist regime was patrimonial in character; second, we use more standard measures, including the Freedom House index, and World Bank Governance indicators of quality of output of institutions (Kaufmann et al. 2006) to measure the extent to which democratic institutions are working effectively. Finally, we include a measure of ethnic pluralism.

The results in table 4 provide further strong support for hypothesis 1. National contextual conditions are not case associated with issue positions on the economy, democracy, and ethnicity. We only find three significant relationships between the non-economic reform factor and socio-economic conditions. However, these reform issues are among the least relevant for all party systems (see table 1). This broad pattern holds across the range of measures of socio-economic conditions, prior regime, institutional performance and ethnic pluralism. Parties' stances, therefore, are hardly shaped distinctively by national context.

Quite the opposite holds true, however, for issue salience. As table 4 shows, the extent to which all main issue dimensions are made salient is clearly associated with national context, in the following ways. First, parties are more likely to make economic issues prominent in less economically developed states; where the agricultural sectors is larger or the service sector is smaller. This is clearly consistent with Lipset and Rokkan's argument that unresolved issues set the agenda for political actors. Economic issues are more pressing where economic development is lower and parties, therefore, make these more salient in their appeals to mass publics. Parties may also respond to pressures from citizens who are concerned; they may set the agenda as a result of the unresolved nature of issues. The specific causal path is not relevant for our purposes here. What is important is that while parties package issues similarly in all contexts, the extent to which they stress economic issues is systematically related to national conditions, just as Lipset and Rokkan argued (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967 p. 35).

Second, across the region as a whole, the salience of the democracy dimension is strongly, consistently, and inversely related to measures of socio-economic affluence, the quality of the democratic process and to Communist legacies. Socio-economically, all indicators point to one conclusion: the less affluent a country is, the more likely parties stress the democracy dimension. This is true for the Human Dimension index ($r=-.18$), and the size of the agricultural ($r=.30$) sectors. In addition, where countries have a syndrome of negative democratic conditions—are assessed to have lower quality governance institutions ($r=-.21$) and were

governed by patrimonial Communist regimes ($r=.20$)—parties are clearly more likely to make the issue of democracy salient. Again, we believe that this makes sense in terms of unresolved issues; those states where democratic institutions under-perform have conditions that will mobilize parties around this issue.

Finally, a variety of county conditions impact on ethnic divisions in party competition. As expected, ethnic pluralism increases the salience of these issues to party appeals. We also find that less economic and democratic development are associated with increased salience to ethnic cleavages. Again, we consider the range of factors associated with ethnic salience to be most plausibly part of a syndrome of conditions; patrimonial and clientelistic ties, for example, may be more likely in ethnically divided societies where spoils are linked to ethnic networks, and may play a role in reducing economic development. Finally, note that reforms are less salient when countries are more homogeneous ethnically; a pattern that prompted us to separate the ethnicity indicator from the broader reform factor. More generally, this reform factor is also connected to lower socio-economic affluence.

Summary. We find considerable evidence to support our hypothesis, based on the ‘structured diversity’ model, that the salience of issues in party appeals relates to country context and, in particular, that specific issues are made more salient by those country conditions that are most likely to be associated with unresolved conflicts— economic issues by relative economic under-development, democracy with under-development, and ethnicity by ethnic cleavages and other economic and political conditions that may be associated with them.⁹

⁹ One illustration of the usefulness of the distinction between stances and salience is to examine the party stances on issues weighted by their salience. When salience and stances are fused, we see the variety of country-specific issue dimensions that country experts discuss. Of course, our goal is to disentangle these dimensions in order to analyze the nature and sources of party competition, so it would not be meaningful to rely on the merged indicator in our analyses.

7. Explaining the Salience of the Democracy Dimension in Central and Eastern Europe

The previous section suggests that we should take seriously the difference between issue position and salience because the distinction helps us to reconcile various explanations about the character of party systems in the post-communist region. In this section, we will argue that the empirical patterns we found regarding party stances and their salience reveal a problem with a postmaterial interpretation concerning the meaning of the democracy dimension. To put it succinctly, when parties stress this dimension, we argue that they are concerned with the consolidation of democratic regimes.

This point deserves elaboration. In the West, a demand for more democratic participation at the level of parties (and electorates) is typically linked to the emergence of a ‘post-material’ generation (Inglehart 1977), or left-libertarian generation of citizens (Dalton 2005). At the level of party systems, this is most clearly expressed by the evolution of Green parties that are now represented in virtually every parliament in Western Europe, but also by the incorporation of green issues by other parties as well. It is helpful to remember the backdrop against which these participatory demands developed: affluence and firmly established, liberal-representative institutions. The goal of Green (and greenish) parties is to develop greater participatory elements *within* the framework of liberal-representative democracies.

Indeed, this is also how various analysts treat the democracy dimension in the post-Communist context. Kitschelt, for instance, argues that “[m]y substantive hypothesis is that increasing economic development and affluence induces a general shift of voter preferences toward libertarian, participatory claims.” (1992: p. 19). And Marks et al. (2006) include the democracy dimension as part of the second, non-material dimension (called Green Alternative-Libertarian) just as they suggest it for Western Europe (Marks et al. 2002). Thus, while these authors recognize that the clustering of issue positions likely differs across the East-West divide,

they do not recognize that the specific connotation of the democracy dimension may differ as well.

The reason why the democracy dimension may differ from that in the West is that post-Communist countries have only recently established democratic institutions. If parties in this context stress the need for democratic development in their country, we expect this to be different from that in the West where parties demand more participatory institutions within the confines of mature democracies. In our view, then, the democracy dimension in the post-Communist context expresses a concern with the consolidation of liberal-representative institutions *per se*, and not with adding a participatory dimension to liberal representative institutions.

The contextual determinants of the salience of the democracy dimension (table 4) afford us, therefore, with a clear test to sort out the post-materialism vs. consolidation interpretation of the democracy dimension. If parties had accorded more salience to pro-democratic stances in response to material prosperity or postmaterial conditions, then the salience of the democracy dimension would have been *higher* in the most affluent nations in the region. These countries (particularly Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Czech Republic) also have democratic institutions that are reasonably firmly established (Kaufmann et al. 2006). We find exactly the opposite. Parties in *less affluent* countries, such as Russia, Moldova, and the Ukraine, but also Bulgaria and Romania, where national institutions are less developed, are precisely the ones that accord greater salience to the democracy dimension. Consequently, these patterns support an interpretation that views the democracy dimension as an expression of a concern with the consolidation of liberal representative institutions rather than the impact of post-material conditions.

8. Conclusions

The paper concludes with several ‘happy endings’. First, we have systematically described the nature of political cleavages among political parties in thirteen post-Communist states. Given the paucity of comparative data on this issue to date, we regard this in itself to be a significant

contribution. The results document the predominance of socio-economic issues. Divisions over the allocation of resources provide a unifying cleavage across party systems in the region, just as in Western Europe.

Second, by developing the distinction between issue position and issue salience, we are able to reconcile basic but often contradictory evidence from prior research into one general model. Party positions on *issues* are structured in a common and uni-dimensional way across all Central and Eastern Europe. The appearance of multiple country-specific dimensions to party competition (the ‘no (common) structure’ model) that emerges from single-country studies occurs primarily because of the differences in salience attached to issues as a result of national contexts. Parties facing similar national-level contexts and challenges tend to make issues salient in directly comparable ways. While socio-economic issues are most important, one must also account for a second dimension in nearly every party system in order to fully understand the broad forces structuring party competition in any given country. In some countries, parties are divided over the democracy dimension; in others, they compete over regional, religious, or ethnic issues. We find, therefore, structured diversity to party competition in terms of salience. This finding is theoretically pleasing as it builds on both cross national and country specific research.

Third, our findings suggest that the consolidation of democracies is a main theme for parties in countries where democratic institutions are less firmly established. When parties discuss issues of democratization, it is likely to take on overtones of consolidating liberal-democracies, and not to add a post-material flavor to democratic politics.

One final broad implication stands out. Despite the fragile nature of party-citizen linkages, weak party organization and frequent lack of continuity of particular parties themselves, party systems as a whole have coalesced around a predictable set of factors. There are variations, but they are predictable on the basis of society-level factors that influence the salience attached to them. One way to understand cross-national variation in the basis of party systems is to be able to answer Lipset and Rokkan’s question, “What have [elites] achieved and where had they met the

most resistance?” (1967, p. 36). If we know what issues remain unresolved for countries as a whole, it is a good bet that parties stress these issues. Thus, contrary to much of the negative literature on ability of parties to function properly, party cleavages exist that both reflect the conditions of post-Communism generally and are specifically relevant to country conditions. Thus, parties succeed in simplifying the choices among voters to a manageable set of associated issues without oversimplifying them to ignore important national circumstances.

All told, we see party systems in these states in a far more positive light than alternative accounts to date. As we found in another study, party systems exhibit those characteristics that enable them to provide the mechanisms of a ‘responsible party government’ (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2007). Despite the difficulties they may face in new democracies, they appear to function more effectively as agents of party government than is commonly assumed. This is both practically important (because it contributes to democratic consolidation) and theoretically relevant as it shows that the concept of party government can be applied to examine the nature and sources of party cleavages outside of mature democracies.

Appendix: Measurement of Variables

Party positions and their Saliency on relevant domestic divisions:

We first asked respondents to identify the four most important divisions between parties:

“We would like to begin by asking about the party system as a whole. Some countries may have multiple issue dimensions structuring party competition, others only one, and some of course may have none at all. Could you please indicate how important each issue dimension is in the party system of [country x]? If two issue dimensions are about equally important, please still rank order them for the purpose of the next question.”

Respondents could rank up to four issues from the following list:

- A. Economy: redistribution issues (for example, tax levels, welfare state spending)
- B. Economy: State-run versus market economy
- C. Democracy: strengthening democratic institutions
- D. Ethnic rights (for example, minorities)
- E. Nationalism and Internationalism (for example, views about the EU).
- F. Religiosity (role of church)
- G. Social rights (for example, lifestyle)
- H. Views of the Communist past and its legacies
- I. Regional divisions
- K. Urban-rural divisions

The next question asked respondents to indicate for each party the position on each dimension identified by respondents in the first question:

“We would like to ask you next about the main parties' positions on the issues you just identified. Please note that we are interested in the official position of the party as represented by the main party leaders. (We ask you later to assess the extent to which a political party is internally divided on its policy stances.)

Beginning with issue 1, could you now situate parties in [country x]? Please use a seven-point

scale to score the position of a party. A score of 7 indicates the most strongly liberal position and a score of 1 indicates the least liberal position on any particular issue. If a party has no stance on a given issue, please give it a score of 99.”

This procedure generated measures for party stances for those divisions identified by the first question. For example, issues A and B were mentioned by all respondents in all party systems; we therefore have measures for party stances for the two economic issues. Some issues were deemed irrelevant in some countries and therefore not chosen. For example, ethnicity was not selected among the top four issues in some countries. We therefore have issue positions not for 87 but a subset of 58 parties (e.g., table 2).

“Next, and again using a 7-point scale, please indicate how important each issue is in defining a party's political orientation. Again, we are interested in the party's official stances. A 1 indicates no importance at all; a 7 stands for very important.”

Again, the same logic applies regarding the number of parties for which we have a measure of salience (table 3).

Country Variables:

Economic Sectors (percent of workforce employed in agriculture, industry, and service sector).

CIA country reports, 2003.

Ethnic Pluralism: Fearon's measure of ethnic fractionalization (Fearon 2003).

Freedom House scores (2003).

Human Dimension Index (2002): from 2005 UN's HDI report,

Patrimonialism: own coding based on Kitschelt et al. (1999).

Quality of Output institutions: country scores generated by Kauffmann et al. (2005) for government effectiveness, rule of law, and corruption.

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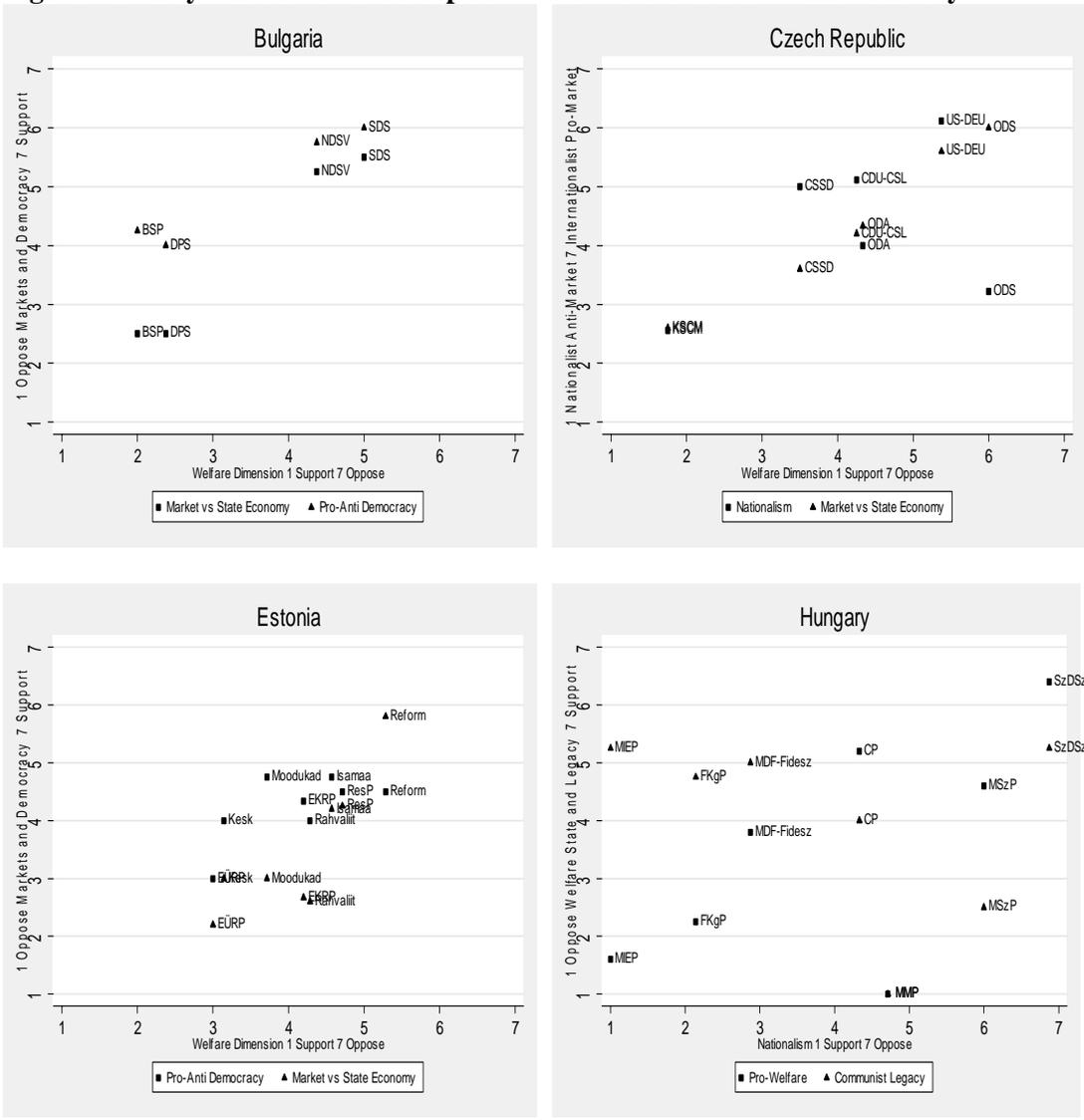
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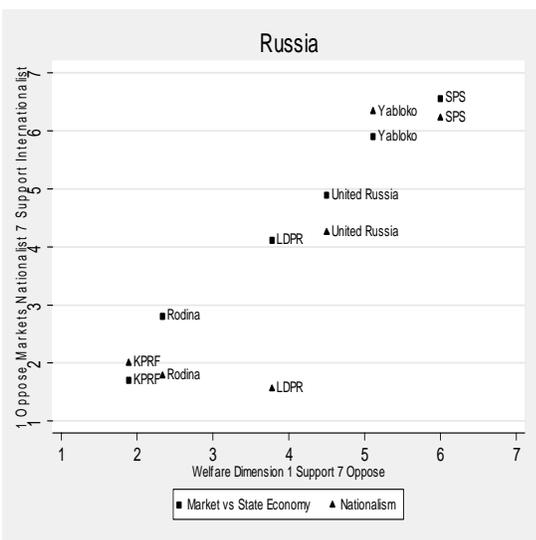
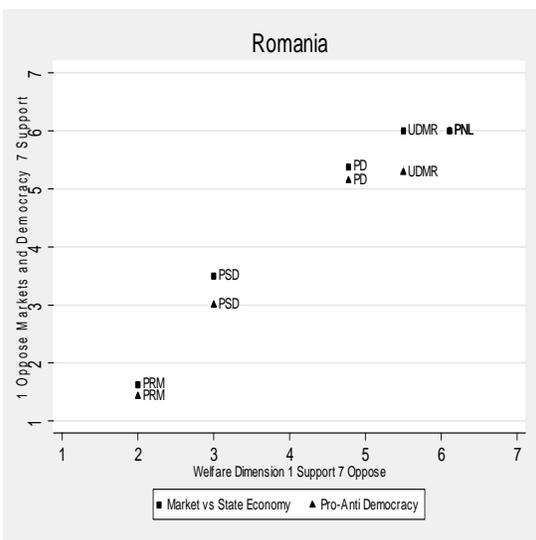
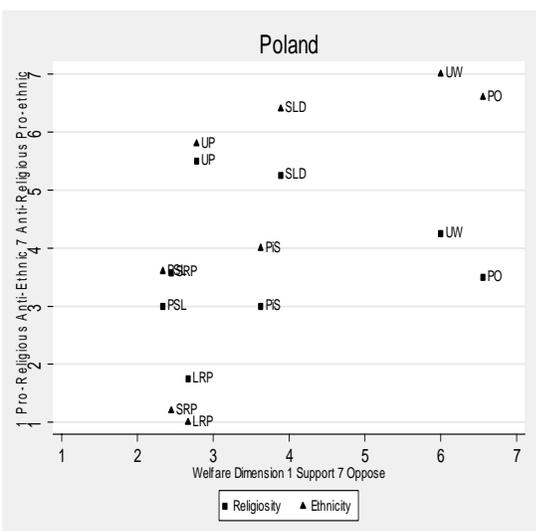
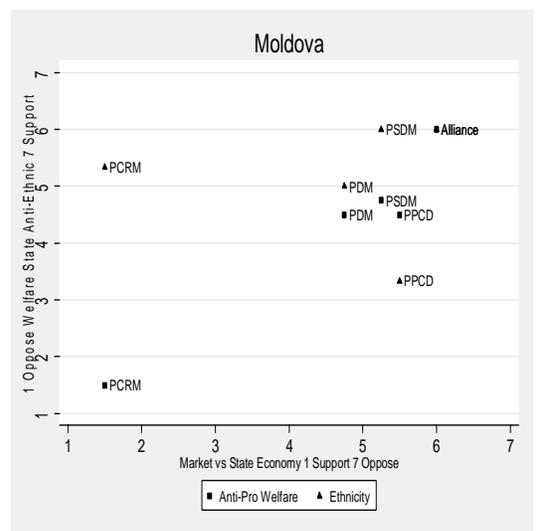
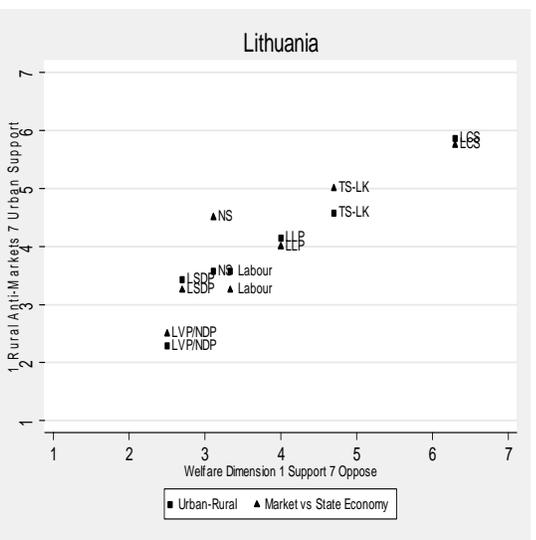
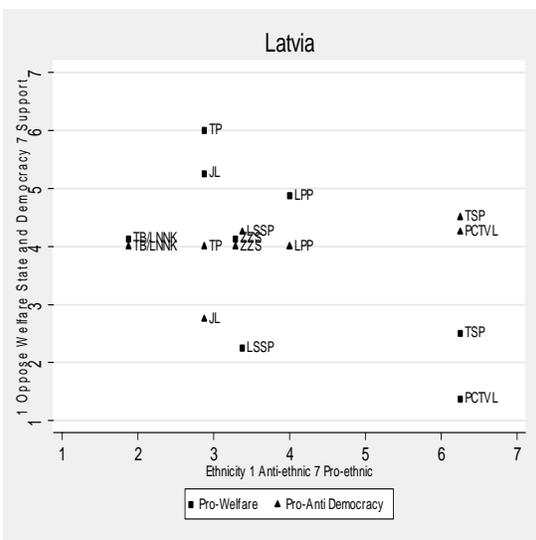
Table 1: The Importance of Conflicts for Party Competition in 13 Central and East European Countries

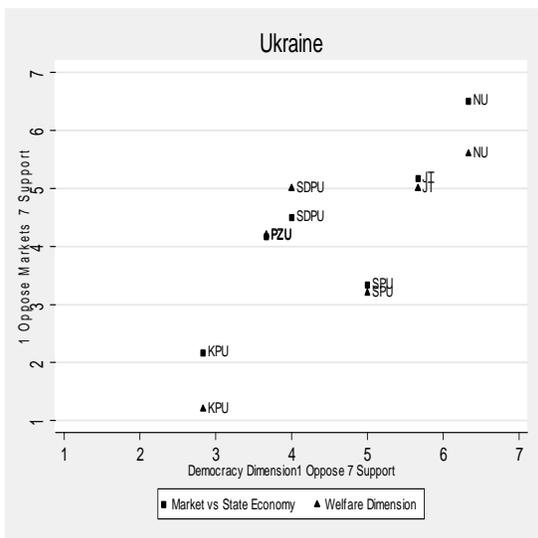
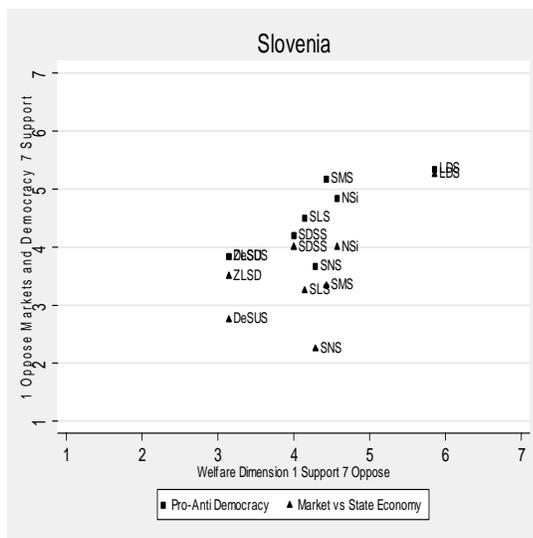
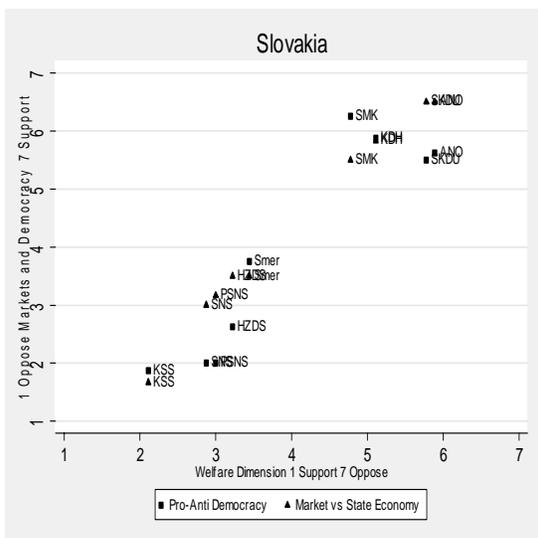
	Welfare State	Market vs State	Democracy	Ethnicity	Nationalism	Religiosity	Social Rights	Communist Legacy	Regionalism	Urban-Rural
Bulgaria	1.1	3.6	3.8	4.8	4.1	5	4.1	3.9	4.9	4.8
Czech R	1.6	3.2	4.3	5	2.4	4.8	4.4	4.1	4.9	5
Estonia	1.3	3.7	3.4	4.1	4.9	5	4.1	4.4	4.7	4
Hungary	3.3	4.5	4.5	4.6	2.1	4.4	4.1	3.5	4.9	4.1
Latvia	2	4.1	4	1.5	4.3	5	5	4.4	5	4.8
Lithuania	1.3	3.8	4.5	5	4.1	4.9	4.5	4.2	4.6	3.7
Moldova	3	2.8	3.7	3.5	3.7	5	4.2	4.8	4.3	5
Poland	2.2	4.2	4.9	5	3.6	2.8	4.7	4.7	5	4.9
Romania	1.9	2.4	3.3	4.3	3.9	5	4.6	4.3	4.7	4.9
Russia	1.5	1.9	4.1	4.8	3.4	5	4.9	4.2	4.9	4.9
Slovakia	1.8	3.3	3.1	3.7	3.6	4.7	4.7	4.7	5	5
Slovenia	2.3	3.4	3.1	4.6	3.8	4	4.1	4.3	4.3	4.2
Ukraine	3.1	2.9	2.8	4.9	3.9	4.5	4.1	4.5	3.3	4.8
Mean (all nations)	2.03	3.47	3.81	4.24	3.68	4.56	4.45	4.33	4.67	4.55

Note: Entries are mean scores indicating the importance of a conflict dimension. The indicator ranges from “1” (most significant) to “5” (insignificant).

Figure 1: Party Position on the 3 top conflict dimensions within each country







Note: The x-axis displays the position of parties on the most important cleavage in a country; the y-axis displays their position on the second and third most important conflict dimension.

Table 2: The Structure of Party Positions in Central and East European Party Systems (confirmatory factor analyses, standardized solutions)

	Model 1:		Model 2:
	One-factor Model		Two-Factor Model (orthogonal)
	Factor I:		Factor 2
Small (vs Large) welfare State (item A in appendix)	.93		.95
Market (vs State-run) economy (B)	.96		.96
Pro-Democracy (C)	.74		.73
Ethnicity (D)	.41		.85
Internationalism (E)	.62		.71
Social Rights (G)	.58		.57
Communist Legacy (H)	.63		.64
Goodness-of-fit-index	.83		.76
Non-normed fit index	.80		.68
Incremental fit index	.87		.79
Comparative fit index	.88		.79

Note: N =56. An empty cell means no cell entry.

Table 3: The Structure of Issue Salience in Central and East European Party Systems (confirmatory factor analyses, standardized solutions)

	Model 1		Model 2	
	One factor Model		Two-Factor model (orthogonal)	
			Factor I	Factor II
Small (vs Large) welfare State (item A in appendix)		.87	.90	
Market (vs State-run) economy (B)		.95	.92	
Pro-Democracy (C)		.26		.52
Ethnicity (D)		.10		.46
Internationalism (E)		.38		.69
Social Rights (G)		.24		.43
Communist Legacy (H)		.15		.63
Goodness-of-fit-index		.64		.85
Non-normed fit index		.51		.88
Incremental fit index		.73		.92
Comparative fit index		.71		.92

Note: N=56. empty cell means no cell entry.

Table 4: The Relationships between Contextual Conditions and Party Appeals

		Position				Salience			
		Economy	Democracy	Ethnicity	Reform	Economy	Democracy	Ethnicity	Reform
Socio-economic Conditions	Human Dimension Index	-.09	-.07	-.13	-.19*	-.16*	-.18*	-.37***	-.23**
	Agriculture	.07	.11	.17	.28***	.20**	.31***	.28**	.31***
	Industry	-.03	.03	-.09	-.15	-.10	.13	-.30***	-.14
	Service	-.07	-.17	-.15	-.25**	-.19*	-.30***	-.15	-.31***
	Unemployment	-.05	-.04	-.04	-.02	.08	-.04	-.20*	-.02
	Ethnic Pluralism	a	a	.01	-.09	a	a	.30**	-.25***
Institutional Conditions	Freedom House	-.08	-.01	.01	-.04	-.10	-.11	-.50**	-.17
	Quality of Bureaucracies/Judiciaries	-.10	-.05	-.05	-.17	-.21*	-.21***	-.53**	-.33
	Patrimonialism	.08	.07	.10	.16	.13	.20*	.30***	.30***

Note: Entries are Pearson's correlation coefficients. N=87 for Economy (an additive indicator of welfare and market economy) and Democracy; N=79 for Reform (internationalism, social rights, communism); N= 64 for Ethnicity. “*”, “**”, “***” denotes significance at p=.10, p=.05, and p=.01 level, respectively