Explaining Party Level Volatility in the New European Democracies

Sergiu Gherghina
EPOP Conference, Oxford
September 8, 2012
Puzzle and RQ

• High levels of electoral volatility in CEE (absolute and relative)
• Entries and exits from the political scene
• Low continuity in government

• How can the electoral volatility be explained?
Explanatory Layers

• **Macro: Party System Level**
  Democratization, electoral system, ideology, cleavages, and turnout

• **Meso: Party Level**
  Incumbency, *party organization*

• **Micro: Voter Level**
  Government performance, party ID, retrospective economic evaluations
Why Party Level

• Direct agents of representation: interaction with voters, they run in elections, demand voters’ support, and are influenced by vote shifts
• Large unexplained variations within party systems
• Systems are unstable, entries and exits
• Able to capture splits, mergers, label changes
• Size of the party (ENP does not do)
Organizational Determinants

- Type of organizations
- Party Age
- Institutional network (church, trade unions)
- Leadership changes
- Party Funding
- Candidate Selection
- Party Membership
- MP Renomination Rates
What Diminishes Volatility?

1. Decentralized candidate selection

2a. Large membership organizations

2b. Stable membership organizations

3. Larger renomination rates
Research Design

• DV: net electoral volatility (Birch 2001)
• Unit of analysis: political party/election
• 6 countries: Bg, Cz Rep, Hu, Pl, Ro, Sk
• 29 political parties (1990-2008)
• Statistical analyses (correlations and OLS with robust errors) and comparative case studies
• 3 controls: party system volatility, turnout, and incumbency
Candidate Selection

Party Membership
- Size
- Variation

MP Re-nomination Rate

Electoral Volatility

Control Variables
- Party Incumbency
- Party System Volatility
- Voter Turnout
Candidate Selection

• Statute analysis for centralization of candidate selection
• Triangulation (expert survey, single case studies)
• Index of candidate selection (6 point scale)
• Empirical support for H1: correlation of 0.36 (statistical significance at 0.01)
Candidate Selection Overview

- Decentralized: 19%
- Centralized: 19%
- Local nominations: 36%
- Central nominations: 7%
- Mixed nominations: 19%
Membership Organizations

- Oscillant: 72%
- Ascendant: 14%
- Descendant: 14%
Levels of Party Membership
Weak Mobilization Networks

• No empirical support for H2a
• No empirical support for H2b
• Why?

1. Low levels of membership
2. Small oscillations of membership organizations
3. High variations of electoral volatility (across parties and over time)
MPs as Stability Factors
Diminishing Volatility
### Multivariate Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>25.74** (7.74)</td>
<td>27.48 (14.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Selection</td>
<td>38.84** (12.52)</td>
<td>33.76* (13.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Size</td>
<td>-2.16 (2.29)</td>
<td>-1.14 (2.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variations in Membership Size</td>
<td>-1.66 (4.30)</td>
<td>-0.59 (4.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renomination</td>
<td>-43.17** (14.11)</td>
<td>-38.66** (13.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party System Volatility</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.24 (0.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.07 (0.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Incumbency</td>
<td></td>
<td>-9.47* (3.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( N )</td>
<td>101</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

• Getting closer to the voter matters (decentralization)
• Renominated MPs diminish volatility
• Membership organizations are not linked to electoral volatility
• Implications:
  1. Endogenous explanations of volatility
  2. A new theory of institutionalization
  3. Rethink the relationship parties-voters