A Critical Literature Review of New Party Success in Central and Eastern Europe

Yuxiang Lin[1]

Abstract

The paper offers a critical literature review of existing explanations for new party success in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communism in 1989. The paper presents the strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches, arguing that the historical analysis, the sociological explanation, and the institutional framework can provide sources of changes in party systems, and set constraints to political party leaders, but fail to elucidate variations in individual parties. The paper then continues to reflect on `the agential approach and the party-specific factors such as partisanship and organization, stating that while the partisanship approach is not appropriate for the study of party politics in Central and Eastern Europe due to the region's short time scope of merely three decades of democratisation so far, the choices and crafting of party leaders as well as the party organization development are crucial to spelling out why some new parties endure, while others are short-lived.

Introduction

New party success is defined in various ways. It is mainly conceptualised as "electoral success" (Chandra, 2005). Such electoral success can be operationalised as both winning seats in the legislature and entering government (Ishiyama and Stewart, 2021). Electoral success can be long term. Being able to avoid electoral failures consistently means keeping long-term representation in parliament, also coined as persistence and survival (Stanley

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[1] Doctoral student at the Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham, e-mail: YXL010@student.bham.ac.uk

et al, 2021). Electoral success can also be short-term. This is when new parties reach the threshold in elections for one time, achieve parliamentary breakthrough, but fail in the following elections (Emanuele and Sikk, 2020).

Indeed, time is an important dimension when specifying success. Emanuele and Sikk (2020) find five distinctive paths of new party performance in their first five parliamentary elections: "explosive, meteoric, contender, flat and flop", with the degree of success in a decreasing trend. While "explosive" means leaving a permanent footprint in the party system, "meteoric" is brief success and burning out, and "contender" and "flat" refer to shy entry into government. The final category "flop", "weak from the beginning and then dissipate", is observed as the most common category in their dataset of Western European countries. In CEE, new party success tends to be short-term, and a new party tends to be replaced by newer parties (Haughton and Deegan-Krause, 2020). Strikingly the Bulgarian political party GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria, achieved parliamentary breakthrough in 2009) is an exceptional case. It had already broken the record when it won its second parliamentary election in 2013, being the first party that won two elections in a row in Bulgaria since 1989. Nevertheless, its electoral success continued in the 2014 and 2017 parliamentary elections. Another exceptional example is the Slovak political party *Smer* (meaning "direction" in Slovak) which for the first time entered the parliament in 2002 as a new party, and managed to maintain seats it its sixth parliamentary mandate in the recent 2020 parliamentary elections. Similarly the Czech party ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens) first entered parliament in 2013 and maintained its parliamentary representation continuously until the recent 2021 parliamentary elections.

New parties are also defined in various ways. For instance, a new party can either be a party that split from an existing party or a party that does not get help from any existing party (Tavits, 2008). Similarly, Bolleyer and Bytzek (2017) stress the "organizational development" when defining *newness*. They think new parties do not necessarily represent new issues. Indeed, as it has been observed in CEE, new parties tend to represent in a similar way the issue of anti-corruption but are formed with new organization. For instance, in the 2022 April Slovenian parliamentary election, the new party Freedom Movement won more votes than any other parties with its anti-corruption appeal.

The rise of new parties has been observed in Europe, even in the world, albeit different in the timing. In Western Europe, the "frozen party system" was observed to end in 1968, and since then a series of new parties have been created (Bartolini and Mair, 2007). Then in 2010 the number of new parties, as well as the level of their electoral support in Western Europe, was observed to rise to an unusually high level (Emanuele and Sikk, 2020). Overall a high level of volatility has been observed in CEE, and new parties are frequently replaced by newer parties in the 21st century (Haughton and Deegan Krause, 2020). In other regions such as Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and South-East Asia democracy has been established over the last three decades, and the emergence of new parties has also been observed (Ibenskas and Sikk, 2017).

Emanuele and Sikk (2020) conceptualize the GNP (genuinely new parties) as parties that "are not successors to any previous parliamentary parties, have a novel name and structure, and do not have any important figures from past democratic politics among their major members" (Sikk, 2005: 399), while Barnea and Rahat (2011: 311) proposes the threshold for a new party as "a party that has a new label and that no more than half of its top candidates (top of candidate list or safe districts) originate from a single former party". New leadership is stressed in these definitions of new parties.

After the introduction, I assess the role of history in explaining new party success. Then I explore the explanatory power of sociological cleavages and electoral system. After that, I look into how important is the leadership factor to craft new party success. Following that, I analyze the significance of partisanship factor and party organization to shape up new party success.

Historical explanations: Legacy

In the study of party politics in CEE and Russia, Kreuzer and Pettai (2004) observed that scholars highlighted the importance of historical legacy. For instance, Kitschelt et al. (1999) used different types of communist regimes to explain the subsequent development of party systems, while Tworzecki (2003) explored how the nature of communist rule and socioeconomic structure shaped the electoral choices of voters. Moreover, Kostelecký (2002) believed that the historical legacy such as regional identities and industrialization shaped voters' preference in CEE, while Moser (2001) applied the long-term historical legacy (eg. underdeveloped civil society) to explain why the type of the Russian electoral system had permitted more parties to enter parliament unlike in Western Europe.

These historical analyses, according to Kreuzer and Pettai (2004), suffer from weaknesses, as they tended to treat the party system development as 'statically fixed by long-term historical legacies' (Kreuzer and Pettai, 2004: 619). Indeed, historical legacy contextualises the party system development that cannot be ignored, but the role of history should be taken in a more dynamic way. Elster et al. (1998) provided convincing arguments regarding the dynamic role of history, analysing that actors' resources are determined by the communist and pre-communist legacies, while stressing the contingency of the post-communist transition also constantly updated constraints put on actors' choices.

Therefore, in order to clarify the causal weight of historical legacy, it is crucial to look into the experiences of individual party leaders, explore how their past resources and ties enable them to design and implement new party projects, and analyse how actors cope with the constraints emerging from historical legacies. For CEE, the communist history may matter to the development of political parties in the 1990s, but it may be less powerful to explain the phenomenon of new party success in the 21st century.

Sociological explanation: cleavages, issue divides, and social changes

Cleavage is understood as 'political division among citizens rooted in the social structure and affecting electoral preferences' (Jurkynas, 2004: 281). Stoll (2008) highlights that social cleavages are exogenous to the political system. From the sociological perspective, a political party is an agent that translates a societal conflict into political disagreement (Jurkynas, 2004). Political sociologists employ the sociological factor of cleavage to explain the birth of the modern party system in Western Europe, arguing that it originates from the structural social division, which can be traced back to the national and industrial revolutions (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967).

Challenging this 'bottom-up' understanding, the 'top-down' approach of cleavage stresses the role of party officials in shaping the social division (Evans and Whitefield 2000). Indeed, the social structure does not automatically translate itself into political interaction, and therefore the role of elites is crucial to make such translation happen. Take the class cleavage as an example, Sartori (1968) believed that the class position is not translated to politics mechanically, but it is the working class party that raises the awareness of working class people for the common political goal.

The cleavage theory is used to explain the trajectory of party system development in Northern Europe from 1950s onwards that initially left-wing party supporters were mainly from low-educated and low-income voters, but later were also associated with high-educated voters (Martínez-Toledano and Sodano, 2021). There the class-based party system has been documented to weaken, and other socio-economic cleavages were observed, such as the sectoral cleavage, gender cleavage and urban-rural cleavage (Martínez-Toledano and Sodano, 2021).

Similarly, from the perspective of socio-economic cleavages, Bauluz et al. (2021) argue that the 2008 financial crisis has led to the transformation of party systems. They found a decline in class cleavages in Italy and Spain with the emergence of anti-system parties and anti-immigration parties, but Portugal saw a widened class divide with the ideological polarization of the two mainstream parties, and in Ireland the class division increased with the emergence of a 'workers' party (Bauluz et al., 2021).

The problem of applying the concept of cleavage in CEE is the scope of time. Strictly speaking, cleavage requires long-term institutionalization of social conflicts (Jurkynas, 2004). The historical cleavage itself manifests a certain level of stability (Bornschier, 2007). Relatively short-term politicization of social disagreement is issue divide (Jurkynas, 2004).

The sociological explanation is powerful, because it contextualizes the party system in the broader society. It focuses on crucial events, including historical events such as national or industrial revolution, or financial crises and civil wars. These events play a fundamental role in transforming the whole society, dividing the society, and therefore also leading to changes in the party system. It also highlights that social structural patterns classified by religion, education and income can influence voting choice of various demographic groups (Bornschier, 2007). Indeed, if the main function of political parties is to link the state to

society, then political parties are like mirrors that reflect the reality and structure of the wider society. If we use the sociological lens to look at party systems, it is not surprising to observe that a high number of new parties are emerging, given the global environment of rapid social changes, such as the global financial crisis in 2007. Research shows that in Europe the financial crisis led to vote losses of incumbent parties (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016).

The rapid development in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) is also likely to be sources of changes in party systems globally. If we look from the case of Bulgaria, the new party collation DB (Democratic Bulgaria) for the 2021 pre-electoral campaign flagged up two themes: electronic governance and judicial reforms (Nova, 2021/a). The strengths and weaknesses of electronic governance and electronic voting are debatable, and such debates are formulated in politics. As could be expected, the new party DB represents the supportive position for electronic governance, while the incumbent party NFSB (National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria) takes the opposite position (BNT, 2021). Therefore, the sociological lenses bring us to look at how the technological changes can also provide sources of division between new and incumbent parties.

The cleavage approach, however, does not explain the variations of individual parties taking similar positions in social division in CEE and beyond. The electoral market provides voters with alternative choices of several new parties representing the same ethnic minority group issue, for instance, but then how can it be explained that one party crosses the threshold while another fails to do so. Indeed, the cleavage approach can be powerful to explain the whole party system, but may not be powerful enough to explain why a new party can maintain seats in parliament over a few mandates but another new party disappears from parliament fast in CEE and beyond. Therefore it is useful to take the social division and social changes as context, but to look into party-specific factors.

The long-term social conflict and recent social changes are likely to be reflected in the party system, but to what extent it is reflected is also conditioned on the institutional framework. One of the weaknesses of the sociological explanations is that they ignore the institutional perspective. If political parties are to link society to the state, then both society and the institution contextualize party competition by setting opportunities and constraints. The institutionalization of social divisions is dependent on the specific electoral system and party financial restrictions in countries.

Institutional framework: electoral system

A significant institution in party politics is the electoral system. The types of electoral systems have an impact on party politics. The two types of electoral systems, the proportional representative system, and the single-member plurality system, have their advantages and disadvantages. The proportional representative system has greater proportionality and minority representation, while the single-member plurality system has greater accountability. The single-member plurality system sets bigger barriers for new

party breakthroughs than the proportional system. Harmel (1985) studies the breakthrough of new parties in Western Europe and the US from 1960 to 1980. The data from the large N study lends support to the role of the structural factor - the electoral system, demonstrating that new parties are more likely to achieve a breakthrough in proportional representation rather than the plurality/majority (Harmel, 1985: 518).

Duverger's law states that the single-member plurality system is more likely to generate a two-party system (Duverger, 1954). If a new party aims to win votes under a single-member plurality system, it has to get a substantially high number of votes in a district, otherwise, the small votes for a new party will be wasted. The geographically dispersed electoral support will put new parties in a disadvantaged position (Lijphart, 1994). Tan and Preece (2020) also point out the psychological effects that the system has on voters: voters will "avoid wasting votes on smaller or new, less well-known parties that are unlikely to win seats". For instance, the single-member plurality system in the UK is the "largest single obstacle" to the rise and success of new parties (Berrington, 1985: 446). If a new party in Britain manages to mobilize 20% of the vote that is equally spread geographically, it still will not be able to gain seats' (Berrington, 1985: 446). Therefore, the single-member plurality system is relatively not permissive for new party breakthrough compared to the proportional representation.

The threshold in the proportional representative system can impact how difficult it is for new parties to enter parliament. For instance, this system in Turkey has a 10 percent threshold, which is so high that an enormous number of new parties were created, but none made a parliamentary breakthrough since 2002 (Arslantaş et al., 2020). The strength of the electoral system approach is that it points out the structural force as a "facilitator or inhibitor" that might influence the experience of party formation and success (Hauss and Rayside, 1978: 37). Countries in CEE have largely employed the PR system or the mixed system (Birch, 2001). This makes new party success more likely to happen. In other words, the type of the electoral system in CEE is more permissive for newly created parties to gain seats in parliament. Nevertheless, the institutional approach cannot explain why under the same electoral system, different new parties may have different electoral performances and subsequently different fates. Perhaps various political party leaders as agents under the electoral system are important to make new party success happen in CEE and beyond.

Agential approach: leadership

In the hierarchic structure of a political party, leaders are at the top level and make strategic decisions for the party's development. Leadership factor is often studied as part of the organization factor (Ishiyama and Stewart, 2021; Wieringa and Meijers, 2020; Bolleyer and Bytzek, 2017).

Van Dyck constructs a leadership-centered model that focuses on the 'moral authority, cross-factional ties, and ideological representativeness' of party leaders as sources of party cohesion which is more likely to prevent schisms or party collapse in Peru (Van Dyck,

2018: 891). Similarly, Wieringa and Meijers (2020) demonstrate that the previous political experience of leaders is positively related to the new party breakthrough. Indeed, the networks that leaders have built prior to the launch of political parties may later transfer to part of Extended Party Networks, which extend the scope of influence that their parties have in society.

In addition, leadership continuity is argued to be important for new parties to persist after a breakthrough (Bolleyer and Bytzek, 2017). Voters are easily attracted to the personality of leaders, especially of charismatic leaders, and subsequently support parties (Eatwell, 2005). Leaders should remain unchanged for relatively sufficient time, so that their authority can be consolidated, and they can lead a relatively smooth process of party building (Brichta and Pedahzur, 2002; Gherghina, 2014). Similarly, Litton (2015) points out that a change of leaders is more recognizable for voters than a change of party program or policy. This perspective of leadership continuity is powerful to explain new party success, because it takes into account the reactions of voters. For many new parties that have achieved success mainly relying on the charisma of their leaders in CEE, leadership is an important factor for their success to happen.

Party-level factors

Partisanship

Partisans can be understood as either politicians who 'seek office and hold office', or citizens who 'belong to or identify with a party' (Herman and Muirhead, 2020). Herman and Muirhead (2020) point out that the heart of partisanship is that "the ideas and policies of one's own party are superior to those of opposing parties". On the other hand, partisan identity is conceptualised as either "affective attachments to political parties" or "running tally" changing with how voters evaluate party performances (Fossati, 2020). Ward and Tavits (2019) understand strong partisan affect means voters "strongly like some parties and dislike others". Ward and Tavits (2019) summarize the existing explanations that partisan identities make voters perceive electoral success as personal. They also use partisan identities to explain the perception of polarizing party ideology and hostile party competition in Western Europe and the US during recent decades. The strong empirical basis of the study makes persuasive the impact of partisan effect on voters' perception of party competition. Nevertheless, the partisan affect tends to be long-term and is not powerful to explain the fast emergence and success of new parties. In CEE, new parties seem to disappear before being able to cultivate a voter base with strong party identity. It seems that citizens tend to vote for new parties mainly due to their anti-corruption promise in the electoral campaigns, but the anti-corruption message alone seems not to cultivate long lasting partisanship and constant electoral support.

Even though the partisanship is traditionally studied in the bipolar majority party system such as the US and the UK, recent studies explore how it can be applied in European

proportional vote system (Mayer, 2017). Moreover, the negative partisanship, or "hostility hypothesis", according to Mayer (2017), can increase voter turnout and have an effect on voting choice. For instance, the negative partisan identification towards liberals increases the possibility of voting for socialist democrats and vice versa. The negative partisan identification towards conservative/Christian democrats can also increase the possibility of voting for socialist democrats, and vice versa (Ibid.). Such explanation is powerful, because it takes account of party competition to spell out why citizens vote or not vote for a party. Nonetheless, it cannot explain within the same party family why citizens vote for one party rather than another.

Combining partisanship and the specific communication skills of local politicians in the US party system, de Benedictis-Kessner (2021) reveals that "when politicians' partisanship is well-matched to the ideological leanings of their population, their communication is easily distinguished from that of the opposite party, but when they are misaligned with their constituents' ideology, they communicate in a way that is more similar to the opposite party". Such strategic communication makes the so-called 'partisan identity' fluid and dependent on the context. This analysis is insightful because it considers the rhetoric of partisan identity, and how it is used for strategic communication. This phenomenon is also likely to be observed in CEE.

Similarly, in the communication segregation and partisan base study on Twitter in Hungary and Poland, Matuszewski and Szabó (2019) found out for both Poland and Hungary the group division of political views is not solely based on partisan lines, and 'cross-ideological integration might exist on Twitter'. This study is persuasive as it exposes that partisan base is not the only factor that impacts how voters think about politics.

Organization

Recent studies focus on the role of the organization in new party success, stressing that organization is important in new party success, both short-term and long-term (Ishiyama and Stewart, 2021; Wieringa and Meijers, 2020; Bolleyer and Bytzek, 2017). Ishiyama and Stewart (2021) study the electoral success of ethnic parties in CEE, highlighting the role of the organization. They unpack component parts of party organizational capability as to whether parties report their organization structure of chairman, vice-chairman, and regional coordinators, and whether parties report any organized wings of youth, elderly and women, etc. Moreover, Ishiyama and Stewart (2021) also see the organization as to whether the party has active websites and other tools to communicate its messages effectively to voters. Werkmann and Gherghina (2016) point out that organization is indicated as 'the extent to which the party's organization extends beyond the capital city'. Their understanding of party organization is detailed and provides a useful tool to measure and compare organizational capacity across parties.

Bolleyer and Bytzek (2017) stress one organizational feature, the time for party building, measured through years between party creation and party breakthrough. Bolleyer and Bytzek (2017) demonstrate that the shorter the time for party building, the more vote

loss new parties will suffer after the breakthrough. This is because the tension that new parties face in parliament might leave them little time to expand their organization. This explanation is insightful because it points out the niche variations in the timing of formation and breakthrough in the life cycle of a new party. Indeed, if new parties after achieving a breakthrough keep investing in the organization, then they are more likely to endure (Haughton and Deegan-Krause, 2020).

Wieringa and Meijers (2020) demonstrate with evidence from the Netherlands that new parties originating from existing parties are more likely to gain parliamentary entry. They are insightful to reveal that the organizational capacity of new parties is related to the origin and the creation point of new parties. The accounts of Wieringa and Meijers may not have strong explanatory power in CEE, where a series of new parties that gain parliamentary representation is created by celebrities from the business and media spheres.

Party origin as an organizational feature is also stressed in the study of Bolleyer and Bytzek (2017) focusing on new party success after breakthrough in Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Bolleyer and Bytzek (2017) argue that parties created with strong support from 'promoter organizations' such as 'environmental groups, women's organizations, religious groups, unions/employer organizations…' are more likely to endure in parliament (Bolleyer, 2013). The mechanism is that such linkages make it easy for personnel from external organizations to be recruited in new parties, raising levels of competence and loyalty to organizations in new party members (Art, 2011). This explanation is powerful because it stresses the role of linkages between new parties and external organizations, which can be sources of short-term and long-term success. This explanation can well travel to CEE, even though in the region these promoter organizations may come from Western Europe. For instance, GERB is established with active support from the German non-profit political organization Hanns Seidel Foundation. Linkages with promoter organizations form part of the informal organization of new parties, and can be sources of electoral support for parties, while new parties are likely in turn to highlight in the legislature the ideology of their promoter organizations. Therefore, clientelism as an informal organization and linkages can be useful for new party success.

The informal organization plays a distinctive role in party survival. After new parties achieve a breakthrough, patronage distribution via informal organization can provide parties in government with human resources and facilitate policy implementation (Levitsky, 2001; Kopecký and Spirova, 2011). If parties that have relied on patronage resources are deprived of them, then the organizational cohesion of parties would be weakened, which might have a negative impact on new party survival and success. Indeed, party organization, both formal and informal, can be a key to explain why a new party can continue its success in gaining seats in parliament, but another new party disappears shortly in CEE.

Conclusion

After reviewing existing literature, the paper argues that party-level analysis is more convincing compared to country-level analysis in studying the fate of a given new political party in Central and Eastern Europe. Among party-level factors, it points out that party organization is key to shaping up party endurance: a new party that has developed stronger organizational strength is less likely to suffer dramatic vote loss in the following parliamentary elections after initial parliamentary breakthrough. In a more comprehensive conceptualization of party organization, the paper suggests the informal organization may be particularly powerful in making and sustaining clientelistic networks between a new party and voters.

Therefore, the way to get out of the new party cycle that new parties come fast and are gone fast, seems to be that a new party invests more in building up informal organization and clientelistic networks. As such, a new party's networks may gradually reach to more of its supporters who may not necessarily be interested in becoming part of the party's formal organization. In this way, a new party is likely to retain active contacts to its supporters who subsequently are more likely to cast votes within the network that the party builds to them. This seems important from the perspective of a political party to address the tendency that a voter that supports a new party at a given parliamentary election may support a newer party at the following parliamentary election. To address such tendency is important to party system institutionalization and long-term decision making related to national development strategies. Indeed, new party endurance is embedded in the context of the country's historical legacy, sociological cleavages, and electoral system, as well as related to the new party's own leadership and ideology, but an essential element that this paper proposes is the building and development of nationwide organizations, especially informal organizations that spread networks to citizens in a wide range of spheres. Informal organization and clientelistic networks make a new party endure.

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