BEING IN GOVERNMENT: A POINT TO

INSTABILITY?

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Introduction

In a seminal work, Lipset and Rokkan assumed a party system take many years to solidify and his road is slow with many stops. This statement is fitting very well for post-communist countries. Previous studies have established the importance of political parties in order to party system stabilization.

The starting way of political parties from Eastern Europe, the organization type, the changes of these structures, represents so many opportunities for researchers who are interested about these countries. I’m just a seeker, so I cannot stay away from this.

As Jan Zielonka has wrote (in connection with Russia) in Eastern Europe the institutional design is in flux and chaos and political parties are not excepted from this situation. Is this context provisional or a long-term process toward stability?

This short paper starting with Kreuzer and Pettai (2003:80) assumption: stop treating parties instability as an residual category but an ordinary one. That means instability will be treat in this research like being the soul of party systems. I will stop now with these sophisms. This work is focus on the electoral change of parties,(governmental parties but also non governmental) in four Eastern countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania. One of the goals is to be clear, concise and brief (sorry for redundancy).

I chose the sample with no clear reasons but proximity, maybe some kind of familiarity and sure for short time.

In such Eastern countries, the electorate is open (Mair 1996:9), the psychological identification between parties and voters are weak, and more than that electorate is strongly oriented to a punishment vote for parties who lead the government. What’s happen with parties who are punished by electorate and therefore lost the power? This question produced the hypothesis which I’ll follow in research:

The governmental parties become more fluctuant than parties who never was in power. That presume for government parties a higher electoral volatility and elasticity than for non-governmental parties which I expect to be more stable.

So my goal is to find an empirical connection between government position of a party with the evolution in manner of electoral change after the party lost elections and therefore the power.
This research ignoring the type of parties, the position in left–right spectrum, membership also the leadership, the general context and particularities of each party system. I could say this is a static research, a quantitative one concentrate only on the electoral volatility and elasticity of the parties. Is one of the many boundaries of this paper.

**Concepts**

Electoral change produced in time a substantial work by various scholars. Lipset and Rokkan are maybe the parents of this concept, linked by them to the industrial revolution cleavages. Rose and Urwin (1970), Bartolini and Mair (1990) are also scholars who stressed the same subject in various ways but close with the macro-level indicators in order of measuring system stability. Another group of researchers, Dalton and Wattenberg (2000) has been focused on micro-level of stability: partisan affiliation (Drummond 2002).

The most used measure to capture the electoral change is electoral volatility, a concept well known in political research (developed by Pedersen, Bartolini and Mair, Birch etc.), concerning changes over successive elections in party support and therefore is dealing with voters behavior. In this study, the two indicators of parties electoral change are:

- electoral volatility which is calculated as the sum of all electoral differences, for a party system or for a single party, divided by 2;
- electoral elasticity, for a single party or for all parties, which is calculated as being the absolute difference between a party’s best and worst electoral outcome for all elections;

Elasticity and volatility give us information about party system change. But what is the difference between them? I cannot say better than Drummond:

“to use an analogy, if we consider a single party to be a swinging pendulum, the variety of that pendulum, both its speed and direction, could represent electoral volatility, while the distance between the highest points on either side of the pendulum represent the elasticity of the party support”.

Nice words. But what happens if a party’s vote share not decrease in some consecutive elections? Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First election</th>
<th>Second election</th>
<th>Third election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10% of votes</td>
<td>13% of votes</td>
<td>15% of votes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case it’s useless to calculate volatility because the party’s votes share increase each time so the real solution is to avoid to calculate volatility( technical it’s
impossible). Unfortunately in this study the electoral volatility will be the same with elasticity party support in some cases only for statistical reasons.

The third and the last key concept is being in government. What is the meaning of being in government? I chose again the most simple definition in order to eliminate such parties who not hold executive position but give assistance to the cabinet (Romanian ethnic party UDMR is a good example):
- a party it’s member of a government if this party hold at least one executive position in the cabinet.

This statement produced two categories of parties: governmental parties and non-governmental parties. With these operational categories of parties I’ll test my hypothesis.

The variables and expected relations

The period which I decided to be analysed is the last three elections for each country from my sample for the lower chamber (in case of Romania and Czech Republic). The argument for such a choice is the different situations between countries. First elections in independent Czech Republic, the electoral system change in Bulgaria made me very careful with selection in order to have almost the same conditions in each country.

The parties which I have chosen are those parties who won seats in Parliament in at least two consecutive elections. Just such parties are in position to gain executive powers. Because not all the countries are using the same electoral system, Hungary is using a mixed system, the others different kind of RP, I decided to consider relevant percentage of votes not seats. In Hungary case I used percentage for list votes. The source of electoral results is Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe, University of Essex.

The independent variable is a dummy variable:
- 1 for governmental parties:
- 0 for governmental parties;

The dependent variable is the net difference between two consecutive elections for parties who just have lost the executive power, and the total volatility or elasticity for non-governmental parties. The analyses method is simple regression. Will be calculated the total mean of electoral volatility for governmental and non-governmental parties. The same calculation I’ll apply for elasticity party support, to compare the results. I expect for governmental parties a higher electoral change. Also expect the follows relations in order to verify my hypothesis:

TVNGP < TVGP;
TENGP < TEGP;
Where: TVNGP is total electoral volatility for non-governmental parties; 
TVGP is total electoral volatility for governmental parties; 
TENG is total elasticity for non-governmental parties; 
TRGP is total elasticity for governmental parties;

**Analyses**

To keep my initial promise, to be clear and brief I will list below all parties which I selected for analyses with variable code (for independent variable) and the net difference of votes after these parties (or never gained the power) lost the power (for dependent variable).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party’s name</th>
<th>country</th>
<th>code</th>
<th>difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSD-Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDR- Romanian Democratic Convention</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD- Democratic Party</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDMR-Magyar Democratic Union of Romania</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUNR-Party of Romanian National Unity</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSZP- Hungarian Socialist Party</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIDESZ- Federation of Young Democrats</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SZDZS- Alliance of Free Democrats</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FKgp-Independent Small Holders Party</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDS-Union of Democratic Forces</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSP-Bulgarian Socialist Party</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-21.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSSD- Czech Social Democratic Party</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-2.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These are all governmental parties and it is easy to observe that the majority of them are negatively influenced by being in government, ten parties lost votes after they lost the power. The most sensitive parties are in Bulgaria where SDS (Union of Democratic Forces) and BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party) lost or won together 49.46% of votes share. The Bulgarian party system was in 2001 scene of a huge surprise when a complete new party won the elections. Two most “freeze” parties are in Czech Republic where CSSD (Czech Social Democratic Party) and his opponent ODS (Civic Democratic Party) lost just 4.23% of votes.

For non-governmental parties, unfortunately just three, the situation is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party’s name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRM- Greater Romania Party</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSP-Movement For Freedom and Rights</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KSCM-Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+8.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Hungarian party system simply surprising with no non-governmental party. Maybe the reason is electoral system who push the voters to give votes for already well established parties. Concerning governing formulas in Hungary are the most familiar in Eastern Europe (Toole 2000). In percentage of all non-governmental parties is clear an increase of votes share for all parties. The higher level of increase belongs to PRM (Greater Romania Party) a nationalist party which is the second party in Romania after last elections.

The next step is to observe the indicators for electoral change, electoral volatility and elasticity party support.

In their studies Rose and Urwin (1970) found a stable trend of electoral volatility in post-second World War years, with just 1% change in an electoral term. Bartolini and Mair (1990) found an average 8.5% for volatility in western democracies. After this period, I mean after the 70’s the general electoral volatility increase in all
regions, more in previous most stable countries, the Scandinavian countries. These
not expected changes in Scandinavian area give us a warning for future positions
concerning “freezing” party system. A party system is hotter than he looks. But these
changes in volatility are not significant in comparison with Eastern Europe countries.
The elasticity for party support is in the same period is 7.9%. As electoral
volatility, elasticity increased with 1.3% in twenty-five years. I think this difference
not relevant. So electoral volatility and elasticity both are in low levels in western
democracies. Let’s compare now these findings with our findings concerning
electoral volatility and elasticity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEVGP</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>34.08</td>
<td>11.0647</td>
<td>10.5550</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Valid N (listwise) 15

Like statistics show us the volatility is between 0.50% and 34.08% for
governmental parties, who means a great fluctuation. The mean is 11.06 % which is
not much higher than average from western countries (8.5%) but remember these
parties are the most institutionalized in their countries so the average is not very
relevant. More relevant is here the minimum and maximum, the difference between
them.
For non-governmental parties the scores are like we expected, smaller than for
governmental parties with a mean close to western level 8.67%. Poor number of such
parties don’t make me optimist for statistical relevance.
We have the same situation for elasticity party support: a not very higher elasticity for governmental parties than western elasticity support. More than that, for non-governmental parties the mean (8.63%) is lower than western index which is in the end of period 9.2%.

In this point of research we have the next relations confirmed:

\[
\text{TEVNGP- 8.67\%} < \text{TEVGP- 11.06\%} \\
\text{TENG} \quad -8.63\% < \text{TEGP} \quad - 12.50\%
\]

That means the hypothesis is valid and the research is finished? For first level of analyses can be in this way. But for a strong evidence in defence of hypothesis we need a statistical confirmation so I’ll try to capture this evidence using for the next step of research the simple regression.
Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Summary</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>11.5400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Predictors: (Constant), BG</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANOVA</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Regression</td>
<td>294,089</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>294,089</td>
<td>2,208</td>
<td>.157</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>2130,763</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>133,173</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2424,852</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Predictors: (Constant), BG</td>
<td>b Dependent Variable: DIFF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1(Constant)</td>
<td>8,633</td>
<td>6,663</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>.213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BG</td>
<td>-10,846</td>
<td>7,299</td>
<td>-.348</td>
<td>-1,486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a Dependent Variable: DIFF</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we see, the value of standardized coefficient beta is -.348 which means there exist a relationship in expected way between variables. But if we check the value of adjusted R square we find .066 in other words just 6% from cases are explained by the variance of independent variable. Another evidence against the relevance of the statistical results is the number of residual: 16. Unfortunately the research failed to produce strong statistical evidence.

The hypothesis is confirmed only on inferior level –position in government has an impact against electoral change of a party in expected sense- because the expected relations are confirmed, but not as strong as we believed, and more important we failed in building a statistical evidence using this kind of variables.
Conclusion

If the study of new party systems from Eastern Europe have something to teach us about stabilization maybe is the next idea: these party systems are simply more complex in different new ways to be capture with a static, quantitative model.

These systems are in permanent move in different ways, from different reasons, faster or slowly but moving. An approach to party systems in Eastern Europe should be more comprehensive, because as Mair argue, here (or there) almost everything is different: the general context with no civil society, patterns of competition, the electorate, therefore the methods and concepts have to be different.

This research failed in order to produce a statistical evidence for hypothesis but I hope we can stressed a few findings in final:

- electoral volatility and elasticity for party support are both higher than the same values for western countries;
- governmental parties are more open to electoral change than non-governmental parties;
- ethnic parties are not affected by being or not being in government (Magyar Democratic Union of Romania and Movement for Freedom and Rights in Bulgaria are two parties with low electoral change);
- in coalition cases, the second large party pay the price of the cabinet (Alliance of Free Democrats in Hungary, Party of Romanian National Unity and Civic Democratic Alliance in Czech Republic paid the bill for first coalition party’s).

In brief this research looks like a party system from an Eastern country: a half in shadows a half in light.
Notes on individual countries for ambiguous parties (after Sarah Birch idea)

Romania:
The Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN) is considered to be continuous with Romanian Party of Social Democracy in 1996 and continuous with Social Democratic Party in 2000.
The National Salvation Front (FSN) is continuous with Social Democratic Union in 1996 and with Democratic Party in 2000.

Bulgaria:
Bulgarian Socialist Party is considered to be continuous with For Bulgaria in 2001.
Movement for Freedom and Rights (DSP) is continuous with Alliance for National Salvation in 1997.
References


