Cleavage change or shapeless shifting? The dynamics of party-system supply and demand in Poland, 1997–2007.

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Abstract

The 2007 Polish general election confirmed a significant shift in patterns of elite political competition, with the inherited ‘regime divide’ superseded by a ‘transition divide’ defined by the ‘liberal-orthodox’ model of post-communist reform. However, the existing literature on Polish voting behaviour consists mainly of synchronic analyses that focus on the effect of particular structural or attitudinal variables, rather than diachronic analyses of the changing relationships between structures, attitudes, party preferences and voting behaviour. This paper seeks to fill that gap. It finds that there was no clear evidence of cleavage change over the period: there was more consistency than flux in preferences, and only limited shifts in the influence of particular variables on voting behaviour.

Keywords: Poland; party preferences; voting behaviour; cleavages.

Introduction

The recent literature on cleavage politics is marked by debates over the influence of political agency on the structuring of party systems and the mobilisation of electoral cohorts (Deegan-Krause and Enyedi 2010). Accounts which emphasise the role of agency are often intuitively plausible to scholars of the young party systems of Central and Eastern Europe, accustomed as they are to the prominence afforded political entrepreneurs in defining the range of political choices in the region. Yet others contend that hypotheses based on structural explanations remain ‘only partially evaluated’, and encourage the production of detailed case studies to provide a basis for further theory building (Evans 2010, 644). Through an analysis of the structural and attitudinal predictors of party preferences and voting choices over the past four Polish general elections, this paper seeks to make such a contribution.

The first broadly applicable theories of post-communist cleavage formation acknowledged the quantum of supply-side uncertainty introduced by the fluidity of the new elites, but were nevertheless demand-centric. Kitschelt (1992, 26) argued that post-communist party systems would reflect the bifurcating logic of liberal-democratic modernisation. Subsequent theories converged on the paradigm of ‘structured diversity’, connecting the travails of transition to deeper
political and economic structures from the communist and pre-communist era (Evans and Whitefield 1993, 541 – 3; Kitschelt et al. 1999, 69 – 80). Although the supply of parties remained volatile, Evans (2006, 257) concluded that the first decade’s worth of comparative findings exhibited ‘socially structured patterning of commonality and differentiation in the social-structural characteristics underlying partisanship that is to a substantial degree interpretable in differences in identities, values and interests conditioned by those characteristics’. This led some to conclude that structural factors were dominant influences on the nature of post-communist cleavages. However, others argued that such accounts ‘tended to ignore the strategies and interaction of political actors’ in influencing which historical legacies were politically relevant, in crafting – and altering – the institutions in which they operated, and in destabilising patterns of competition (Szcerbiak and Hanley 2004, 3). This perspective places emphasis on the capacity of agents to ‘decisively influence […] whether differences of interests are perceived as social conflicts’ (Enyedi 2005, 699). Rejecting the deterministic logic of rational choice theories of ‘party shakedown’ in which iterated games between parties swiftly give rise to cleavage ‘freezing’ (Zielinski 2002, 198), it views cleavage formation as a more open-ended interaction of the structures, attitudes and institutions of which cleavages are comprised.

Without the luxury of a longer perspective, the identification of cleavages in Central and Eastern Europe is necessarily provisional: ultimately, the test of a cleavage is its longevity. Although the often rapid coalescence of patterned interactions between parties and voters in the first decade of transition was impressive, ‘[e]vidence for structure at one point should not lead to expectations of structure later’ (Whitefield 2002, 195). This observation was of direct relevance to the Polish case. By the end of the second decade of transition there was a growing conviction that the post-communist / post-Solidarity ‘regime divide’ which had determined Polish electoral outcomes during the 1990s had gradually been supplanted over the second decade by a ‘transition divide’ consisting in a widening dichotomy between the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of the transition process. The conscious attempts by elements of the Polish political elite to redraw lines of political competition in accordance with this divide encouraged observers to speculate about whether objective divisions in society could be reshaped by adroit ‘political engineering’. Did coherent cohorts of voters respond

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1Evans (2006, 259) even suggested that ‘[c]ontrary to the assumptions of many commentators, elites and institutions may actually have less room to shape divisions in Eastern Europe than in more consolidated democracies, where established party organizations and long-term partisan affiliations can serve to accentuate top-down differences’.

2Comparing party-system stabilisation in the Visegrad, Bakke and Sitter (2005, 259) attributed the greater consolidation observed in the Czech Republic and Hungary to ‘strong leaders that proved capable of taking advantage of their non-socialist competitors’ suboptimal strategic choices or divisions’. Enyedi (2005, 708 – 9) contended that in Hungary, the strategic emphasis of traditionalist and nationalist socio-cultural interests by the formerly liberal Fidesz [Magyar Polgári Szövetség] made socio-cultural politics the prism through which voters discerned the spectrum of choice, despite the initial focus on economic issues. Similarly, according to Kopecký (2006, 128), liberal-democratic technocrats grouped around Vaclav Klaus and the Civic Democratic Party [Občianská demokratická strana, ODS] were instrumental in framing Czech political conflict in terms of the allocation of resources.

3This distinction was a recurrent feature of political discourse from the beginning of the post-communist era, with the multiple upheavals of transition expected to have asymmetric impacts on different socio-demographic cohorts. Tucker et al. (2002) and Herzog and Tucker (2010) confirmed its importance for explaining divergence in attitudes to European Union membership in Central and Eastern Europe.
to the new agenda, or was it met simply by the shapeless shifting of ‘electoral hordes’ (Markowski 2007)?

The following analysis seeks to answer this essential question. The next section details the supply side shift between the apogee of the regime divide in 1997 and the denouement of Poland’s ‘populist moment’ in 2007. Subsequent sections examine the extant literature on party preferences and voter choices, outline the hypotheses to be tested, discuss the methods by which they are to be tested, and present the outcomes of analysis.

From ‘regime divide’ to ‘transition divide’: the supply side shift

The first decade of Polish post-communist democracy saw the alteration of governments in accordance with their origins in the communist-era Polish United Workers’ Party [Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR] (plus associated satellite parties) or in the Solidarity movement. The post-communist successor party Democratic Left Alliance [Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SL] exploited its organisational advantage and established visibility at the beginning of transition to marginalise competition on the left (Grabowska 2004, 359 – 60). Ideological and organisational disorder among post-Solidarity elites ensured that no hegemon existed on the right, but the emotional legacy of Solidarity provided a sufficiently strong point of gravity for a multitude of parties to cooperate in opposition and government. By 1997, the SL had negotiated its transition to a modern social-democratic party, and the post-Solidarity right was at least organisationally less fissiparous, with the conservative-nationalist umbrella coalition Solidarity Election Action [Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność, AWS] and the liberal Freedom Union [Unia Wolności, UW] joining forces in government.

This divide was a significant point of reference for Polish political elites (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 166 – 7; 170 – 1), and governed coalition formation. However, it corresponded poorly to debates over the ‘liberal orthodox’ model of transition. (Kurczewski 2009, 85 – 8) identified the early emergence of a ‘triangle of values’ in a two-dimensional issue space mapped by the dual imperatives of market reforms and liberal constitutionalism. The poles of this triangle were inhabited by liberal parties arguing for civic rights and rejecting socio-economic rights, a social democratic left supporting both civic and socio-economic rights, and Catholic-nationalist parties supporting socio-economic rights but favouring a nation-based and collectivist rather than civic and individualist conception of society. The early problems of coherence experienced by the post-Solidarity right were at least in part attributable to the substantial ideological distance between its liberal and non-liberal elements on both these axes. Meanwhile, the taboo on governmental cooperation across the regime divide did not prevent liberal Solidarity from working effectively with the post-communists to promulgate the 1997 Constitution. This draft was bitterly opposed by non-liberal elements of Solidarity, and the animus of post-Solidarity movements was carried over into the subsequent AWS-UW coalition government, whose ambitious attempts at deepening reforms were hampered by the ideological incompatibility of its constituent elements.
By 2001, the post-Solidarity elite was again in disarray. Only the victorious SLD\(^4\) and their subsequent coalition partner the agrarian Polish Peasant Party [Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL] remained in parliament. Two new parties, Civic Platform [Platforma Obywatelska, PO] and Law and Justice [Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS], inherited the post-Solidarity mantle. More significantly, two parties of neither post-communist nor post-Solidarity heritage, the radical Catholic-nationalist League of Polish Families [Liga Polskich Rodzin, LPR] and the populist Self-Defence [Samoobrona, SO], also entered parliament. At first, arguments that this outcome had ‘shattered what appeared to be the new emerging order’ (Szczerski 2002, 67) and that electoral politics had ‘ceased to reflect the historic division’ (Millard 2003, 368) seemed rather premature. SLD suffered an ignominious collapse over its term in office, damaged by an underperforming economy, the travails of European accession negotiations, and serious allegations of corruption. Yet PO and PiS were still regarded primarily as parties of opposition to the post-communists. It was also generally assumed that all ‘normal’ parties would throw a cordon sanitaire around the disruptive LPR and the disreputable SO.

However, in 2005 the regime divide failed for the first time to provide the main source of opposition to the governing parties. Prior to the dual parliamentary and presidential elections, PiS and PO were thought almost certain to form the next coalition government, but the concurrent presidential race changed the dynamics of the parliamentary campaign. The withdrawal of the early frontrunner, SLD candidate Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, left Lech Kaczyński of PiS and Donald Tusk of PO the only viable candidates. PiS, whose origins lay largely in non-liberal currents of Solidarity, seized the opportunity to reframe both plebiscites as a choice between their ‘social’ or ‘solidaristic’ leanings and the ‘liberal’ ethos of PO. This rhetoric sharpened PiS’s electoral appeal against the background of all other parties, and their narrow victory in both elections saw PO–PiS coalition talks collapse amid mutual distrust and resentment.

PiS entered government with a dilemma: they had a radical agenda for change and a supportive president, but would be hugely inhibited by having to rule as a minority. After tentative attempts at informal and then more formal cooperation, they eventually invited SO and LPR to form a coalition government. This coalition’s lowest common denominator was opposition to the liberal-orthodox model of transition and the advocacy of a new ‘Fourth Republic’, and it announced an ambitious reform programme which placed particular emphasis on the extirpation of an alleged ‘network’ [układ] of post-communist and liberal-Solidarity elites. It also struck a substantially more nationalist and market-sceptic tone than its predecessors. Attempts to execute this agenda brought the government into repeated conflict with liberal elites in politics, the media, academia and business, and with the institutions of the Third Republic, resulting in an escalation of populist rhetoric. The regime divide was sublimated into the new divide, with liberal Solidarity indicted alongside the post-communists as the co-authors of transition reforms and the coalition’s attempts at more radical decommunisation targeted not only at former communists but also their alleged liberal-Solidarity collaborators.

\(^4\)The SLD fought the 2001 election in coalition with the Labour Union [UP], but were decidedly the major partner; for the sake of clarity the term ‘SLD’ is used throughout.
The chief outcome of this period was not reform of the Third Republic, but elite-level realignment of the terms of political competition. Beset from without by an increasingly hostile media and negative public attitudes, and compromised from within by infighting, intrigue and indiscipline, the coalition stumbled to a premature end over the summer of 2007. The subsequent parliamentary election was ‘a plebiscite on a polarising and controversial government’ (Szczerbiak 2008, 27) which consolidated the divide between PO – which won convincingly – and PiS, which in spite of losing the contest made significant electoral gains (not least at the expense of the now extra-parliamentary SO and LPR). Significantly, the SLD failed to stage a comeback, and PSL crossed the regime divide, forming a coalition with PO. While Szczerbiak (2008, 27) felt that this outcome might simply prove a temporary resolution of longer-term flux, developments since 2005 seemed in keeping with the argument that the regime divide had been ‘decisively transcended’ by an agenda appealing to the ‘anxieties of transition’ Millard (2006, 1007). The 2007 - 2011 parliamentary term saw the deepening of differences along this divide. An increasingly frustrated PO - PSL government was stymied in its attempts at economic liberalisation by President Lech Kaczyński, whose death in the Smolensk air crash of April 2010 – and the defeat of his brother Jarosław in the subsequent presidential election – compounded the emotional distance between the two camps. The post-communist left remained weak, and new initiatives made little impact.5

The mobilisation of Polish voters: evidence from and gaps in the literature

Studies of party preferences and voting choices yielded a baseline account for the first decade of transition: the regime divide and religiosity were the clearest and most important determinants while economic attitudes and ‘economic’ socio-demographic categories were not irrelevant, but less influential. Ecological analysis of voting at the level of the commune (gmina) indicated the persistence of these two dimensions underneath the surface of supply-side volatility6. Zarycki and Nowak (2000, 343), and individual-level studies confirmed the particular importance of the regime divide. Grabowska (2004, 358) concluded that over the first decade of transition this dichotomy found expression in ‘coherent and active social identities’: those who identified with post-communism were more likely to have a negative attitude to transition reforms and less likely to approve of decommunisation, while those who identified with the legacy of Solidarity were more likely to hold the opposite view.

There is some evidence that these identities conditioned attitudes to the politics of reform: in a study of attitudes and voting behaviour in the 1993 election, Powers and Cox (1997, 621–2) observed that even when controlling for

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5After the 2010 presidential election, two new political organisations were founded, the party Support Movement [Ruch Poparcia, RP] founded by maverick former PO deputy Janusz Palikot, and the association Poland Comes First [Polska Jest Najważniejsza, PJN] founded by a number of deputies who left PiS in disaffection at its return to radical rhetoric after the election.

6But see Bell (1997, 1288), who views the religious divide as cross-cutting the post-communist one.
personal economic assessments and standard socio-demographic variables, the more a respondent blamed the communists for Poland’s current circumstances, the more their satisfaction with reforms increased; the more they blamed the first wave of reformers, the more their satisfaction decreased. The regime divide also incorporated cultural values in the form of religiosity and attitudes to the relationship of Church and state. Drawing on post-election surveys for 1997 and 2001, Jasiewicz (2002, 86–8; 97–8) found that historical affiliations and religiosity were significantly more important than economic attitudes in explaining preferences for the major parties on both sides of the divide.

Socio-demographic categories and economic attitudes were more ambiguous in their impact. While cultural values complemented the regime divide, economic attitudes cut across it. Self-identification with the politics of left or right was unrelated to stances on the economy, and socio-demographic factors more directly redolent of economic circumstances – place of residence, occupation, and educational level – were not consistent predictors of left or right self-placement (Szawiel 2001, 234 – 8). Ecological analyses of the first decade of transition indicated ‘clear and persistent patterns in political preferences according to unemployment and income levels’ (Bell 1997, 1283), and a broad distinction between transition loser-winner constituencies supporting or opposing parties associated with economic reforms (Fidrmuc 2000, 215; Jackson et al. 2003, 103). However, individual-level analyses found that only one party, PSL, had a clear class profile, drawing the vast majority of its support from rural agricultural constituencies. The broad party families that made up the aforementioned ‘triangle of values’ had more amorphous electorates, although not without some socio-demographic and attitudinal patterning. Liberal parties tended to attract disproportionally high shares of groups who could expect to benefit from the new conditions (urban-dwellers, the highly educated, and the managerial and professional classes) and who were more inclined to favour market reforms (Raciborski 1999, 251; Shabad and Slomczynski 1999, 702; 712; Jackson et al. 2003, 101). Yet there were no other clear and consistent tendencies on the part of socio-economic groups: in 1993 the unemployed and retirees were associated with voting for both sides of the ‘reform divide’ and union membership was more relevant to the regime divide (Jackson et al. 2003, 99–101). The clearest distinctions between Christian-nationalist and social-democratic electorates were found in categories related to the regime divide: historical affiliation, religiosity, and occupational groups strongly associated with the communist state (Shabad and Slomczynski 1999, 702). However, while these electoral cohorts differed in their assessment of economic changes, they both exhibited rather mixed attitudes to economic issues (Shabad and Slomczynski 1999, 712). They were also less unambiguously associated with particular ‘economic’ socio-demographic groups: while Shabad and Slomczynski (1999, 702) found that skilled and unskilled workers were much more likely to identify with the Christian-nationalist party family in the early years of transition, Szélényi et al. (1996, 220) averred that by 1993 the social-democratic left had strengthened its blue-collar support.

Towards the end of the first decade of transition, some scholars expected that economic values and class identification would become more important as the impact of further privatisation and growing inequality led Poles to recognise their ‘real’ economic interests (Zarycki 2000, 864–5; Slomczynski and Shabad 1996, 187) and greater experience with party politics taught them to attribute
blame for economic performance (Roberts 2008, 535–6). Zarycki (2000, 864–5) further argued that the decoupling of evaluations of the economy from regime divide partisanship would see the emergence of a broader anti-liberal politics, cultural attitudes aligning with economic interests rather than the regime divide. At a socio-demographic level, this would involve a shift in the basis of structural support from regime affiliation to objective and subjective transition ‘winner’ and ‘loser’ categories.

The literature on preferences and voting behaviour in the second decade of transition provides some evidence for the relevance of these structures and attitudes to preferences and voting behaviour. Exit poll data and the 2005 Polish National Election Study (Polskie Generalne Studium Wyborcze, PGSW) pointed to differences in the socio-demographic profiles of the two largest parties, PiS and PO. PiS voters were on average ‘more religious, slightly poorer, occupying less prestigious labour market positions ... less frequently identifying] as upper-middle or upper class’, while PO was ‘overrepresented among moderately religious people, who are evidently richer, of better professional and labour market standing, and live in metropolitan areas’ (Markowski 2006, 826). At the 2007 election, flows of voters from minor parties to the two major parties reflected the government - opposition divide, and there was some evidence of a widening socio-demographic gap, with the average PiS voter ‘much older, less educated, more religious and increasingly rural’ (Markowski 2008, 1064). There was also evidence of changing attitudinal patterns in accordance with the greater salience of economic issues, with the mean values of party electorates increasingly divergent on this dimension (Markowski 2006, 827 – 8; Markowski 2008, 1065).

Using the same data, Jasiewicz (2009, 502 – 4) tested the hypothesis of an emergent ‘solidarism – liberalism cleavage’ around the politics of transition by regressing attitudinal variables and individual party preferences on a number of socio-demographic variables, finding that the younger, less religious, better educated and wealthier were more likely to identify with liberalism, more likely to express a preference for PO, and less likely to express a preference for PiS, although only around 10 percent of the variance was explained in either case. However, Owen and Tucker (2010, 37) counselled that the ‘past is still present’, with the regime divide still relevant to current preferences and choices in the form of long-term evaluations of economic changes and performance.

In summary, the extant literature suggests that parties’ structural and attitudinal bases of support appeared to change over the period in a manner compatible with the supply-side shift. However, these findings are insufficient to permit clear conclusions in three respects: no single study covers the full period of change, none simultaneously evaluates the relative impact of socio-demographic and attitudinal variables relevant both to the regime change and to the politics of transition, and none looks both at patterns of party preference and actual voting behaviour. The following analysis seeks to fill those gaps. By using PGSW data from the four post-election surveys from 1997 to 2007, it covers the whole period of purported change in a single study. It specifies more comprehensive models which take into account variables absent from recent analyses, particularly social class. Finally, by examining both preferences and voting behaviour it permits judgement on the extent to which patterns of political affinity

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7It should be noted that the average voter for all parties was anti-market; differences were relative rather than absolute.
translated into electoral outcomes.

Hypotheses

If cleavage change is the most cogent explanation of the interaction between supply and demand over this period, there should be an increase in the importance of structural and attitudinal factors linked with the politics of transition, and a decline in the importance of the regime divide. Three sets of linked hypotheses can be advanced to test this overall assumption.

The first set groups those socio-demographic factors relevant to the transition winner/loser divide. Widening disparities in household incomes were the most obvious locus of this dichotomy. Although retirees were often not ‘losers’ in a material sense, older people might reasonably be expected to perceive fewer opportunities for themselves under the new conditions and experience the retreat of the state from welfare functions as a phenomenon with less revocable impact on their lives. Both level of education and area of residence reflected the growth of a divide in levels of human capital, with those living in rural areas and those of low educational attainment less able to take advantage of the opportunities of transition and more exposed to its depredations than their urban or well-educated counterparts. This was also true of social classes, with those in professional and managerial positions experiencing greater autonomy and lower uncertainty about future prospects than their blue-collar and agricultural counterparts. Although not typically regarded as an element of the winner/loser divide, religiosity was also relevant, as the devout were appealed to as ‘spiritual losers’ of transition, new mores and values challenging the hegemony of Catholic traditionalism.

If the structural winner/loser divide was more relevant, we should see an increasing amount of variance in party preferences explained by socio-demographic factors (H1a) and that socio-demographic categories associated with benefiting from the politics of transition were increasingly likely to vote for parties promoting rather than contesting reforms, with the reverse applying for transition losers (H1b).

The second set of hypotheses concerns ideological attitudes. In light of the foregoing discussion, the left-right divide might seem more relevant to historical identities than to ideological differences, associated as it initially was with the regime divide. However, it is unclear to what extent this divide was expressive of those identities, and how much it was associated with the perceived ideological stances of the relevant parties. That is an investigation beyond the purposes of this paper, but if the politics of left-right were to remain important over the period of analysis in spite of the concomitant decline of the regime divide, this would suggest that it was - or at least had become - more expressive of broad ideological identifications rather than historical fealties. It is therefore of

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8 Tucker et al. (2002, 559) argue that the objective ascription of winner and loser categories ‘remain[s] at best one step removed from individual perceptions and at worst an imprecise and inaccurate system of extrapolation’. However, the notion of a change from regime divide to transition divide assumes that political parties made their own ascriptive designations, explicitly appealing to specific social groups as the winners or losers of the transition process.
substantive relevance and interest, although it falls outside the specific remit of the research question. The hypotheses instead refer to specific ideological distinctions relating more explicitly to the politics of transition: attitudes to economic reform, European integration and a non-economic ‘Gal/Tan’ divide that incorporates concerns about traditionalism and the status of the nation versus moral modernisation and cosmopolitanism (Marks et al. 2006, 157).

If the politics of transition were more relevant, we should see an increasing amount of variance in party preferences explained by these attitudes (H2a), and an increasing ideological divergence between the electorates of the major parties in line with the supply-side shifts identified above (H2b).

The third set of hypotheses concerns the regime divide, which encompassed both attitudes to the communist past and affiliations to regime or opposition institutions. In the case of attitudes, transitional justice was a recurrent and particularly controversial issue, with often vociferous debates between supporters of radical decommunisation and ‘lustration’ (screening of certain professions, particularly those of ‘public trust’) and those opposed to this or advocating less radical alternatives. At the level of institutions, the most relevant distinction was whether an individual identified with the PZPR (and the official trade unions) or with the Solidarity movement.

If the regime divide was less relevant, we should see a decreasing amount of variance in party preferences explained by regime-divide attitudes and institutional affiliations (H3a) and a declining association of these factors with the probability of voting for the major parties (H3b).

Methods, models and data

In recent years the study of voting behaviour has experienced something of a methodenstreit with respect to the dependent variable, with an influential current championing the virtues of ‘electoral utility’ over ‘discrete choice’ (van der Eijk et al. 2006). Objections to the latter are twofold: operationally, a focus on discrete-choice questions ‘fail[s] to explicitly distinguish between choice on the one hand, and the attractiveness of the parties and candidates as options for choice’; methodologically, discrete-choice models are more susceptible to problems arising from mis-specification and violation of assumptions, deal poorly with small parties, and are difficult to apply in comparative research settings (van der Eijk et al. 2006, 426; 430). By combining measures of the probability that a respondent would vote for each relevant party, the electoral utility approach makes it possible to observe the relative impact of particular independent variables on ‘generic party preference’. This approach can enrich studies of cleavage formation and change, particularly with respect to post-communist conditions in which supply-side volatility may obscure patterns of allegiance to particular party families. However, it is ultimately the act of voting for specific parties that sees such changes become politically salient. Discrete-choice analyses are necessary to identify the extent to which the emergence of political

9For the sake of clarity and consistency, the term ‘decommunisation’ is used throughout, as it refers to the broad goal of removing alleged communist influence from public life, with lustration the major instrument in this process.
potentials is reflected in actual voter mobilisation, particularly where – as in the Polish case – elections are plagued by low turnout. The small-n response for minor parties is in any case less problematic when the object of interest is cleavage patterns, since the nature of major-party electorates is of greater significance in determining the presence of cleavages. The following analysis thus treats both approaches as complementary elements of analysis rather than competing paradigms.

The data used in the analysis were taken from the Polish General Election Studies (PGSW) post-election surveys of 1997, 2001, 2005 and 2007. The dependent variable for tests of the party preference hypotheses (like) was constructed from eleven-point scale measures of ‘party sympathy’ (the degree to which a respondent likes or dislikes a party)\(^{10}\) which were ‘stacked’ to create a new data matrix with as many respondent/party combinations as there were relevant parties.\(^{11}\)

The respondent/party structure of this dataset resembles panel data, with cross-sectional variables identifying individual respondents and time-series variables identifying individual parties (i.e. each instance of measurement for an individual respondent). This necessitated the use of fixed-effects models rather than ordinary least squares regression (Bos and van der Brug, 2010, 19). Discrete-choice hypotheses were tested by estimating a series of multinomial logit models, in which the dependent variable (\(\text{votedparty}\)) was constructed from respondents’ self-reporting of their vote choice at the relevant election.

Four tranches of independent variables were used: three of substantive interest and one a set of controls. As Evans (2010, 638) argues, ‘complex, simultaneously estimated’ multivariate models may obscure the relevance of structural characteristics by estimating their effects alongside ‘perceptions, attitudes and identities’ that are potentially endogenous to those structures. This is an important consideration, given the argument that attitudes to transition were at least partially conditioned by the different experiences of particular socio-demographic cohorts. The first tranche thus comprises those socio-demographic variables connected with the ‘transition winner-loser’ dichotomy. Age is self-explanatory. Household income was included in logged form, as the original variable was non-linear (\(\text{log\,income}\)). Level of education (\(\text{educlevel}\)) was recoded into three categories commensurate with the most fundamental divides in educational attainment: basic or no education; secondary education; and higher education. Area of residence (\(\text{resid}\)) was recoded into three categories: rural, towns and small cities, and urban areas. The four categories of religiosity (\(\text{relig}\)) combined information both on religious belief and observance. ‘Atheist or lapsed’ comprised those who were unbelieving or who had doubts, and who attended a religious ceremony at most once a year.\(^{12}\) ‘Ambiguous’ denoted those who were

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\(^{10}\)It is argued by van der Eijk et al. (2006, 433, fn 17) that party sympathy scores are not useful proxies for electoral utilities. However, the logic and methodology of the electoral utility approach are compatible with the analysis of party preference at the level of ‘generic sympathies’.

\(^{11}\)A party was regarded as relevant if it obtained parliamentary seats at the election in question. PSL was excluded in 2001 due to the absence of data necessary to construct the independent variables (see below). Given the marginal position this party occupied with respect to the key lines of competition, this is unlikely to have affected the analysis unduly, with the possible exception of the category of agricultural workers.

\(^{12}\)Given the centrality of church-going in Polish cultural life, even atheists may reasonably be expected to visit church at least once a year, if only during the Christmas period.
unbelieving or doubting but attended more than once a year, and those who were believing but attended less than once a year. ‘Casual believers’ were those who professed belief (whether ‘devout’ or not) and attended more than once a year but less than weekly. ‘Devout believers’ were those who professed belief and attended at least once a week. Finally, social class was operationalised as six categories: professional, managerial, white-collar, blue-collar, agricultural, and a residual category of those who had never worked or could not otherwise be classified.

For the party preference models, it was necessary to transform these variables. The stacking of party preferences turns the dependent variable into one which has no party-specific meaning but instead covers all respondent/party relations. Independent variables which are individual-specific rather than party-specific (such as education) cannot be used in their original form, since per respondent their effect on one respondent/party combination simply cancels out the effect on another. By regressing like on each of the socio-demographic variables in turn, then extracting and centering the predicted values ($y$-hat), these variables were transformed to convey the explanatory power of the independent variable with respect to each respondent/party combination (Bos and van der Brug 2010, 17–18).

The importance of ‘issues’ can be ascertained by observing the additional effects they transmit on top of the effects of social structure (Franklin 2010, 654). The second tranche of independent variables comprised a number of attitudinal indicators relevant to the politics of transition. Leftright was derived from an 11-point scale measuring self-placement on this dimension. Economic attitudes were tapped using 11-point scales measuring stances on the desirability of privatisation (priv) and the optimal tax regime (taxreg). Integ measured attitudes to European integration. Finding suitable variables to operationalise the Gal/Tan dimension was more difficult. In 2005 and 2007, three variables were used to form the composite variable galtan: the issue of traditional versus liberal norms was operationalised by attitudes to abortion (abort) and the pursuit of criminals (crime); national identification (nateur) was tapped by a variable measuring the degree of a respondent’s self-identification along a continuum running from wholly Polish to wholly European. In 1997, only abort and crime were available, and in 2001 only abort and nauteur.

These variables were transformed for the party preference models by calculating the absolute distance between respondents’ self-placement and their perception of where the party in question was placed on the same issue. The resulting variables were generic measures of ideological proximity. In the case of galtan, no measures of party placement were available in the datasets. Instead, the variable was transformed by calculating the absolute distance between a respondent’s self-placement and an approximate party placement derived from the Chapel Hill expert surveys.\footnote{The Chapel Hill surveys give figures for the mean and standard deviation of expert placement of parties on a given dimension or issue. Party placements were drawn at random from an area bounded by one standard deviation either side of the mean placement, on the assumption that there is at least as much uncertainty among voters in placing parties as there is among experts.}

The third tranche comprised three variables operationalising the regime divide.
Decomm was an 11-point scale variable measuring attitudes to decommunisation. Comparty recorded whether or not a respondent was previously a member of the PZPR. In 2005 and 2007, this variable included a third category of those too young for the distinction to be meaningful. Union recorded whether at the apogee of regime contestation in 1980/81 the respondent was a member of Solidarity, a member of one of the party-sponsored trade unions or a member of neither, with a fourth category identifying those for whom this question was inapplicable. For the party preference models, decomm was transformed in the same way as the tranche of attitudinal variables; comparty and union were transformed using the \( y-hat \) procedure.

The fourth tranche consisted of four controls. Gender was included as a standard control variable for studies of voting behaviour. The others related to broad attitudes concerning the politics of transition. Attitudes to parties at election time may be influenced by more general sentiments about the successes or problems of transition and the standard of Polish democracy. Retropol and retroecon thus controlled for assessments of whether the political and economic situation had worsened or improved over the previous year, and hapdem for the degree of contentment with actually-existing democracy. Each of these variables was transformed for the party preference models using the \( y-hat \) procedure.

Data cleaning, recoding and stacking was carried out in the software environment \( R \). Both fixed-effects and multinomial models were estimated with multiple imputation, as missing data on some variables led to a substantial decrease in the number of cases when estimating the full models. For the fixed-effects models, the \( R \) package Amelia was used, as it allows imputation models to take account of the stacked nature of the data by specifying cross-sectional variables (respondents) and time-series variables (parties) (Honaker and King 2010). Models were then estimated for each imputed dataset using the \( xtreg \) routine in Stata 11, and the pooled quantities of interest and standard errors computed using Rubin’s rules for multiple imputation inference, implemented in the \( R \) package \( BaBooN \) (Meinfeld 2011). For the multinomial models, the \( R \) package \( mice \) was used, as it was necessary to export the data in \( ice \) format for further analysis (van Buuren and Groothuis-Oudshoorn 2011). These models were estimated using Stata’s \( mi estimate: mlogit \) command, and predicted probabilities and standard errors extracted using the \( margins \) command.

Data analysis

Party preferences

The results of the fixed-effects models (see Table 1) show a picture of overall structural and attitudinal stasis, with limited shifts more redolent of the contingent dynamics of particular elections than comprehensive cleavage change.

In each case, socio-demographic factors (models 1 and 2) explained less than 10 percent of the variance in preferences. Notably, the variance explained in 2007 was actually lower than in 1997. The impacts of individual variables are largely inconsistent rather than patterned. Religiosity stands out as the strongest overall structural predictor of generic preferences; however, its influence declined
over the period, contrary to expectations that the heightening of controversy over the relationship between Catholicism and ‘Polishness’ during the 2005–7 parliamentary term would find an echo in attitudes to parties. The influence of age followed a similar pattern of decline until 2007, when it shot up again to become the strongest structural predictor of preferences. This is consistent with the observation that the 2007 election saw the mobilisation of young voters against the incumbent government. Place of residence also remained significant, despite a small decline in 2005. The impact of household income was more clearly distinguishable in 2005 and 2007, prior to which it did not remain significant when controlling for ideological attitudes. Social class was significant throughout, but had a fluctuating impact on preferences. Finally, the impact of education varied over the period, and in 2007 it was an insignificant predictor of preferences, in contrast to expectations.

Collectively, ideological attitudes were clearly the most significant predictors; with the exception of 2001 they explained an additional 20 percent of variance. However, it is evident from the coefficients of individual variables in model 3 that the majority of this increase was attributable not to specific ideological issues but the more amorphous distinctions of the left-right divide. In the case of individual ideological attitudes, most of the coefficients are significant but small. By contrast, the left-right divide exerted a substantial impact in 1997, 2005 and 2007, but had significantly less effect in 2001, with a corresponding decline in variance explained. Given uncertainty about what the left-right divide actually meant to Poles over the period, interpreting the significance of this finding is not straightforward. As discussed above, there is some evidence to suggest that in the first decade of transition the politics of left and right were filtered through the prism of the regime divide. The decrease in magnitude in 2001 is plausibly an effect of the emergence of two parties unconnected with this divide. However, it is unclear whether the subsequent increase in the effect of the left-right distinction is due to its sublimation into the newly dominant transition divide or to the recrudescence of the regime divide.

The regime divide tranche of variables (model 4) sheds no further light on this question. In each case, very little additional variance is explained; this is particularly surprising in the cases of 1997 and 2001, when the divide was still the most significant point of orientation for the electorate in distinguishing between parties. The picture is again mixed at the level of individual variables. Although in 2005 attitudes to decommunisation and communist-era affiliations were less significant than previously, in 2007 coefficients for decommunisation and union membership had approximately the same magnitude as in 1997. This does not necessarily point to a return of the regime divide. The particular emphasis of the 2005–2007 governments on decommunisation and lustration as tools for disciplining both ex-communists and their liberal ‘collaborators’ may account for the renewed significance of attitudes to this issue as a predictor of preferences, but conceivably as a broader question of civil liberties rather than of transitional

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14 For party proximity variables, the greater the ideological closeness, the greater the magnitude of the negative coefficient.

15 The clearest exception to this is the gáltan coefficient for 2007, the increased magnitude of which may reflect the particular impact of the ‘national question’ and issues of morality in the 2005–7 term, but which should be treated with caution given the less than optimal nature of this indicator.
justice. Similarly, the apparent relevance of union membership in 1980/81 may reflect the asymmetrical mobilisation of young voters at this election, with those too young to belong to a union in Solidarity’s heyday more likely to prefer parties opposed to the then ruling coalition, and thus cutting across the regime divide in their preferences. However, there is too little information to confirm these surmises, and the more pertinent finding is that the regime divide may not have been as important a predictor of preferences as originally thought.

Finally, there are some potentially meaningful patterns in the control variables, although as a bloc they contributed very little to explained variance. Happiness with democracy was significant throughout, suggesting that supporters of different blocs connected electoral outcomes to their satisfaction with democratic processes. Gender became more important over the period, although its effect was insignificant in 2007 when controlling for ideological factors. However, the meaning of this trend is not clear. More intelligible from the perspective of the broader political narrative of the decade are the fluctuations in retrospective evaluations of the political and economic situation. In 1997, when the economy was relatively buoyant but the bitter arguments over the promulgation of the Constitution were fresh in the memory, evaluation of the political situation was a significant determinant of preferences but economic evaluation was not. The reverse was true in 2001 and to a lesser extent in 2005, years in which the less auspicious condition of the economy was of more pressing concern. In 2007, after two years of relative economic improvement but substantial political antagonism, evaluation of the political situation was again much more significant. The meaning of such shifts should not be overemphasised given the low variance explained, but these changes correspond in intuitively plausible ways with the broad dynamics of political life over this period.

Voting behaviour

Figures 1 to 8 display predicted probabilities from the multinomial models, using lineplots for continuous variables and dotplots for categorical ones. For reasons both of clarity and relevance, the plots omit probabilities for the two parties with the lowest percentage of the vote. 95% confidence intervals are plotted on all lineplots, but - again for clarity’s sake - they are only included on the dotplots for those probabilities which are statistically significant, or close enough to statistical significance to warrant discussion.

The evidence for socio-demographic change was mixed, with the primary distinction most often that between voters and non-voters. In 1997, 2001 and 2007 there was a clear association between increasing age and a lower probability of belonging to the cohort of non-voters. In 2001 the winning party (SLD) had a distinct age profile, attracting a significantly higher proportion of older voters. However, in other years, the winning party tended to attract a roughly even share of the vote across the age groups, with an age profile more in evidence among the electorates of non-winning parties. In 2005, PO clearly appealed more to younger voters than older ones, and the converse was true for PiS in 2007. Lower levels of household income were also associated with non-voting, although this is more clearly in evidence at the extremes. In 2005, the electorates of PiS and PO had a similar income profile, appealing slightly more to the afflu-
ident than the non-affluent. By 2007, there was some sign of divergence; however, this was largely a case of PO sharpening its previous profile, the probability of voting for PiS showing little association with changing levels of income. Low education was consistently associated with non-voting. There are few statistically significant findings for parties, but in most cases - with the predictable exception of SO in 2001 and 2005 - the pattern of coefficients indicated that parties were more likely to mobilise those of secondary and higher education, suggesting that the most important divide with respect to education lay between voters and non-voters, rather than party electorates. There was not a significant pattern of divergence between rural and urban voters. Results from 2007 support the contention that PO appealed more to non-rural (i.e. small town and urban) voters. However, this is not clearly related to patterns of divergence in other party electorates; it seems instead to reflect an increased propensity for rural Poles to abstain from voting (although this was not statistically significant). The voter / non-voter divide was again significant in the case of religiosity: the cohort of devout believers was consistently more likely to vote than any other. This group was also most likely to have a significant relationship with a particular party: in 1997, devout believers were substantially more likely to vote for AWS; while in 2001 there were no significant relationships, in 2005 and 2007 they were significantly more likely than others to vote for PiS. Finally, there was very little statistically significant evidence that party electorates were divided by class.

As with party preferences, the most influential ideological determinant of voting behaviour was the left-right divide, rather than more specific issues. In 1997, the two major parties polarised along this divide to the extent that centrists were on average more likely to be non-voters. The collapse of post-Solidarity forces in 2001 is evident in the substantial shift of non-voters to the right; their subsequent recovery in 2005 (and the collapse of the SLD) is reflected in the shift of non-voters to the left. In 2007, the picture is somewhat more complex: LiD’s electorate clearly retained a strong left-wing profile and PiS’s a distinct right-wing profile, but PO - while retaining a right-wing bias - attracted proportionally more centrist voters than major parties had in preceding elections. On economic issues, there were more consistent divisions between the electorates of PiS and PO in 2005 and 2007 compared with those of large parties in preceding years. The same applied in the case of attitudes to European integration; while AWS and SLD voters had a similar profile in 1997 on this issue, by 2007 PO voters were significantly more pro-European than their PiS counterparts. Finally, the Gal/Tan divide distinguished the electorates of liberal (UW) and largely non-liberal (AWS) post-Solidarity formations in 1997, but was not significant in 2001. However, in 2005 PO voters were markedly more liberal on this basket of issues, and in 2007 the difference between PO and PiS electorates was substantial, reflecting the mobilisation of liberal-minded cosmopolitans on the part of PO and the turn taken by PiS toward traditionalism and nationalism.

While evidence of the decline of the regime divide was not unambiguous, there was some evidence of its changing significance. Attitudes to decommunisation were clearly relevant to voting behaviour in 1997, when advocacy of decommunisation was associated with a higher probability of voting for the post-Solidarity AWS and a lower probability of voting for the post-communist SLD. In 2001, this distinction was still present, but in attenuated form.
decommunisation were still proportionally more likely to vote for post-Solidarity formations in 2005, they were also more likely to abstain than in previous years. In 2007, however, there was a clear divergence between PiS voters, who were more likely to be in favour of decommunisation, and PO voters, who were more likely to oppose it. This suggests that voters responded to the shift in meaning attached to decommunisation during the 2005–2007 term, seeing it as an instrument by which the liberal transition elite could be disciplined. There is also some evidence of the structural breakdown of the regime divide. In 1997, there were clear and significant differences between AWS and SLD electorates on the question of whether they belonged to the Communist Party or not, and AWS voters could also be distinguished on the question of their union affiliation. These divides were also strongly in evidence for SLD in 2001. In 2005 and 2007, there were still signs of a structural divide between the electorates of PiS and SLD/LiD voters, but the PO electorate was not significantly divided along these lines.

Conclusions

The research question asked whether the supply-side shift from the politics of the regime divide to the politics of the transition divide was reflected in changing patterns of preferences and voting choices on the part of voters. This analysis clearly shows that the hypothesised cleavage change did not occur over the period in question. The most significant evidence for this is the failure of socio-demographic variables to explain more variance in party preferences (H1a) or for relevant cohorts to display clear patterns of divergence in the probability of voting for parties on either side of the transition divide (H1b). It can be concluded that the winner/loser divide was no more influential at the structural level in 1997 than in 2007. The analysis confirmed the importance of religiosity for Polish voters, but suggested that it had a diminishing effect on preferences and choices rather than an increasing one. The most significant findings instead concern the distinction between voters and non-voters. In a recent consideration of agendas in cleavage research, Evans (2010, 643) makes the important point that lack of choice is relevant to the analysis of choice. His contention that ‘[v]ote/non-vote needs to be treated as a cleavage’ arguably pre-empts the results of the research for which he calls, but the Polish case indicates that there are sufficient grounds to justify formulating and testing hypotheses about the vote/non-vote divide as a distinct cleavage, and one the analysis of which may shed further light on the findings of this paper. Given the presence of substantial cohorts of transition losers in the class of non-voters, it seems likely that the absence of cleavage change owes as much – if not more – to the under-mobilisation of voters in general as it owes to the failure of parties to capture distinct cohorts of those who voted.

If the winner/loser divide was not influential at a structural level, it is unsurprising that the ideological divides of transition did not explain an increasing amount of variance in preferences (H2a) and were associated only partially with diverging probabilities of vote choices pertinent to the transition divide (H2b). The increased association of the Gal/Tan divide with voting choices between 2005 and 2007 was in line with expectations, but the effect of this variable was
still substantially lower than that of the left-right divide. The persistent importance of the left-right divide suggests that the broad ideological identifications connoted by the politics of left and right remain more meaningful for Polish voters than specific issues. However, it is not clear from these analyses what meaning the left-right divide had for Polish voters, or whether this changed in any substantial way. This is further complicated by the evidence that the regime divide did not decline over the period as a determinant of party preferences (H3a) and the absence of unambiguous evidence that its elements declined as predictors of voting choices (H3b). It might simply be that the clear association of the politics of left and right with post-communist / post-Solidarity identities in the first decade of transition carried over to the second. However, the unexpectedly low amount of variance in preferences explained by regime-divide indicators suggests another possibility: that the vaguer identifications of left and right were always more important determinants of preferences and choices than the more specific issues and identities associated with the regime divide.

Although the hypothesis of cleavage change was not borne out by the results of this analysis, neither was there evidence of ‘shapeless shifting’. At the level of preferences, there was more consistency than flux over the period, and those changes that did occur at the level of party voting were largely congruent with expectations. Instead, the overall conclusion is that Polish parties did not substantially alter the structure of preferences and choices. While the supply side was marked by dynamic shifts, the demand side was surprisingly static.

References


Florian Meinfeld. Package 'BaBooN'. cran.r-project.org/web/packages/BaBooN/BaBooN.pdf, 2011.


### Table 1: Fixed effects models for party preference

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R-squared (within): 0.068 | 0.117 | 0.339 | 0.352 | 0.352 | 0.352 | 0.352 | 0.352 | 0.352 | 0.352 |
R-squared (between): 0.045 | 0.064 | 0.085 | 0.088 | 0.088 | 0.088 | 0.088 | 0.088 | 0.088 | 0.088 |
R-squared (overall): 0.075 | 0.102 | 0.278 | 0.280 | 0.280 | 0.280 | 0.280 | 0.280 | 0.280 | 0.280 |

Note: Models estimated with robust standard errors. All coefficients and standard errors are calculated from five imputed datasets using Rubin's Rules. All R-squared statistics are the average of five models estimated individually.
Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of voting, 1997 (continuous variables)
Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of voting, 1997 (categorical variables)

No vote
AWS
SLD
UW
PSL

Probability ± 95% CI

Class
Managerial
Professional
White-collar
Blue-collar
Agricultural

Party membership
Party member
Not party member

Religion
Atheist
Ambiguous
Casual believer
Devout believer

Union membership
Solidarity
Party–approved union
None
Figure 3: Predicted probabilities of voting, 2001 (continuous variables)
Figure 4: Predicted probabilities of voting, 2001 (categorical variables)
Figure 5: Predicted probabilities of voting, 2005 (continuous variables)
Figure 6: Predicted probabilities of voting, 2005 (categorical variables)
Figure 7: Predicted probabilities of voting, 2007 (continuous variables)
Figure 8: Predicted probabilities of voting, 2007 (categorical variables)