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0521849128 - Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church Institutions and Electoral Continuity
in Hungary

Jason Wittenberg

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Introduction

The Paradox of Political Persistence

One of the oldest paradoxes in the study of politics is why mass political loyalties persist long after the circumstances around which they arose have disappeared. This paradox has emerged in a variety of different forms across a wide range of countries and time periods, and has puzzled not just political scientists, but historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and many other observers of political life. Indeed, despite nearly a century of empirical research and theoretical development, we still do not fully understand why certain regions exhibit remarkable political stability even through dramatic and prolonged social upheaval. This book will show how to recognize, analyze, and explain political continuity by examining some particularly puzzling instances of it.

Perhaps the most remarkable example of persistence has occurred in France, where, at least since Siegfried (1913), scholars have attempted to decode the extraordinary longevity of political divisions that originated in much earlier periods of history. The French Revolution gave birth to our modern notions of “Left” and “Right” in politics, and these labels have continued to define French politics ever since. Since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, large swathes of western France have consistently supported the Right, while parts of Mediterranean France have supported the Left.¹ This has remained true even through changes in political regime, wars, in- and out-migration, disruptive economic development, and dramatic organizational discontinuity in the political parties that have represented both the Left and the Right. As one analyst noted, decades

¹ Brustein (1988).

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ago: “[P]olitical regimes follow one another, interrupted by revolutions or *coups d’état*: monarchy by divine right, revolutionary republic, charismatic empire, constitutional monarchy, liberal monarchy, presidential republic, plebiscitary empire, parliamentary republic, military occupation, multiparty republic, charismatic republic. But, in their passing, they leave layers of opinion, analogous to geological sediments. In the year 2000, there will still be Gaullists, as there were Orleanists, Legitimists, and Bonapartists in the 1880’s.”²

Others trace the Left–Right divide back to the French Revolution, which created two political camps. On one side stood the allies of the new antimonarchical, anticlerical republic, whose political descendants would later evince leftist loyalties. On the other side remained the supporters of the prerevolutionary order, whose descendants would eventually gravitate toward the Right. Indeed, there is an amazing similarity between the geographical distribution of Left–Right support in the legislative elections of 1981 and the results of assembly elections in the 1790s, just after the revolution. After nearly two centuries, “the division between a conservative north and a much more radical south seems almost ‘traditional.’”³ For some, the roots of contemporary French cleavages stretch back even further into the past. Siegfried (1949: 57) ascribes political differences between French Catholics and Protestants to the Roman period: “If one realizes that the present area of Protestantism coincides with the old diocesan boundaries, themselves traced from the Roman *civitates* and the Gallic *pagi*, one cannot help feeling awed by the persistence of the millenary influence.”⁴

The paradox also extends to the United States. For decades the Democratic Party’s strength and later demise in the “Solid South” has been a central theme in the study of American politics. Key (1949: 76–7), for example, provides dramatic evidence of an “extraordinary durability of voting habits fixed by war and reconstruction” in his analysis of the evolution of voting behavior in Tennessee between 1861 and 1944. There is a remarkably high correlation across counties between the vote for or against seceding from the Union in 1861 and the presidential vote in 1944. Almost all antisecession counties continued to favor the Republican Party eighty-three years later. According to Key (1949: 79), “[T]he greenest carpetbagger, provided he had the Republican nomination, could win.” The former slave-holding

² Dogan (1967: 182–3).

³ Hunt (1984: 133).

⁴ Cited in Dogan (1967: 183).

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counties, on the other hand, still preferred the Democrats. Why is it that so many Southern Whites could not bring themselves to vote for the party of Abraham Lincoln nearly a century after the end of the Civil War?

The “standing decision by the community” for a particular political party extends beyond the Confederacy, though it may involve the remnants of confederate attitudes. Key and Munger (1959: 287) note for Indiana in the latter part of the nineteenth century “the long persistence of county patterns of party affiliation despite changes in ‘interest’ and the disappearance of issues that created the pattern.” For them this persistence in party division, with Democrats in the southern counties and Republicans in the North, is a consequence of “a crystallization of attitudes at the time of the Civil War.”⁵ According to Levine (1976) a similar standing decision existed in Maryland between 1872 and 1924. There a “post-war ‘political confessionalism’ grew out of the Civil War loyalties and the regional-cultural differences they represented.”⁶ Maryland became split into stable Republican and Democratic bastions, each reinforced through energetic party competition. These areas of persistence would dissolve only as technological developments “destroyed the separateness and parochialism of the economic, social, and ideological life in the grass roots community.”⁷

In Western Europe persistence is manifest in different ways. At the level of national party systems, its most famous expression comes in the form of Lipset and Rokkan’s (1967: 50) “freezing hypothesis,” which states that “the party systems of the 1960’s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920’s.” Despite the Second World War, postwar prosperity, and the subsequent emergence of a bevy of new political issues, not just the same basic political tendencies (such as the Left and the Right) lived on, but in many cases the same party organizations. As Lipset and Rokkan (*ibid.*) note, many of these parties “are older than the majorities of the national electorates.” The freezing hypothesis has spawned dozens if not hundreds of efforts to locate persistence and volatility in different European systems.⁸

The paradox is not limited merely to the structure of political cleavages. As in France and the United States, various Western European countries

⁵ Key and Munger (1959: 283). More recent political continuities in Indiana are explored in Shaffer and Caputo (1972).

⁶ Levine (1976: 301).

⁷ Hays (1967: 158). Cited in Levine (1976: 324).

⁸ The best of these is Bartolini and Mair (1990), which also includes an extensive review of the literature.

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exhibited astonishing persistence in mass attachments to particular political groupings. For example, despite considerable economic development and frequent instability in support for individual parties, there has been persistent postwar support for leftist and confessional parties in Austria, Denmark, and the Netherlands.⁹ In the Federal Republic of Germany the Social Democratic Party maintained a stable postwar electoral base, even as its constituents became increasingly affluent and socially mobile.¹⁰ The same has been true for Sweden.¹¹ In Italy, rapid postwar modernization did not prevent both leftist and Christian democratic parties from enjoying decades of steady political support.¹²

Such continuity extends well beyond the stable, established democratic systems of Western Europe and North America. Even more surprisingly, it has also been observed in nations that have undergone redemocratization after a period of disruptive authoritarian rule, such as Austria after Nazism and war, post-Mussolini Italy, and post-Franco Spain.¹³ Spain provides a fascinating example. Four decades of Francoist dictatorship separated the last free preauthoritarian election in 1936 and the first postauthoritarian election in 1977. Yet despite such a lengthy absence of democratic politics, significant economic development, severe political repression, and extensive disruption in the leaderships and organizations of anti-Franco political movements, there nonetheless emerged striking regional continuities in patterns of electoral support. Linz (1980) reports a significant correlation across provinces between support for the conservative Spanish Confederation of the Autonomous Right (CEDA) in the 1936 election and for the Union of the Democratic Center in 1977. Both he and Maravall (1982) document even stronger continuities in loyalties to the Socialist Party (PSOE), which competed in both pre- and post-Franco elections. Remarkably, loyalties to the PSOE remained after four decades even as the party itself was ruthlessly suppressed and most of its preauthoritarian supporters had passed away.

The paradox has also been observed in redemocratizing Latin America and takes its most striking form in Chile.¹⁴ Until the advent of the

⁹ For Netherlands and Denmark, see Mair (1990). For Austria and the Netherlands, see Houska (1985).

¹⁰ Hoschka and Schunck (1978).

¹¹ Heclo and Madsen (1987).

¹² Sani (1976).

¹³ On Austria, see Cotta (1996); for Italy, Golden (1988) and Sivini (1967).

¹⁴ For Colombia and Honduras, see Remmer (1985); for other countries, Geddes (1995).

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Pinochet dictatorship in the early 1970s, Chile featured the most stable democracy in South America and was characterized by persistence in what has been termed the “logic of the three thirds.” This refers to the division of Chilean politics into “Left,” “Center,” and “Right” tendencies, each of which claimed between 25 percent and 40 percent of the electorate in the decades prior to the democratic collapse in 1973.¹⁵ Chile’s military regime may not have lasted as long as Francoism, but democratic politics were, nonetheless, forcibly terminated: Political parties of all stripes were banned and many opposition leaders were imprisoned or forced to flee. As Valenzuela and Valenzuela (1986) document, the preauthoritarian parties, faced with extinction, clandestinely struggled to maintain their ideological and organizational vitality in Chilean society.

Yet despite the hardships of authoritarianism in Chile, the preauthoritarian political divisions proved highly resistant to change. Indeed, all three tendencies survived the dictatorship and, with some deviation, managed to recoup much of their former strengths. In the 1992 municipal elections, parties of the Right won 29.9 percent of the vote versus an average of 30.1 percent between 1937 and 1973. Center parties won 29.4 percent, down from an average of 39.7 percent in the pre-authoritarian period. Leftists received 29.6 percent, up from an average of 24.2 percent before the dictatorship. There was some change to be sure, but less than might be expected given that roughly half of the postauthoritarian Chilean electorate had never voted before.¹⁶ Moreover, some continuities extend to the local level. For example, across communes there is a high correlation between a vote for the leftist Salvador Allende in the 1970 presidential election and a “no” vote in the 1988 plebiscite on whether Pinochet should continue to wield power. This pattern carried over into the 1989 presidential election.¹⁷

Perhaps most puzzling of all, political continuities have been observed in countries that have suffered war and decades of disruptive communist rule. Many of the symbolic continuities between pre- and postcommunism are well known. Cities, streets, and squares assumed their old names, parties with precommunist names were launched, and new political elites used every opportunity to emphasize a “return to history.” Yet the signs of persistence are more substantial than the symbolic rejection of communism.

¹⁵ Siavelis (1999).

¹⁶ Valenzuela and Scully (1997: 517–19).

¹⁷ Ibid.: 521–2.

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Throughout much of postcommunist Eastern Europe regional patterns of support on both the Left and the Right resemble those from precommunist elections. For Poland, Kowalski and Śleszyński (2000: 79) reveal in maps the resilience of center–Right political support between 1922 and 1997 in the regions surrounding the towns of Białystok, Warsaw, Krakow, and Rzeszów. This is astounding because between these two elections Poland suffered a right-wing dictatorship, German and Soviet invasion, the loss of a significant proportion of its population in war, massive territorial revision, and four decades of communism. In the Czech Republic the regional base of the Communist Party's success in the 1990 and 1992 national parliamentary elections is similar to the areas where its preauthoritarian predecessor party scored gains during the interwar and immediate postwar periods.¹⁸ In Slovakia, there are few continuities at the level of individual party organizations, yet current regional support for populist and nationalist parties bears an uncanny similarity to the regional vote patterns of the prewar Slovak People's Party.¹⁹

Political Continuity in Hungary

This book investigates the paradox of political persistence through an in-depth study of Hungary's path from democracy to communism and back to democracy during the twentieth century. Hungary is a fascinating and unlikely case.²⁰ The reemergence of revived precommunist parties in the heady early days of the transition and the victory of the Right in the first postcommunist national parliamentary election in 1990 provoked immediate comparisons with Hungary's precommunist history of support for right-wing parties. József Antall, the new prime minister, triumphantly declared: "After having gone through the last 45 years, the Hungarian people have cast votes more or less the same way. This means that after several decades of dictatorship, their historical and political reflexes are not different. We are still alive."²¹ Szelenyi and Szelenyi (1991: 123) interpreted the election result in even more dramatic terms: "Astonishingly, as the curtain was raised, the audience was confronted with a still life: the 'act' that was interrupted 40 years ago with the transition to socialism seemed

¹⁸ Jehlička, Kostecký, and Sykora (1993) and Kostecký (1994).

¹⁹ Buerkle (2003), Kostecký (2002: 81–3) and Krivý (1997, 2003a, 2003b).

²⁰ For prior efforts to uncover continuities, see András (1996), Körösnéyi (1991), Wiener (1997), and Wittenberg (1999).

²¹ Cited in Kostecký (2002: 84).

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Figure I.1 Rightist Electoral Persistence in Hungary, 1945–1994

to have resumed, as if nothing had happened in between . . . embedded in Hungarian political culture is a strong taste for Christian-national political rule.”

Similarities between pre- and postcommunist politics are especially striking if we examine the 1994 election outcome in historical perspective. Figure I.1 displays a correlation map that compares the vote for right-wing parties in 1945 and 1994 across Hungarian settlements. The map is constructed by grouping settlements together according to which of Hungary’s nineteen provinces (“counties”) they currently belong, and then correlating, for each of those provinces, the right-wing vote share across municipalities in the two periods.²² Each county is then shaded according to the magnitude of its correlation. Remarkably, the correlation between the votes exceeds 0.5 in three of Hungary’s counties and is greater than 0.35 in eight more. To put this in perspective: In the United States, the most stable of democracies, the correlations across states between pairs of elections separated by an equal or lesser period sometimes dipped below 0.5.²³ The Hungarian correlations are huge in comparison with this figure.²⁴ Indeed,

²² To do this it was necessary to construct geographic units that were constant between 1945 and 1994. I postpone discussion of this and other technical details until Chapter 2.

²³ Burnham (1968).

²⁴ That the U.S. correlations are computed using states as a unit makes the Hungarian result even more remarkable, because high levels of geographic aggregation tend to inflate correlation coefficients. I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 1.

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someone who knew no history might gaze at the map and be amazed that Hungary endured a brutally repressive authoritarian regime between these two elections. Such a person would be flabbergasted to discover that in the interim state-socialism eviscerated the peasantry and created in its place an industrial working class; that it leveled gaping economic and social inequalities and broke the power of the bourgeoisie and the Churches; and that it implemented a vigorous program of reeducation and indoctrination in an attempt to create a “new socialist man.”

Refining the Problem

Why should old patterns of political loyalties reemerge after such prolonged economic, social, and political disruption? How should such patterns be measured and by what means are they reproduced? These are the central questions for this book. They are certainly easier posed than answered. It is best to begin with a more precise definition of the outcome to be explained, as it is not possible to answer the “why” before I have established the “what.” First, I focus on persistence in mass attachments rather than in political parties, party families, or party systems. Clearly, one cannot totally separate party elites from the masses who are their followers: parties (or party families) cannot survive without popular support. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the continuing existence of parties and the distribution of loyalties to them. What is most puzzling is not the longevity of the Democratic or Republican parties in the United States, but that they maintained stable constituencies for so long. Likewise, for redemocratizing regimes it is not the reemergence of the alternatives that is puzzling, but the uncanny similarities in their bases of support over time. Second, I use the continuing electoral preference for the same family of parties as an indicator of persistent mass partisan attachments. Some may quarrel with the equation of vote choice and partisan attachment given that voters are often motivated by factors other than partisan identification. However, in the case of the paradox of persistence, there is good cause to believe that vote choice does indicate a diffuse underlying partisanship.

First, even for U.S. politics, with its stable system of parties, *prolonged* persistence implies a partisan link. Bartels (1998: 306) expresses the conventional wisdom: “[T]o the extent that successive elections with different candidates, issues, and political conditions produce essentially similar voting patterns, it seems safe to infer that these patterns somehow reflect

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the organizing force of partisanship.”²⁵ This statement is even more germane for systems where there is volatility in individual party organizations. Indeed, this organizational volatility is part of what makes persistence so paradoxical and compels us to shift the locus of analysis from individual parties to party families. As Mair and Smith (1990: 179) note, “the greatest puzzle in understanding party system change is the need to explain how broader familial or bloc loyalties can persist *despite* the evident vulnerability of individual party organizations.” Partisanship is thus even more resilient than individual political parties. Second, I focus exclusively on vote for parties on regional lists. According to Carey and Shugart (1995), closed list results are less apt to reflect personal reputations than the candidate-voting in single-member constituencies. This will further reduce any “candidate effects” contaminating the electoral results.

An added benefit of employing electoral behavior is empirical tractability. Long before the collapse of state-socialism, scholars noted the persistence of various precommunist political values within society. Paul (1985) and Skilling (1985), for example, identify “pluralism” as a continuing deeply held value in Communist Czechoslovakia. Schöpflin (1979) finds surviving “petit-bourgeois” and “peasant-traditional” mentalities in Hungary. Jowitt (1974) attempted to explain the continuing importance of bribery and “connections” in Communist Romania. There is a sizable literature on the continuities and discontinuities between Czarist and Communist political culture in the Soviet Union.²⁶ To begin studying continuity and discontinuity for a given value, belief, or behavior, one needs, at a minimum, directly comparable measures at two different points in time of the phenomenon of interest. While postcommunist political culture has been amply documented through surveys, we have no comparable data from the precommunist period. Indeed, one of the most trenchant criticisms of the literature on political culture under state-socialism is that it was based largely on impressionistic accounts of the political values within society.²⁷ Electoral results, by contrast, are available for both the pre- and postcommunist periods.

As a redemocratizing country, Hungary is an ideal place to study political continuity. First, the best-developed explanations of the phenomenon have focused largely on the open, democratic, stable, multiparty democracies in

²⁵ Bartels (1998).

²⁶ For a review, see Welch (1993).

²⁷ For an excellent review and critique of the methodological problems in studying political culture under communism, see McAuley (1985).

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North America and Western Europe. As such, they rely on the existence of neatly archived electoral and survey data, regularly held free and fair multiparty elections, and freely operating civic and political institutions. Although great strides have been made in accounting for the startling electoral persistence observed in so many stable democratic states, such arguments fare poorly when the focus turns to countries where during the authoritarian period opposition parties were suppressed, elections were a sham, and civil society was either destroyed or co-opted by the regime. Yet, to understand the general roots of electoral persistence we should seek an explanation that can encompass the entire universe of cases, both stable democracies and redemocratizations. As we shall see, arguments developed for the stable democracies are either inapplicable to redemocratizing countries or, if they can be made applicable, are unlikely to be the principal source of persistence. Redemocratizing countries thus offer a means by which we can come to understand the sources of continuity in all countries that exhibit the phenomenon.

Second, there exists a smaller, less-developed set of explanations for continuity that has focused exclusively on (mostly right-wing) redemocratizing regimes. These accounts are tailored to accord with situations in which democracy is interrupted by a period of authoritarian rule. However, they suffer from a number of problems, including inadequate theorization of the links between the pre- and postauthoritarian periods and an overly aggregate level of analysis. Indeed, one of their central theoretical claims is that the less intrusive the authoritarian regime, the more likely there is to be partisan persistence between pre- and postauthoritarianism. Yet state-socialist countries endured an authoritarianism far more disruptive than that experienced by Chile, Spain, or, for that matter, any other country emerging from right-wing authoritarian rule, save perhaps Germany. Thus, if there should be discontinuity within redemocratizing regimes, it should be most visible in postcommunist countries, at least those that had experienced significant democratic politics before the communist period, such as in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. The question of continuity cannot easily be posed for the former Soviet Union, where precommunist democratic politics were tenuous or nonexistent.

Finally, within redemocratizing Eastern Europe the peculiarities of Hungary render it an especially ironic case. Like the rest of the region, it suffered through the brutal imposition of Stalinist political rule, the painful reorganization of economy and society along socialist lines, and the repression of the Churches. As in Czechoslovakia and Poland, mass popular