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Introduction

Why are some parties better able than others to establish themselves in new democracies? Specifically, why do some parties succeed electorally and survive and others die? Why are some parties better at becoming unified and cohesive in parliament while others remain dominated by individuals and are less successful in forming "responsible parties"? These questions are critical for understanding democratic consolidation. Numerous studies draw a direct link between party institutionalization and democratic consolidation (Bielasiak 1997, 2002; Birch 2003; Diamond and Linz 1989; Dix 1992; Elster, Offe, and Preuss 1998; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Kostelecky 2002; Kuenzi and Lambright 2005; Levitsky and Cameron 2003; P. Lewis 2000, 2001; Mainwaring 1999; McGuire 1997; Mozafar and Scarritt 2005; Olson 1998; Pridham 1995; Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Stoner-Weiss 2001; Tworzecki 2003). Stable parties generate clear expectations about the political actors, their behavior, and the overall structure and rules of party competition. Because of the stability and predictability, institutionalized parties can perform the fundamental functions of representation more effectively and have less incentive to break the democratic rules of the game. Innes (2002, 85) notes that if parties fail to provide a stable linkage between state and society, democracies will be vulnerable to instability and takeover regardless of "how efficient other institutions of state may have become." Understanding what determines this institutionalization is therefore directly related to the deeper concern over the quality and survival of democracy.

Parties that are able to successfully establish themselves (or institutionalize) – that is, succeed and survive electorally and become cohesive entities in office – form the basis of the new democratic party systems.[1] It is these parties that are

[1] This definition of party institutionalization or stability builds directly on the existing literature, which considers coherence (unity) and stable roots in society (electoral support) as the central

responsible for setting up and consolidating the new regime. They become the primary vehicles for integrating diverse interests, formulating policy, and holding officials accountable. These parties also determine which of the preexisting cleavages become politicized and thereby define the bases for future political competition (Zielinski 2002). As the world continues to witness democratic transitions, understanding which of the initial scores of electoral formations remain viable political forces determining the direction of the new regime is ever more relevant. In addition to the broader theoretical and practical significance, the elites in democratizing countries themselves are likely to be interested in the strategies of building viable and unified parties.

Answers to these questions are anything but straightforward as several expectations about party competition, developed on the basis of the experience of advanced democracies, are not likely to hold in newly democratized countries. For example, authoritarian regimes often attempt to level social stratification and other types of cleavages, hindering or entirely preventing the classical cleavage-based party competition from automatically forming after democratization. Similarly, voters in post-authoritarian regimes lack experience with multiparty competition, may have poor understanding of the democratic process, and may not be able to articulate their own (ideological) interests, thus posing a challenge to interest-based representation. Uncertain about voter preferences, lacking identity, facing the initial problem of legitimacy, and dealing with uncommitted elites, how can parties establish themselves in post-authoritarian multiparty democracies?

Focusing on the democratic transitions in post-communist Europe during the period of 1990–2010, this study provides a fresh perspective to understanding the development of parties in new democracies. It demonstrates that the successful establishment of a party in a new democracy crucially depends on the strength of its organization. Specifically, I argue that political parties that invest in strong party organizations (including cultivating a large membership, developing an extensive network of visible local branch offices, and building professional, specialized, and permanent central office staff) are more likely to succeed electorally, survive as significant players in the electoral arena, and behave cohesively in the parliament. That is, they are more likely to establish themselves as the basis of the new party system than those parties whose organizations are weak.

The study takes a step further and addresses a puzzle emerging from these findings: Given the positive effects of party organizational strength, why do only some parties build strong organizations? The evidence suggests that parties with pragmatically oriented professional leaders and those that have faced particularly competitive, even hostile, electoral environments are more likely to invest in strong organizations than those that are led by intellectually and

dimensions of the concept (Basedau and Stroh 2008; Dix 1992; Kuenzi and Lambright 2001; Mainwaring 1998).

ideologically oriented amateur leaders and those that have initially experienced easy electoral victories. I also find that uneven distribution of organizational strength within a party, with some local party branches being stronger than others, influences intraorganizational power distribution. Organizationally strong branches are powerful and influential within parties. This may pose an additional obstacle for building party organizations in new democracies because by strengthening the organization, the leadership may be weakening its own power. Although not all parties may build strong organizations because of environmental disincentives, leadership style, or concerns over power distribution, party competition in the critical years after transition is likely to be dominated by those that do.

That party organizations matter goes against the conventional wisdom according to which parties in new democracies do not need and are not likely to build organizations (Agh 1997; Kopecky 1995; Lewis 1996; Mair 1997; Olson 1998; Perkins 1996; Szczerbiak 1999a; Toole 2003; Van Biezen 2003). At the same time, the focus on party structures is in line with the general organizational theory in sociology, economics, and management, which has long recognized that internal organizational factors play at least an equal if not a more important role than environmental constraints in determining organizational success (Lenz 1980; Pfeffer 1997; Scott 2004). Political parties are similarly not simply at the mercy of institutional and social conditions; rather, they can be considered as active agents capable of navigating environmental constraints and influencing their performance through their internal structures (see also Grzymala-Busse 2002a; Panebianco 1988). The goal of this study is to understand whether and how this happens.

Instability of Parties in New Democracies: The Practical Relevance of the Study

Which parties are able to succeed, survive, and unify is not just an interesting theoretical puzzle, but has also been one of the central practical concerns of post-communist democratic transition. As multiple studies document, parties in new democracies often experience large-scale redistribution of votes, and this volatility is related to frequent deaths of existing parties and births of new ones (Birch 2003; Epperly 2011; Innes 2002; Olson 1998; Tavits 2005, 2008a). Such instability of party systems has remained a source of puzzlement and concern. Similarly, studies document the low levels of party discipline in the new parliaments – a phenomenon that further hampered the development of nascent parties in the new regimes (McMenamin and Gwiazda 2011; Montgomery 1996, 1999; Shabad and Slomczynski 2004; Zielinski, Slomczynski, and Shabad 2005).

Although the electoral arena has remained highly unpredictable overall, there are also important differences both across countries and between different parties in the same country in terms of their ability to establish themselves

in the new regime. Some parties are systematically better able to cope with the uncertainty than others. What separates these parties from the rest? For example, Rose and Munro (2003) report that, on average, twenty-five parties have won more than 1 percent of votes at least once in any given Central and Eastern European (CEE) country, but only four out of those twenty-five have contested all democratic elections. The survival rate was lowest in Latvia, where only two out of twenty-nine parties contested all elections, and highest in Hungary, where six out of fifteen stayed in the game. Similarly, some parties continued to function as a collection of individuals rather than a unified entity, whereas others were able to adhere to collective accountability and representation. For example, Tavits (2012) reports a fourfold difference in the voting unity of the most and the least unified party in the Czech Republic (0.20 versus 0.96 on a weighted agreement index, where 0 = perfect disunity and 1 = perfect unity) and a little less than a threefold difference in Poland (0.38 versus 0.98).

The following examples illustrate the significant variance in party instability in post-communist democracies. In Poland, twenty-nine parties and electoral formations were elected into the Sejm in 1991. Only five of those survived through the next election and only two parties – the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) and Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) – were still present in the political scene in some form in 2010. What is different about those two compared to the other twenty-seven original contestants that did not make it? More specifically, Solidarity Electoral Alliance (AWS) ran the first time in 1997 and went on to win about 34 percent of the vote and form a government. In the next election in 2001, however, it received only 5.6 percent of the vote – a result that left AWS without a seat. On the other hand, during the twenty years under consideration, PSL continued to receive at least 7–9 percent of the vote (with a maximum of 15.4 percent in 1993) regardless of whether they were involved in scandals while a governing partner or sat quietly on the opposition bench.

In Estonia, the Coalition Party (KE) won an impressive 32 percent of the vote in 1995, but was able to get only about 7 percent of the vote in the next election and then disintegrated. Similarly, Res Publica (RP) arrived like a meteor (Taagepera 2006) in 2003, receiving about 25 percent of the vote, but ceased to exist four years later when its only viable survival strategy was to merge with another party. At the same time, the Center Party (K) has lived through scandals, which included the resignation, and a temporary absence from politics, of its long-term chairman, with a stable 23–26 percent electoral support.

In Hungary, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), initially the largest party in parliament, was struggling only a few years later to clear the electoral threshold and faced the threat of being subsumed by another party – the Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz). Similarly, the Independent Party of Smallholders (FKgP), which was still the third-largest party in parliament in 1998, was left without a seat four years later and practically ceased to exist as a serious political player. At the same time, the Hungarian Socialist Party

(MSzP) continued to consolidate its support throughout most of the period under study.

Parties in post-communist countries also tended to lack party unity as witnessed in the following cases. Montgomery (1999) reports that in Hungary, MDF fared the worst in this regard as well: together with the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz) these two leading parties emerging from the democratic opposition movement suffered the greatest number of "deserters" and the lowest level of party discipline. The study further argues that only two factions emerged as disciplined: those of MSzP and Fidesz.

For the Czech Republic, according to Kopecky (2000), the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) – a party with dissident roots but a short life cycle – was reluctant to impose party discipline and remained dominated by individuals. The Republicans (SPR-RSČ) – another party dominated by individuals – also suffered significant defections and was swept off the political map. R. Zubek (2008) describes that in Poland, too, some parties (SLD and PSL) followed strict intra-party rules for discipline in parliament (see also Grzymala-Busse 2002a); others (notably AWS) lacked such rules. Indeed, several AWS MPs were being noncooperative toward their own party's bills because they did not want to be the rubber stamps of the party (R. Zubek 2008).

These examples illustrate a nontrivial puzzle: Why do some parties succeed, prosper, and unify while others remain fragile and wither? This question remains a serious concern both for voters and parties in new democracies. For this reason, there is potentially a high payoff for research that helps us better understand factors that contribute systematically to the institutionalization of individual parties.

The Theoretical Relevance of the Study

In addition to practical relevance, this study also helps address significant gaps in the scholarly literature. This study, with an explicit focus on the level of the party, is unlike most research on new democracies, which has taken a system-level approach. Several variables have been linked to the stability of *party systems* in new democracies, including the permissiveness of electoral and other political institutions (Birch 2003; Duverger 1954; Elster et al. 1998; Kostelecky 2002; Tavits 2005), the emergence and strength of social cleavages (Bielasiak 1997; Evans and Whitefield 1993; Roberts and Wibbels 1999; Tworzecki 2003), legacies of the previous regime (Kitschelt et al. 1999), and economic conditions (Nooruddin and Chhibber 2008; Pacek 1994; Tucker 2006). Although greatly informative of the cross-national variance, these explanations are not able (and are not meant) to fully account for the variance in the success, survival, and unity of parties *within* countries. Some parties are clearly better at coping with these environmental constraints than others. The current study, therefore, provides a much-needed addition to the study of parties and party systems in new democracies.

By focusing on an organizational explanation of party formation and stabilization, the current study also represents a direct response to the calls for developing an explanatory theory of party organizations (see Janda 1993; Meleshevich 2007; Montero and Gunther 2002; Sartori 1976). Whereas the early theoretical work by Duverger, Michels, and Ostrogorski followed a sociological perspective and an explicitly organizational approach, the recent literature has been criticized for avoiding the subject of party organizations (Gibson, Cotter, and Bibby 1983; Janda 1993). Indeed, the literature is relatively scarce on organizational explanations of party electoral performance. The explanatory (and especially quantitative) analysis of party organizations has largely been limited to the U.S. context (Coleman 1996; Cotter et al. 1984; Crotty 1971; Pomper 1990). An exception to this is a comparative study by Janda and Colman (1998), but it relies on data collected in the 1950s and is by now outdated. In the post-communist context, a few studies have provided organizational explanations of specific, mostly former communist, parties (Grzymala-Busse 2002a; Ishiyama 2001; see also Golosov 1998). However, we lack an explanation of organizational effects more broadly – that is, how they apply to all parties, not just the successors to the communist party.

Literature that considers party unity in parliament – another indicator of the extent to which a party has been able to establish itself – is also devoid of organizational explanations. Rather, the focus is on political institutions, including electoral systems, presidentialism, and federalism, as they influence party unity (Carey 2007; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998; Hix, Noury, and Roland 2005; Mainwaring 1999; Morgenstern 2004; Owens 2003; Sieberer 2006). This research rarely examines party influence on legislative individualism directly. Parties are not conceived of as active agents and party influence is assumed to result from specific institutional structures. At the same time, recent research has shown that legislators can behave rather differently under the same institutional arrangements (Desposato 2006; Herron 2002; Morgenstern and Swindle 2005; Thames 2005). Haspel, Remington, and Smith (1998) and Kunicova and Remington (2008), for example, find no significant difference in the discipline of Russian Duma members elected from single-member districts as opposed to those elected on the basis of party lists. However, they do find significant differences in voting unity across parties, suggesting that party-level factors are likely to have a direct effect on parliamentary behavior.

By providing and analyzing systematic cross-national data on party organizational strength and party institutionalization in the electorate and in parliament, the current study directly addresses these gaps in the existing literature. It not only attempts to demonstrate the relevance or irrelevance of party organizations in the process of democratic development, but also contributes to understanding the broader theoretical questions about party behavior in different arenas and about the consequences of party organizational strength.

Last but not least, one of the most understudied aspects of party literature that this study contributes to concerns the origins of party organizational strength. As is evident in the discussion that follows, there is minimal

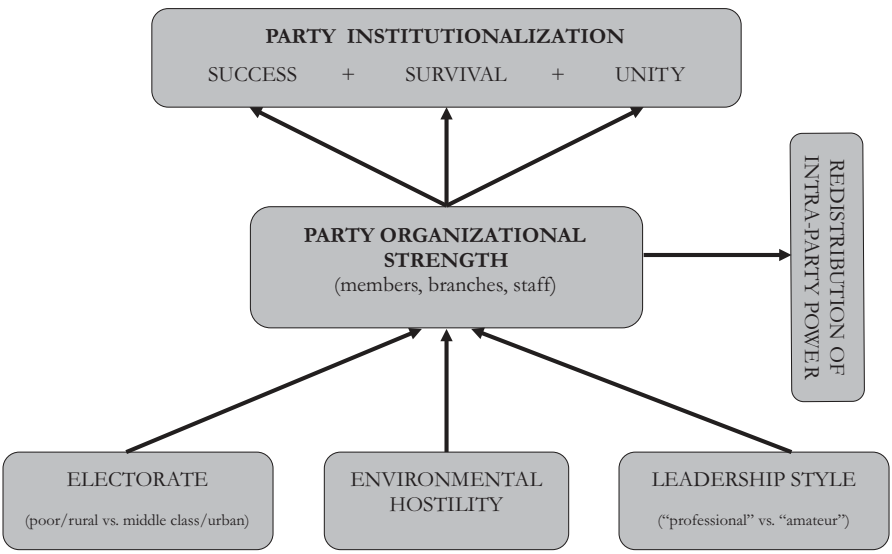

FIGURE 1.1. Summary of the argument.

theoretical guidance to help the empirical exploration of this question. Although the analysis here is understandably exploratory in nature and the conclusions remain tentative, the potential contribution to helping advance future research on the question of why some parties have strong and others weak organizations is significant.

The Causes and Effects of Strong Organizations: Summary of the Main Arguments

Party organizational strength indicates the extensiveness, professionalization, and reach of a party. Specifically, organizational strength is defined here as (1) organizational extensiveness, (2) membership size and activism, and (3) professionalization of the central organization. The establishment or institutionalization of a party involves continued electoral success, long-term survival, and unified behavior in office. Figure 1.1 provides a summary and illustration of the main arguments explaining the causes and effects of party organizational strength.

One of the central arguments of this book is that parties with strong organizations are more likely to be electorally successful and survive as significant players because such parties are able to attract and mobilize voters more effectively than parties with weak organizations. The micro-foundations of this argument are motivated by insights from the cognitive-psychological scholarship on voting behavior and the theory of bounded rationality. These theories suggest that voters rely on information shortcuts when making voting decisions because obtaining detailed information on all parties is too costly (see Brooks

2006 for a review). I argue that a party with strong organization can more easily provide voters with the necessary information shortcuts. These "heuristics," in turn, shape voters' biases in the party's favor for two interrelated reasons. First, because of membership size, extensive local presence, and professional staff, strong parties can have more immediate and frequent contact with more members of the electorate in a more organized manner than parties with weak organizations. Second, parties with strong organizations can be more persuasive than their counterparts with weak organizations. They are more likely to act competently, reliably, and accountably. Thanks to their permanent structures and personnel, they can also more effectively formulate policy, cope with environmental challenges, and take responsibility for their actions. Parties with strong organizations can more credibly claim that they are a stable entity and not just a temporary electoral alliance.

I argue that these effects are likely to be especially pronounced in the context of new democracies in general and post-communist democracies in particular. Simply put, despite some evidence of social bases of party choice in the region (Evans 2006), the party competition in these systems is not likely to be structured to the same extent and in the same manner as in advanced democracies, which makes information shortcuts and credibility especially relevant. Specifically, in newly democratized regimes, voters lack experience with how the democratic elections function (Tavits and Annus 2006), are less likely to have significant (positive) party identification (Rose 1995; Wyman et al. 1995), and are more likely to be confused about the ideological differences between parties (Grzymala-Busse 2002b; Rose 1995) than voters in established democracies, and they may even be hostile toward parties (Mair 1997; Rose and Mishler 1998; Wyman et al. 1995). The voter-level confusion is magnified by erratic elite behavior: in the post-communist context, political elites were not necessarily committed and loyal to their parties and often solved conflicts by creating new parties with little ideological identification (Tavits 2008a, 2008b). Moreover, expressed ideology may not be a very clear indication of behavior, considering that left-wing parties often pursued right-wing economic policies (Tavits and Letki 2009). Additionally, especially in the post-communist context, but possibly also in other new democracies, societies did not have many pronounced cleavages under the previous regime (Lipset 1994). Societies were leveled in terms of social class, church and the role of religion were marginalized, urban-rural differences were largely eliminated, and ethnic differences were suppressed (Ost 1995; Van Biezen 2003). This undermined any cleavage-based party competition. The relative voter availability and ignorance, the weakness of ideological, interest-based, and cleavage-based voting, and the problems with party legitimacy make direct contacts and face-to-face mobilization efforts, made possible by strong organizations, especially crucial. Organization allows more direct (and effective) means of communication with voters than abstract media campaigns, and sizeable membership, local presence, and professional management help signal legitimacy of the party. In a

context where little else is available to structure voters' choices and party competition, parties can use their organizations to introduce some structure and predictability to their own short-term support. They can also build a long-term advantage over newcomers with less organizational resources.

This argument and the overall thesis that party organizations matter in new democracies go against the conventional wisdom in the post-communist party literature. In the post-communist context, there were several reasons why parties were not expected to build extensive organizations to win elections: (1) party formation was driven largely by elite behavior and did not follow the classical cleavage theory, (2) antiparty sentiment was high, and (3) partisan loyalties among voters and elites were low (Agh 1997; Kopecky 1995; Lewis 1996; Mair 1997; Olson 1998; Perkins 1996; Szczerbiak 1999a; Toole 2003; Van Biezen 2003). Rather, an expensive media campaign, a visible leader, the use of patronage, and/or populist ideologies were seen as more relevant for party's electoral success (Kopecky 1995; Lewis 2000; Perkins 1996; Römmele 1999). This argument has been often backed up by examples of "flash" parties – those that suddenly emerge and do well in an election – and the fact that party organizations were weaker and less developed in CEE than in the advanced democracies of Western Europe. However, inferring from a generally low level of party organizational strength (as compared to Western Europe) that such organizations are not necessary or beneficial for success assumes away what essentially is an empirical question that needs to be tested. Furthermore, contrary to seeing the peculiarities of the post-communist electoral context as *precluding* the development of strong party organizations, as this literature does, I argue that it is because of these conditions that it is especially advantageous for vote-maximizing parties to build organizations.

In sum, (1) immediate, frequent, and organized contacts with the electorate, and (2) competence, reliability, and accountability – made possible by a strong party's grassroots presence, permanent structures, and professional management – can help parties with strong organizations shape voters' biases in the party's favor and thereby mobilize support for the party. Strong organizations are likely to matter not only at the party level; a similar argument can also explain the variance in the performance of the same party across different districts. That is, parties are likely to do better in districts where their district-level party organization is stronger as manifested in the extensiveness of local structures and membership in that district.

I further argue that organizational strength helps parties establish themselves not only by enhancing their chances of electoral success and survival but also by enhancing elite commitment and unity in office. That is, holding institutional factors constant, the strength of political party organization directly and independently influences the level of party unity. Following from the arguments made previously, I argue that party organizational strength influences party unity because the stronger the party organization the more valuable an electoral asset the party is to individual legislators, an argument in line with

recent research on pork-barrel politics (Keefer and Khemani 2009; Lyne 2008; Primo and Snyder 2010). This effect works through two mechanisms. First, if a legislator can rely on party reputation and resources to get reelected, he or she may feel less need to sway voters by building personal reputations in office. Second, and more importantly, the more valuable the party is to the legislator (i.e., the stronger the party), the more credible and effective is its threat to withdraw the electoral benefits (i.e., expel or demote the legislator) if a legislator undermines party unity.

Specifically, in line with the existing literature, I assume that legislators are reelection oriented. In order to get reelected, they can use their personal resources, party resources, or both. The more votes a candidate gets because they belong to a given party list, the more valuable the party is to that person. Parties with stronger organizations are likely to receive more votes, and are more valuable to their legislators. Accordingly, the threat of losing the valuable resource – for example, if the party denies renomination, lowers the list place, or expels the person from the party – is likely to induce compliance. Suffering these punishments is likely to be more consequential to a legislator in a party with a strong rather than a weak organization because the latter is less likely to provide many collective benefits (i.e., party votes) to its legislators. For the relationship between organizational strength and voting unity to emerge, the actual punishment does not have to occur – the threat of punishment is enough to induce compliance. In sum, party organizational strength is positively related to party unity in parliamentary voting.

Which parties, then, are more likely to build strong organizations in new democracies? To put it differently, if a strong organization is beneficial for establishing a party in the new regime, why do all parties not build equally strong organizations? I approach this question from two different angles. First, I argue that the effects of a strong party organization are not necessarily all positive from the point of view of the party. Rather, borrowing insights from organizational theory, I argue that it may bring along a redistribution of power within the party from the leadership to organizationally strong subunits. Specifically, literature on organizational sociology suggests that power within organizations is asymmetrically distributed between different subunits, with more powerful subunits being those that are better able to provide resources critical to the functioning of the organization that cannot be obtained by any other means (Emerson 1962; see also Cook and Emerson 1978; Cook et al. 1983; Fligstein 1987; Pfeffer 1994, 1997; Pfeffer and Salancik 2003). Within political parties, such powerful subunits are likely to be local branches with strong organizations (those with visible and active presence in local life via participating in local politics, being associated with locally known leaders and activists, and having local structures and membership) because these branches are able to help party leadership obtain its central goals – electoral and policy success. Such redistribution of power is likely to be especially concerning to leaders of post-communist parties that are largely elite creations where leaders are used to commanding a high degree of power compared to rank and file (Szczerbiak