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**To Stay the Course or Cross the Floor:
Members of Parliament, Parties and
Party System Change in Central
Europe**

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Abstract

The stability of the party systems in formerly communist Central Europe have been subject to considerable debate, cast in terms of party organisation, patterns of competition as well as electoral volatility. Although the Czech and Hungarian party systems are more stable than those of Poland and Slovakia in terms of both political parties and patterns of competition, all four party systems have acquired a considerable degree of stability. The present paper turns the focus to the fate of the

goals; and second, of patterns of interaction between parties (Mair 1997). This also includes forms of competition between government and opposition (Smith 1979, 1989). This yields an operationalisation of party system change along two dimensions: change in the actual party organisations in a party system, and changes in the patterns of bloc competition. A stable party system features not only stable parties, but also stable patterns of interaction. This means that a degree of party system stability may be compatible with considerable electoral volatility (Bartolini & Mair 1990), and some changes in party organisation. The French party system, for example, has seen repeated changes in party organisation, but considerable continuity in terms of patterns of competition, government and opposition, and personnel (Hanley 1999).

The central question in the present analysis is whether these patterns of stability and change in Central Europe mask more continuity in terms of personnel, and if so, whether this is because representatives move between parties like ‘nomads’ or escape like ‘refugees’ when parties decline. The starting point is to compare changes in parties’ electoral fortunes with patterns of elite continuity and turnover. A brief examination of patterns of electoral volatility shows that Poland features somewhat higher volatility than the other three, and that volatility varies somewhat from election to election. However, if parties that divide or merge between two elections are counted as one for the purpose of calculating electoral volatility, the numbers come out at less than twice the West European averages based on similar calculations (Bakke & Sitter 2005; in contrast to Rose 1996). In any case, because electoral volatility may be as much the consequence of party system stabilisation as a cause of change, it should not in itself be taken as proof of party system instability. However, given that parties on the rise are likely to feature a considerable number of new MPs, electoral change is taken into account when comparing elite continuity across parties and states.

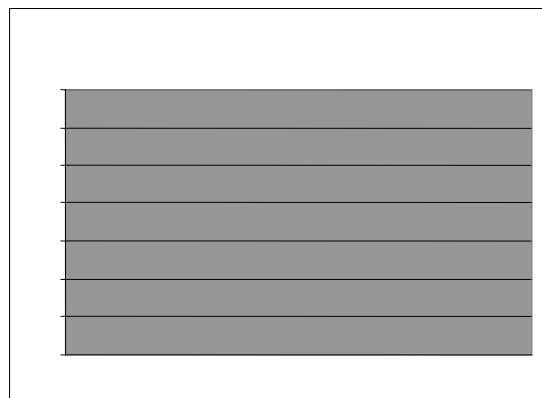
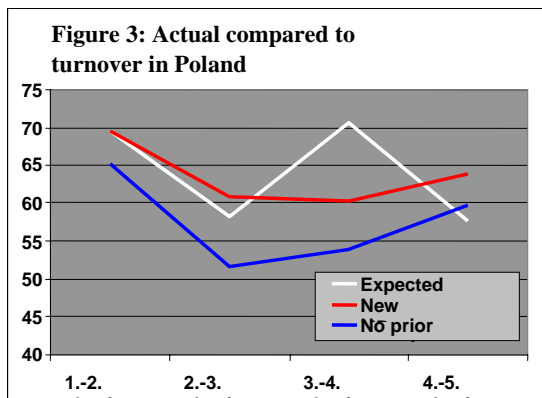
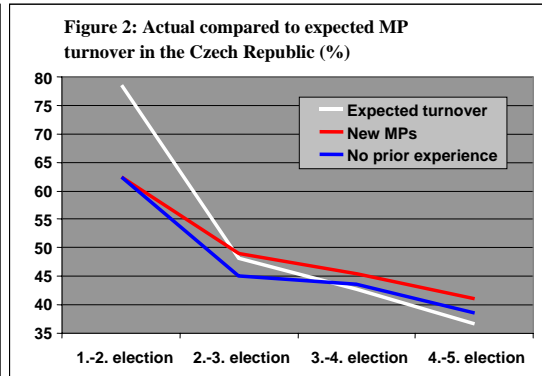
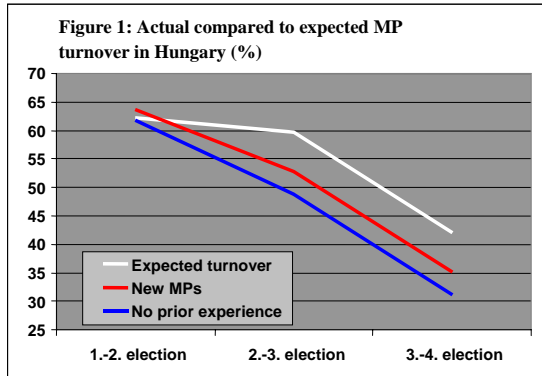
Table 2. Electoral volatility in Central Europe

	1.-2. election	2.-3. election	3.-4. election	4.-5. election	Average	Region average
Poland	34.3	21.3	51.1	36.5	35.8	Ai72.1P

Tables 2 and 3 report electoral volatility and turnover rates for elected representatives. These data broadly confirm expectations about elite continuity based on patterns of party and party system stability and change: higher party and electoral stability in the Czech Republic and Hungary means higher elite continuity. Unsurprisingly, elite turnover was high between the last communist and first fully free elections.² However, persistent patterns of declining elite turnover after the transition to democracy can be found only in the Czech Republic and Hungary (Hungarian turnover is lower, despite higher electoral volatility); the Slovak and Polish figures are more ambiguous. Turnover has been persistently higher in Poland, which features a less stable party system and a more volatile electorate. In Slovakia it rose again in the 2002 election, when two established parties failed and three new ones emerged. This represented a dramatic break in the Slovak trend, which had thus far been nearly identical to that of the Czech Republic; and is consistent with the argument that the Slovak party system stabilised around a core of parties centred on support for and opposition to the Mečiar governments of the mid-1990s, but that this was precarious because of the nature of Mečiar's party (HZDS – the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia) and the problems of building a credible alternative (Bakke & Sitter 2005).

These results prompt the question of whether actual elite continuity in parliamentary representation is higher or lower than what might be expected, given the number of seats

out not to be so important, but in the Poland and Slovakia a number of MPs have returned to parliament after a spell outside. At the country level, the expected turnover is simply all seats that change hands (on aggregate) plus 30 percent of those that do not. For example, in the Hungarian 1998 election 164 of 386 seats were lost in aggregate, yielding an expected continuity of 70 percent of the remaining 222 seats, or 155 MPs. In fact 182 MPs had served in the 1994 parliament, 27 (or 6.75 percent) more than expected. Another 16 MPs had experience from the 1990 parliament but not the 1994 parliament.



discussion of inter-party transfers. All the cases counted as a matter of organisational continuity are discussed briefly in what follows.

On the left, all the communist parties split or reformed, and modified their names. The Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSĽ) split along republican lines soon after the 1990 election. The Slovak party adopted a social democratic platform, and became the Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ), while the Czech party remained communist and fought on as the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSĽM). 16 MPs thus won re-election under different party names in Slovakia's second elections but were in fact KSĽ MPs re-elected on the SDĽ ticket. Likewise 20 Czech communists were re-elected in 1992 under the new party name. In Slovakia, the SDĽ fought the 1994 election jointly with Green and Social Democratic candidates, but the two small parties subsequently joined another alliance. In Poland and Hungary the communist parties turned social democrat and changed names prior to the first fully free elections, and became the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD) and Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) respectively.

In Hungary all other parties either remained stable or split into factions that did not manage to win seats at the next election. There have been a few isolated cases of individual MPs running on joint tickets in single-member constituencies, and one major case of an electoral alliance: 15 deputies from the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) were elected on a joint ticket with Fidesz (the Alliance of Young Democrats) in 2002. However, in these cases the MPs represented separate and distinct parties that were clearly labelled as such.

The Czech 1992 election saw a large number of MPs returned on a different ticket from the 1990 election, but this is deceptive because it is largely a matter of organisational change. The umbrella movement Civic Forum (OF) split into two viable successor parties: the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA). In 1992, 23 of the ODS' 77 MPs (counting MPs with experience from both the federal parliament and the national council) came from OF, as did 10 of the ODA's 14. The two are clearly successor parties not only in terms of organisation, but also personnel.

The second Czech case is the three MPs from the Christian Democratic Union who joined the ODS in the 1992 election, but actually stayed in the same party. Their party, the Christian Democratic Party (KDS), had run with other Christian democrats in 1990, but switched electoral alliance to the ODS in 1992. When KDS was integrated into the ODS before the 1996 election, two of these KDS MPs joined the Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ĽS): one to run successfully as a senator, the other to win a seat in the lower chamber.

Third, when the Freedom Union (US) split off from ODS after the 1997 scandal and crisis that precipitated early elections in 1998, it was one of the few genuine divisions of a Czech party. Six ODS deputies were re-elected for the US to the lower house in 1998, and another two in subsequent Senate elections. In 2002, the US and the KDU-ĽS ran together in the Coalition.

The 1992 elections in Slovakia saw the same kind of disintegration of a broad movement when the Public Against Violence's (VPN) divided into political parties. The only viable one to emerge was the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), for which 17 former VPN representatives won re-election (14 from the national council and three from

the federal parliament). Between the 1992 and 1994 elections a group of MPs left the HZDS and the Slovak National Party (SNS), and went on to form the Democratic Union (DÚ). These splits forced a change of government and early elections, and in 1994 two of the former SNS deputies and three of those from the HZDS then won seats for the DÚ.

Second, in Slovakia, the coalition of ethnic Hungarian parties has proven remarkably stable in terms of both electoral support and personnel, although there have been minor name changes and a change from alliance to party. 10 representatives from MKDH in 1992 were re-elected in 1994 on the MK ticket, and 12 MPs were subsequently re-elected for the MKP in 1998.

The third case of organisational continuity in Slovakia is the parties that joined together in the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK), the SDK itself, and the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ) that emerged when the coalition could not agree on reorganisation as a political party before the 2002 election. Of the 17 MPs elected for the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) in 1994, 11 were re-elected for their old party on the joint SDK list in 1998. So were 12 MPs from the Democratic Union (DÚ) and two representatives from small parties that had fought the 1994 election jointly with the Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ): a single Social Democrat and a Green. 25 of the 42 SDK seats in 1998 were thus filled by returning incumbents, and all MPs elected on the common SDK list were members of the KDH, the DÚ, the Social Democrats (SDSS), the Democratic Party (DS) or Greens (SZ). Eight would return as KDH MPs in 2002, and seven as members of the SDKÚ.

In Poland, the parties that emerged from the Solidarity movement have featured a comparable series of splits and mergers. The first splits had occurred by the time of the the commA6[(the

The number of Central European MPs that genuinely crossed the floor and successfully sought re-election for another party is thus far lower than nominal changes might suggest. The number of genuine cases of successful floor-crossing, after organisational changes have been filtered out, is reported in Table 4. This includes both representatives that migrate between viable parties ('nomads') and those who successfully transfer from a party that falls below the threshold to a viable party ('refugees'), reported in absolute numbers. Bearing in mind that the Polish (460 seats) and Hungarian (386) parliaments have practically twice the number of seats of the Czech (200) and Slovak (150) ones, the numbers are broadly comparable. With a few significant exceptions, they are also strikingly low.

Table 4. Successful floor-crossing and re-election on a different ticket at the next election, genuine 'nomads' (N) and 'refugees' (R) in absolute numbers.

	1.-2. election		2.-3. election		3.-4. election		4.-5. election	
	N	R	N	R	N	R	N	R
Poland	4	10	4	0	1	49	3	0

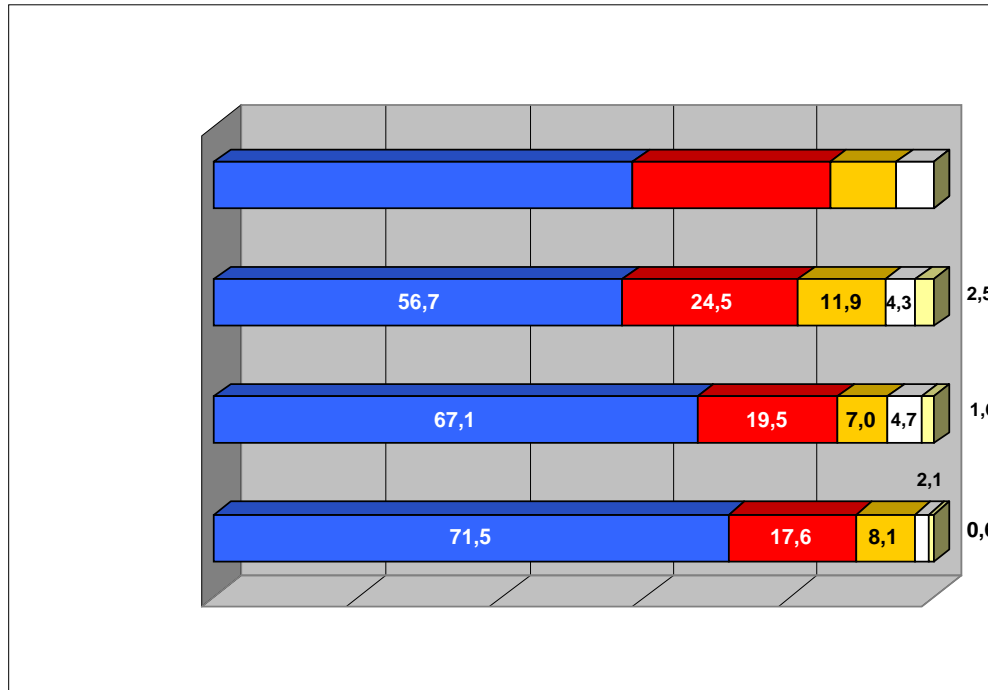
In 1994, five Slovak MPs successfully transferred between viable parties: the one who had previously joined SNS from the DS went on to HZDS; one left the Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ) to join the Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS); one transferred from each of the SDĽ and Social Democrats (SDSS) to the HZDS; while another went the other way from HZDS to SDSS (on a joint list with SDĽ). There were no successful transfers between viable parties in the run-up to the 1998 or 2002 elections, but when the SDĽ declined and fell below the threshold in 2002 it had a single successful ‘refugee’: Robert Fico, founder of the new Smer (Direction) party. He was adamant that “it is against our principles to accept anyone who has been an active member of another party – except myself” (cited in Ue 2004: 56). Two others successfully transferred from the single-term Party for Civic Understanding (SOP), one to the HZDS and one to the new Alliance for the New Citizen (ANO).

The pattern of transfers between parties in Hungary is similar, with two significant exceptions. Both cases benefited Fidesz as it grew to become the dominant party on the centre-right. In 1998, as part of a negotiated deal, Fidesz took over seven MPs from the Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP) which was in complete disarray over whether to fight on as a separate party or give up and join Fidesz. When the Independent Smallholders’ Party (FKgP) self-destructed over a divide in the run-up to the 2002 election, 11 of its MPs crossed over and went on to win re-election as Fidesz members. Both are cases of MPs leaving severely divided parties that were about to fall out of parliament (the FKgP had also divided before the 1994 election, but then the rump party survived and there were no successful floor-crossings).

Apart from these two cases, there have been few successful transfers in Hungary. Between the two first elections three Fidesz MPs left to join and win re-election for the centre-left liberal party, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz). One MP from the KDNP transferred to the FKgP, as did one MDF deputy and one independent. Between 1994 and 1998 one MP left each of the MDF and SzDSz for Fidesz. Another MP left the FKgP to win a seat for the far right Party for Justice and Freedom (MIEP). MIEP had broken away from the MDF in 1993, but failed to win representation in 1994, though four of these ex-MDF deputies returned for MIEP in 1998 (the party fell below the threshold in 2002). In 2002, a single FKgP deputy went to the MDF.

In contrast to the other three states, Poland has seen several dozen successful transfers between parties, mainly in the form of ‘refugees’ from parties that disintegrate and decline to new or established parties (59 of the 71 successful transfers). However, most of the cases come from one single election, in 2001. In fact, given that the introduction of an electoral threshold for the 1993 election might be thought to have concentrated the minds of MPs from small parties, it is surprising that only ten MPs successfully left parties that were about to be eliminated from parliament: the Union of Labour (UP) picked up three MPs from different Solidarity groupings and single-representative parties, the liberal UD picked up four, the Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN) two, and Polish Peasant Party (PSL) one. Two ‘nomads’ went from the Polish Beer Lovers’ Party (PPPP, which had merged with UD) to the Alliance of the Democratic Left (SLD); one crossed from the SLD to the UP and another from PSL to SLD. 1997 saw only four successful transfers, all between viable parties: the SLD picked a single MP from UD, and three UD

5). The average tenure for an MP varies between a low 4.8 years in Slovakia and the Hungarian high of 6.5 years, with Poland scoring 5.1 (2005 election not included) and the Czech Republic 5.4. The present section turns to focus to the MPs that have served three or more terms, and explores patterns of stability and inter-party transfers for the 'survivors'.



spell in the Civic Forum, the LSU or in one case, the Communist party; and one comprising MPs who crossed between ODS, KDU- SL and US.

The 'loyalty score' for Slovakia is somewhat lower: only 57 of the 76 MPs that have served three or more terms remained within the same party throughout. Two five-term MPs transferred, but only between closely related parties: one from the Public Against Violence to the Christian KDĽ; and one from KDĽ to the party that emerged from the coalition, the SDKÚ. Likewise, the other MPs that crossed the floor and survived to serve multiple terms did not travel far: among the MPs who were elected four times there were two switches from the Democratic Party to the HZDS (one via SNS), one from SDK to HZDS, and one from SDK to Smer; there was one cross-over from SDK to ZRS among the MPs who served three periods; while the remaining survivors crossed between HZDS/SNS, DÚ, SDK and SDKÚ; or alternatively between KDĽ, SDK and SDKÚ.

Poland has the lowest score of long-term party loyalty, coming in just below Slovakia in percentage terms. Long-term loyalty characterises the former regime parties, the SLD and PSL, and the German minority party. The others who served five terms moved among the parties on the liberal centre-right: two from the UD via the AWS to the PO (one of them had also been elected for Solidarity in 1989), and one from the UD (through UW) to the PO. 32 of the 42 who served four terms stuck to the same party. The other ten include a Beer Lover who went to the SLD and two who joined the party from the PSL and UD; one defector who left the PSL to the new populist LPR; and six MPs who transferred among the post-Solidarity parties to end up in the PO or PiS.

In short, eight out of ten Central European MPs who served three terms or more stuck with the same party, and those who crossed the floor did not go very far. Political 'nomads' are hard to come by, and 'nomads' or 'refugees' with long term success even more so.

Conclusion – party stability and elite continuity

Comparative analysis of continuity and change in elected representatives in Central Europe since the collapse of communism confirms that the Hungarian, Czech, Slovak and Polish party systems have acquired a considerable degree of stability. In most cases elite turnover is close to what might be expected given electoral change; in the two countries with more electoral volatility elite stability is higher than expected; and the high-volatility 2001 election in Poland actually featured considerable elite stability. In cases of nominal changes to party labels because of name changes or organisational change, elite continuity is as high as expected. Moreover, upon closer inspection it turns out that elite stability is not a matter of a high number of politicians moving between parties like 'political nomads', or even of them escaping from parties in decline. The Hungarian data indicate that transfers between parties are rare, and the comparative data demonstrated that transfers are rare. Almost half of the successful direct transfers are the result of two events: the restructuring on the post-Solidarity right before the Polish 2001 election; and the transfers from two smaller parties to Fidesz as it established itself as the main party on the right in Hungary. However, a number of MPs, particularly in Poland, have made a comeback for a different party after spending one term out of parliament when their party fell below the threshold. Many, but not all, new parties thus include some deputies with previous experience. Practically all transfers are between politically

adjacent parties, and very few MPs have made more than one successful transfer. The vast majority of MPs that have served three or more terms have stuck with the same party, and the minority that has transferred has generally not travelled very far. In, short, very few MPs in Central Europe successfully transfer from one party to another, and MPs

Slovakia, seats and returning incumbents (own or inherited from other parties, including directly from the federal parliament)

	1990	1992	1994	1998	2002
SD	22	29	15	23	
VPN	48				
HZDS		74	61	43	36
SNS	22	15	9	14	
MKP	14	14	17	15	20
KDH*	31	18	17	16	15
DÚ*			15	12	
DS*	7			6	
SZ*	6		1	4	
SDSS*			2	4	
SDKÚ					28
ZRS			13		
SOP				13	
Smer					25
ANO					15
KSS					11

Six Slovak deputies from the old communist parliament were elected to the federal parliament in 1990.

* Elected as part of the SKD alliance in 1998; the SZ and SDSS won seats on the SD ticket in 1994.

Poland, seats and returning incumbents (own or inherited from other parties)

	1991	1993	1997	2001	2005
SLD*	60	171	164	216	55
UP*	4	41	0		
PSL	48	132	27	42	25
PPPP	16				
KLD	37	0			
UW/UD	62	74	60	0	
PO				65	133
KPN	46	22			
POC	44				
BBWR		16			
AWS			201	0	
ROP			6	0	
PiS				44	155
LPR				38	34
Samoobrona				53	56
MN	7	4	2	2	2
WAK	49	0			
Solidarity	27				
PL	28				
Others	32				

*The UP ran in alliance with SLD in 2001, as SLD-UP.

Offe, Claus (1991), "Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the