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**Explaining Support for Radical Right Parties in New Democracies:
The Limits of Structural Determinants and the Potentiality
of Civil Society**

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Europe has undergone a “Right turn” in politics over the last three decades, as evidenced by the continued success of radical right parties in Western European countries. Early studies of Western European radical right parties examined country level sociostructural factors for explaining variation in electoral support of radical right parties, but studies left unanswered if the same aggregate level factors are sufficient for explaining different levels of support that radical right parties secure outside of Western Europe. This paper builds upon the early studies of Western European radical right parties to examine whether structural factors – low economic growth, high unemployment, and high ethnic heterogeneity – are associated with high electoral support for radical right parties in the Central Eastern European EU member states from 1990 to 2010. The findings show that these factors are associated with support for radical right parties in some countries but not others. The paper then draws on theories of democratization to show that civic participation is a potentially important factor for understanding differences in support for radical right parties. This study contributes to a growing literature on the role of civic organizations in democratization and the body of knowledge on right-wing politics in Europe.

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Introduction

In the last three decades, Europe has undergone a “Right turn” in politics. Scholars often cite the continued electoral success of radical right parties as evidence for this shift in political attitudes in many European countries (Betz 2003; Norris 2005; Mudde 1996, 2007; Hainsworth 2000, 2008; Lubbers et al. 2002). According to these studies, radical right parties’ electoral support presents a potential threat to social democratic principles, such as multiculturalism, social rights for ethnic minorities, and pluralism. When ringing the alarm bell of threat to democracy in Europe, however, scholars refer to only the western half of the European Union (EU). The new EU member states from Central Eastern Europe (CEE) are excluded from the analysis. Given the EU’s increasing economic and political integration, excluding CEE from the definition of Europe is no longer an option, especially when it comes to radical right parties.

In contrast to experts’ predictions that CEE’s economic and political instability combined with ethnic tension would lead to high support for radical right parties across the region, shared socio-historical conditions have not resulted in similar electoral outcomes for radical right parties. And when compared to Western Europe, such parties have not been as electorally successful in CEE (see Figure 1). Still, there is a great deal of variation in radical right parties’ electoral support across countries and over time. What explains this variation?

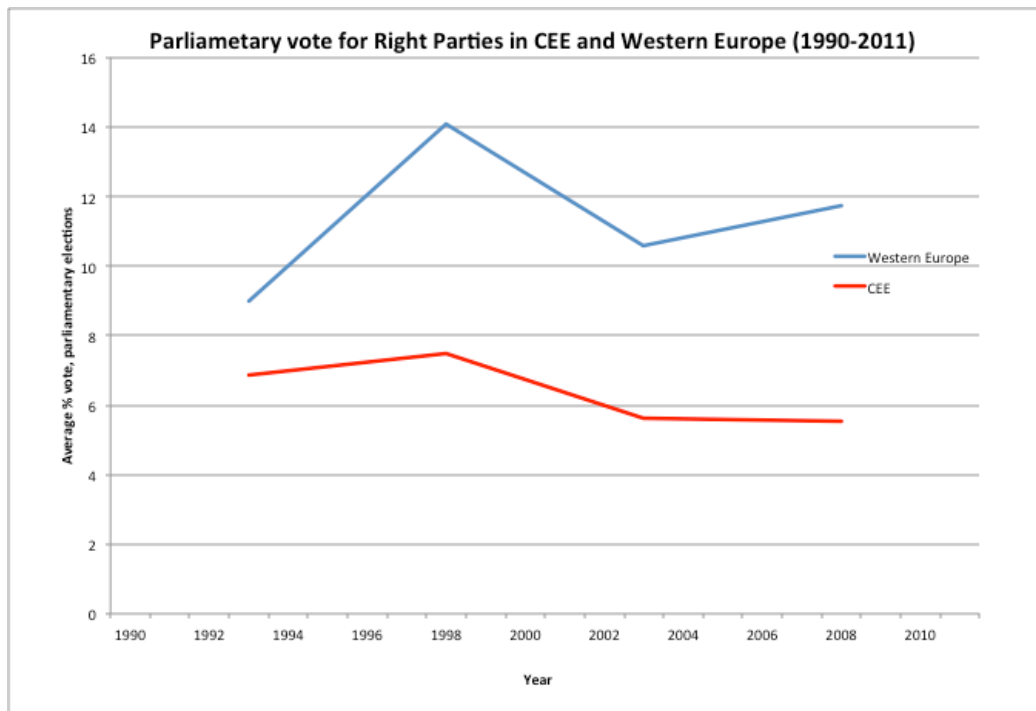
Early studies of Western European radical right parties examined country level sociostructural factors for explaining variation in electoral support of radical right parties (Betz 1994; Jackman and Volpert 1996). Since then, scholars have moved on to examine the relationships between mainstream and radical right parties in Western Europe, leaving unanswered if sociostructural factors are sufficient for explaining different levels of support that radical right parties secure in CEE countries (see Arzheimer 2009). This paper builds upon the

early studies of Western European radical right parties to examine whether structural factors – low economic growth, high unemployment, and high ethnic heterogeneity – are associated with high electoral support for radical right parties in the Central Eastern European EU member states from 1990 to 2010.¹

The paper proceeds in three parts. In part one, I propose a definition of radical right parties based on the notion of ethnic nationalism. Part two offers a step-by-step examination of how structural economic, political, and ethnic conditions affect support for the radical right in CEE. In this part, I first examine the economic theories derived from the Western European context. I show that at the aggregate level, commonly cited economic factors, such as unemployment and economic development, are associated with support for radical right parties in some CEE countries but not others. I then present data on ethnic heterogeneity in CEE to show that the most ethnically diverse countries do not have the most successful radical right parties. In part three, I draw on theories of democracy and civic participation to suggest a new avenue for research focused on the relationship between radical right parties and civic organizations.

¹ The ten countries are Romania, Latvia, Slovakia, Poland, Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Estonia, Czech Republic, and Lithuania. These countries were selected because they are all recent EU members (Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007, all others in 2004) and underwent a democratic transformation in 1989-1991. As such, these countries possess many historical commonalities and face similar future challenges.

Figure 1. Western and Central Eastern Europe Compared²



Part One: Defining Radical Right Parties in Western Europe and CEE

What is “radical” and what is “right” about such parties as France’s National Front or Hungary’s *Jobbik*? Can, and should, these parties be placed in the same category? While much ink has been spilled on arguments over definitions, there is still a lack of scholarly consensus on how to define the “radical right” and which parties to include in this definition (see Anastasakis 2000; Merkl 2003). Various labels such as extreme right, far right, radical right-wing populism, populist radical right, and national populism – just to name a few – have produced a “war of words” without reaching a definitive conclusion (Mudde 2007). In this section, I suggest that the difficulty in defining the radical right in both Western and Central Eastern Europe has to do with

² Source: *European Election Database*. Data are grouped by quartiles (1990-1994, 1995-1999, 2000-2004, 2005-2010). Due to the nature of parliamentary election cycles, this ensures that at least one election from each country is represented.

the fact that such parties do not clearly align along the Left-Right dimension in terms of economic ideology, historical legacies, social policy, or the parties' constituencies. I argue that grouping both Western and CEE radical right parties together only makes sense if such parties are defined in terms of their cultural ideology, which is based on romanticized notions of pure nationhood, exclusionary politics of minority groups, and xenophobic rhetoric especially in relation to non-white, non-Christian immigrant groups. This ethnic vision of nationhood, as opposed to a civic one, is precisely what makes these parties both "radical" and "right" (see Billig 1995; Brown 1999).

Left-Right Complexity in Economics and Historical Legacies

Neoliberal economic policies are most closely associated with the Right in political and sociological theory (see Harvey 2005). Kitschelt and McGann's (1995) influential "winning formula" thesis proposed that radical right parties enjoyed electoral success in the 1980s because they combined xenophobic rhetoric with neoliberal economic policy (see also Betz 1994). According to Kitschelt, this also explained why some radical right parties were more successful than others in shifting electoral support and influencing mainstream parties. Beginning in the 1980s, however, Western radical right parties generally dropped neoliberalism from their economic agendas in a shift toward economic protectionism and redistribution policies.

As opposed to the egalitarian vision of universal social rights, however, radical right parties advocate for a social policy that supports extensive social redistribution to a favored, national ethnic group and limits government transfers to 'unpopular' ethnic groups. Scholars refer to this brand of social protection as "welfare chauvinism" to emphasize the combination of exclusionary ideology and support for extensive welfare spending. In Western Europe,

immigrants are usually targeted as unjust recipients of welfare benefits whose social rights to such state funds should be rescinded. Extreme-right parties in CEE have the same xenophobic characteristics as their counterparts in the West, but given lower immigration levels in CEE welfare chauvinism targets indigenous ethnic minorities, such as the Roma and Jews.

The ideological shift from neoliberalism to social protection has shifted the base of support for radical right parties in Western Europe in particular. Beginning in the late 1980s, workers and middle classes turned out to support the radical right agenda leading to a process of “proletarianization” of the radical right electorate in the 1990s (Betz 1994). Workers and lower middle classes, the traditional constituency of the Left, continue to be overrepresented among radical right party supporters (Rydgren 2007). Thus, neither radical right parties’ economic policies nor who votes for such parties fully capture the definition of the radical right.

Historical legacies present a similar dilemma. Fascist regimes, or the “Old Right,” serve as a reference point for the “New Right” radical parties in Europe. And at the ideological and practical level, there is a clear but implicit commonality between the New and Old Right’s emphasis on ethnic purity and homogeneity. However, both Western European and CEE radical right parties have sought to distance themselves from the inter-war legacies of fascism, even while relying on similar symbolism (e.g. Austrian Freedom Party’s black uniforms) and scapegoating rhetoric. The New Right parties differ from the Old Right on their stance on democracy: contemporary radical right parties are anti-establishment and are critical of liberal democracy, but they are not anti-democratic per se. Instead, they have the advantage of never being in power, which provides radical right parties a standpoint for criticizing established parties and policies. To capture the antiestablishment rhetoric of the new radical right, Mudde (1996) refers to these parties as “antiparty parties.”

As in Western Europe, radical right parties in CEE are critical of mainstream politics and liberal democratic regimes. CEE parties, such as the Hungarian *Jobbik* party and the Romanian *Greater Romania Party*, also rely on implicit fascist symbolism (uniforms, red and black colors, slightly altered symbolism) but have purged overt references to the Old Right. Yet, the CEE differs from Western Europe in that the state socialist legacy looms large on the political horizon. Successor communist parties are still active in many CEE countries and receive a consistent, though minor, share of the vote (Kuzio 2008). Whereas in Western Europe communist or far left parties are progressive, in CEE they are reactionary and culturally conservative. Therefore, radical right parties and communist successor parties often cooperate and become strange bedfellows in CEE (Ishiyama 1998).

In contemporary CEE politics, the traditional Left-Right spectrum is murky. On the far left, communist parties draw on the legacy of the Soviet era to advocate for a return to law and order, stricter moral guidelines, and extensive social spending. On the far right, radical right parties advocate for the exact same policies but they add an ethnic vision of national belonging (Minkenberg 2002). Since many of the post-socialist states were never independent nations even prior to Soviet dominance, an ethnic vision of belonging is a relatively new concept. Thus, communist parties are reactionary, a term usually associated with the Right, and radical right nationalist parties are progressive, a term usually associated with the Left. Given this murkiness, radical right parties can only be defined in terms of cultural issues related to national identity (Betz and Johnson 2004).

The Cultural Radical Right: Ethnic Nationalism

Ethnic nationalism is the distinguishing feature of radical right parties in Western Europe and CEE.³ The doctrine of ethnic nationalism defines national belonging on racial, ethnic, or ancestral identities. In this version of nationalism, the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) of the nation includes only a privileged, “pure” national group and excludes other foreign elements, such as non-white immigrant Muslim in Western Europe or the indigenous Roma or Jew in CEE (Mudde 2007). In contrast to multiculturalism, which states that ethnic minorities can maintain their traditions in conjunction with political participation in the nation-state, ethnic nationalism or ethno-pluralism “states that to preserve the unique national characters of different peoples, they have to be kept separated. Mixing of different ethnicities only leads to cultural extinction” (Rydgren 2007:244). Whereas traditional forms of racism include a hierarchical ranking of ethnic groups, ethno-pluralism emphasizes a “separate but equal” ideology. Thus, for the radical right, the ideal nation is an ethnocracy characterized by the dominance of an idealized homogenous ethnic group. As such, radical right parties see themselves as engaging in a culture war with the Left or even centrist parties that support policies which erode ethno-nationalist dominance (Betz and Johnson 2004).

The ethno-nationalist ideology is particularly powerful in European countries where EU expansion and consolidation blur national boundaries. The EU *acquis communautaire* requires that member states give up certain national rights to the supra-national EU polity, including control over economic trade, financial policy, and acceptance of human rights legislation. For radical right parties and their supporters, this move towards a supra-national system implies a

³ The new radical right’s focus on ethnic nationalism has a long tradition going back to the eighteenth century German literary critic and philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder who elaborated the vision of nation based on common tradition and cultural practices (Holmes 2000).

loss of national identity and culture. A recent study of Western Europe by Gomez-Reino and Llamazares (2011) finds a significant link between individuals' attitudes towards the EU and voting for a radical right party: an Eurosceptic attitude is a better predictor of voting for the radical right than a xenophobic attitude. While the finding is tentative, the research still suggests that individuals turn to the radical right because they see EU expansion as a threat to their economic welfare or cultural traditions. Indeed, some of the most successful radical right parties in Western Europe, such as the National Front in France or the Freedom Party in Austria, have incorporated a critique of the EU project into their cultural ideology. In CEE, radical right parties have also picked up on citizens' discontent with the EU accession process, which infringes upon national governments' jurisdiction (Mudde 2007). EU-skepticism is the flip side of ethnic nationalism in radical right parties' cultural agenda.

In sum, whereas economic and social policy platforms can waver, the cultural dimension that includes an ethnic notion of nation is a key feature of radical right parties' ideologies. In this paper, I use the term "radical right" to refer to parties that espouse an ethnic vision of nationhood and are explicitly anti-immigrant or anti-minority. I examine voting trends for radical right parties in national parliamentary elections in ten CEE countries, 1990-2010. To categorize parties as "radical right," I compared party classifications in secondary literature (Mudde 2007; Rose and Munro 2003; Bustikova 2009; Ramet 2010) and in two surveys: Klingemann et al.'s (2006) party platform survey that classifies European parties into party families based on a coding scheme of parties' platforms 1990-2003, and Benoit and Laver's (2006) expert panel survey on CEE. In addition, I read the party platforms of newer right parties to account for the time lag in the literature. In total, I identified 42 right-wing parties in CEE, active between 1990 and 2010. To obtain national parliamentary election results, I used the NSD European Election

database⁴ and the University of Essex election database.⁵ In some cases, more than one radical right party was active in an election, in which case the total vote is pooled. This results in a total of 50 elections.

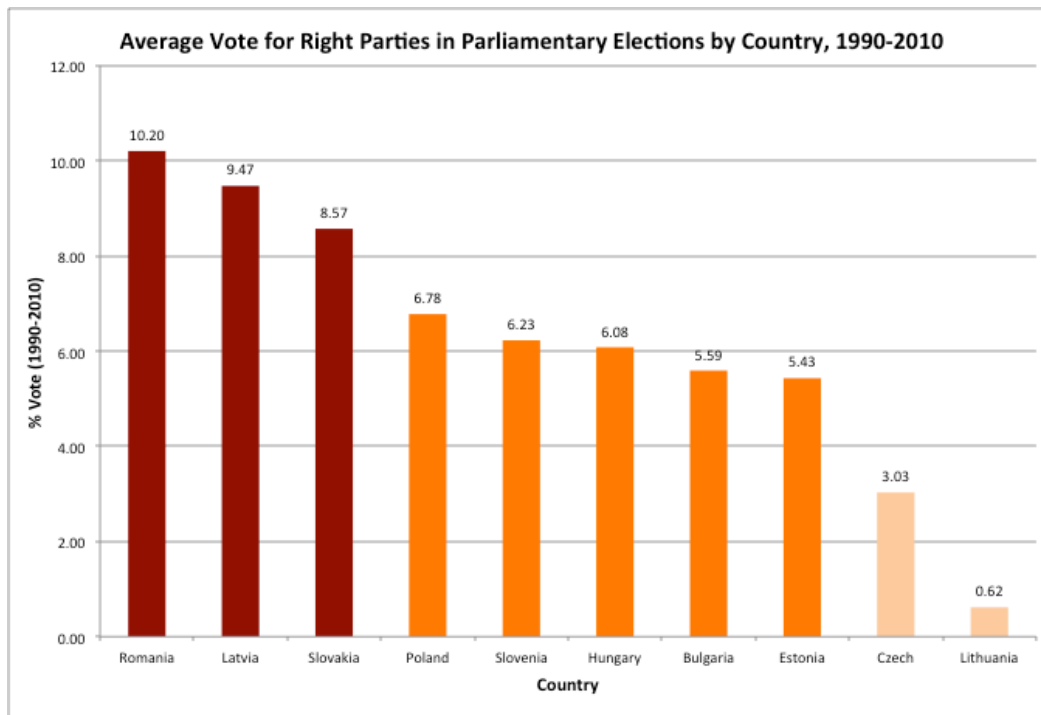
Part Two: Economic Conditions and Ethnic Difference

Structural perspectives examine how macro-level socioeconomic factors, such as unemployment, economic growth, and ethnic heterogeneity, affect radical right parties' returns at the polls. Figure 2 shows the mean vote for radical right parties in CEE by country in all parliamentary elections from 1990 to 2010, sorted in descending order by average vote. The figure shows that CEE countries fall into three categories of support: high-support countries above the regional mean of 5.8 percent (Romania, Latvia, and Slovakia), medium support countries near the regional mean (Poland, Slovenia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Estonia), and low-support countries below the mean (Czech Republic and Lithuania). Grouping countries by support level provides a clearer overview of the region. For the rest of the paper, I will be referring to these three groupings instead of individual countries.

⁴ <http://www.nsd.uib.no/>

⁵ <http://www2.essex.ac.uk/>

Figure 2: Cross-national Variation in Support for Right Parties in Central Eastern Europe



Unemployment and Economic Development (GDP)⁶

Unemployment is a particularly crucial variable for explaining support for radical right parties because it is both a measure of a country's economic health and also one of the main grievances that radical right-wing parties launch at immigrants or ethnic minorities. Using a strategy of scapegoating, radical right parties consistently link immigrants or ethnic minorities with increased unemployment (Jackman and Volpert 1996). Consequently, political scapegoating of this kind should emerge during times of high unemployment when individuals are

⁶ Economic growth is measured in terms of GDP per capita as provided by the World Bank. Unemployment rates come from World Bank Development Indicators, IMF World Economic Outlook database, and the International Labor Organization (ILO). Because the CEE region underwent geographic restructuring in the early 1990s, CEE countries gained sovereignty at different points in time. In some cases, such as the Baltic States, unemployment rates prior to 1992 are not available from a general survey. National statistics bureaus in each country measured unemployment differently than the standard calculated rate (percent of labor force seeking employment), resulting in much lower reported rates that are incomparable cross-nationally. The same is true for Czech Republic and Slovakia, for which unemployment rates are not available prior to 1993.

hypothetically more likely to place blame for their economic misfortunes on an outsider group. In turn, voters may turn to a radical right political party that is able to speak to their grievances and provide easy answers. According to this logic, which stems from relative deprivation theories (Gurr 1970), there should be a positive relationship between unemployment rates and support for radical right parties.

However, the results are mixed. Some studies find a positive correlation (Jackman and Volpert 1996) and others a negative one (Lubbers et al. 2002; Knigge 1998; Arzheimer and Carter 2006). Similarly, there is no consensus on how economic downturns in general, measured as GDP per capita, affect the fortunes of radical right-wing parties. Hofstadter (2002) suggests that identity politics, as practiced by the radical right, become more salient during periods of economic affluence, not economic decline. There is some evidence for this view in Western Europe, where the Austrian FPO enjoyed its highest levels of support during a period of low unemployment and tapering immigration (Art 2006). In CEE, however, there is no clear evidence on how national unemployment rates and economic health affect support for radical right parties.

Figure 3 shows average unemployment rates and GDP per capita for the three country groups in comparison to average support for radical right parties from 1990 to 2010. If the hypothesis that increased unemployment and economic decline contribute to success of the radical right is correct, then unemployment should be highest and GDP lowest in the high-support countries. Average unemployment is in fact highest (10.81 percent) in the expected countries but by only one percentage point in comparison to the medium support countries and by 1.7 percent in comparison to the low-support countries. The differences in average radical right support are far larger: Radical right parties in high-support countries are 3.4 percent more successful than in middle-support countries and 7.6 percent more successful than in low-support

countries. Average per capita GDP is lowest in the high-support group (\$5,195), which is \$1,792 and \$1,473 lower than in the middle- and low-support countries, respectively. The differences between the middle- and low-support countries are small: middle-support countries exhibit an unemployment rate only .7 percent higher than the low-support countries, but GDP is higher in the middle-support countries by a small margin of \$319.30.

These data suggest that in CEE countries with relatively successful radical right parties, economic conditions may partially explain the high level of support. Correlation does not equal causation, but the descriptive statistics show that lower economic development and deprivation correspond to electoral support for radical right parties in some countries. I now turn to examining the trend in voting, unemployment and GDP over time in the three high-support countries.

Figure 3: Unemployment and Economic Growth (1990-2010)

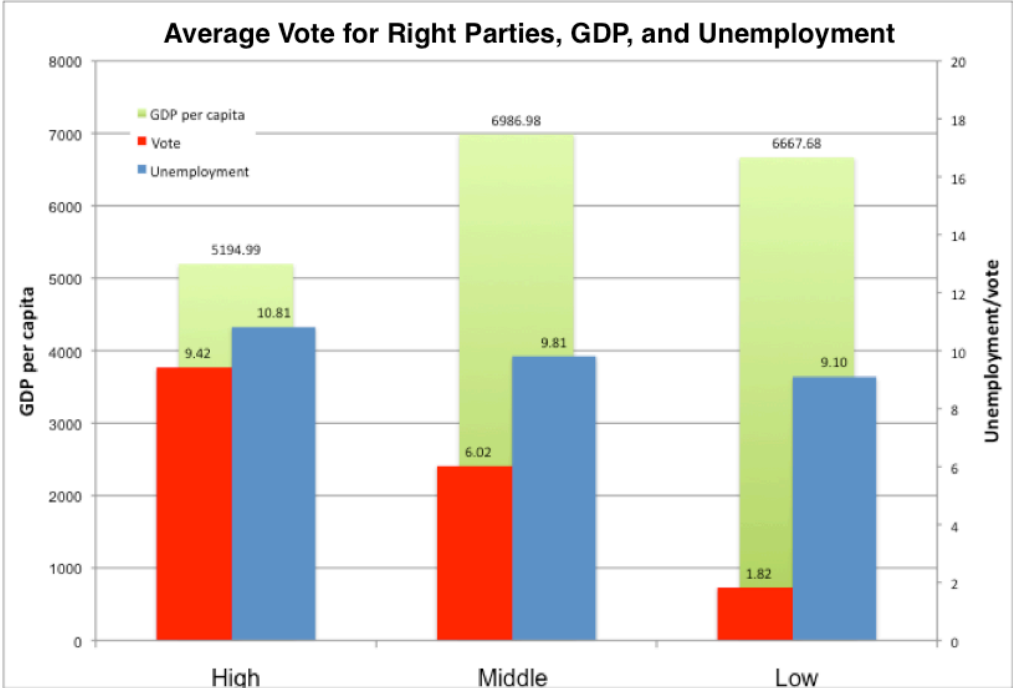


Figure 4: Unemployment, GDP and Support for Right Parties in High Support Countries, 1990-2010

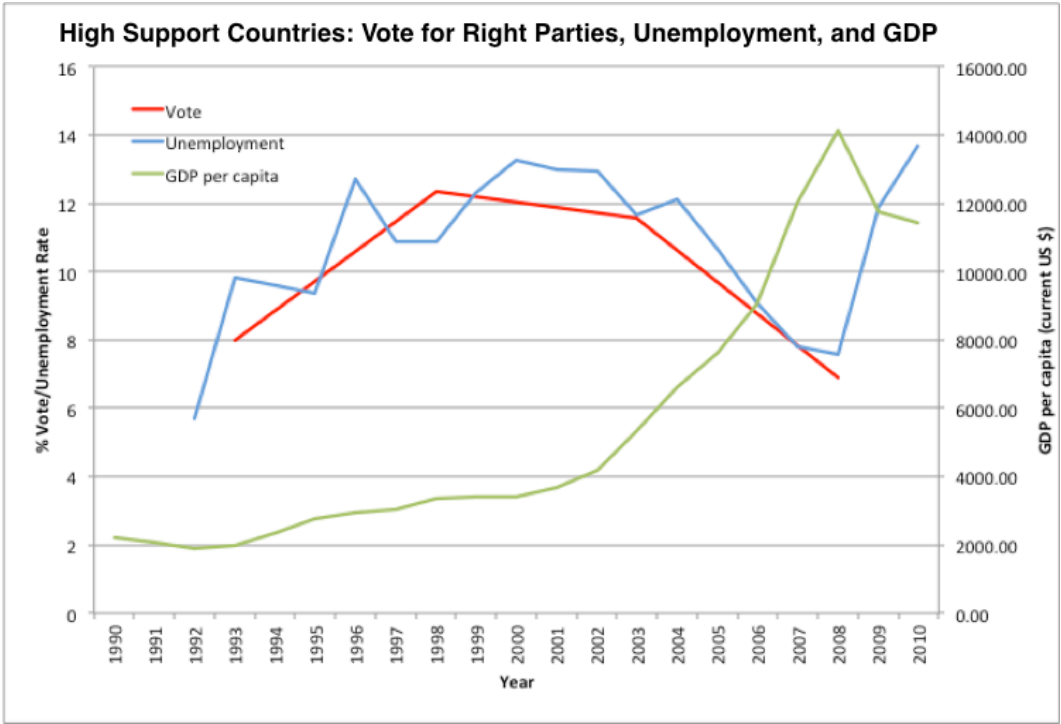


Figure 4 displays average support for radical right parties, unemployment, and GDP per capita for the three high-support countries, Latvia, Slovakia, and Romania, from 1990 to 2010. The unemployment trend directly follows the voting pattern until 2008 when GDP per capita drops. Both the increase in unemployment and the decrease in GDP correspond to the financial crisis that affected all European countries. The trend in GDP per capita in these three countries reflects the overall trend in the region: dramatic increase through the 1990s, then a faster rate of increase in the mid-2000s due to EU membership, followed by a drop during the financial crisis. Because GDP follows the same trend across all CEE countries, it can be treated as a constant, making its effect as an explanatory variable questionable. In the other seven countries, the unemployment rate has no relation to voting patterns whatsoever. Again, this suggests that

economic indicators may only matter in some countries and not others.⁷

These longitudinal trends suggest that: 1. Economic development is not a good predictor of variation in support for radical right parties, and 2. Unemployment may be an important factor for support in high-support countries only.

Ethnic Heterogeneity

Studies suggest that in Western Europe immigration is a necessary but not sufficient condition for sustained radical right-wing party support (Mudde 2007; Norris 2005; Givens 2005; Carter 2005). As with unemployment rates, some studies have found a positive correlation between high immigration rates and right-wing support (Knigge 1998; Gibson 2002; Lubbers et al. 2002) while others have found no relationship (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Norris 2005). With so few cases, there are too many outliers to make a compelling argument: Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands have been high immigration countries with low long-term support for radical right parties. On the other hand, Austria and Finland are low immigration countries with successful radical right parties (Art 2011).

A potential explanation for low support for radical right parties in CEE is that low immigration in the region, as opposed to high immigration in Western Europe, provides no clear out-group for scapegoating by radical right parties. However, such an explanation oversimplifies the unique historical path of development in CEE. To illustrate this point, let us consider the Baltic States, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, which share many characteristics in terms of historical, economic, and political development. Officially, only the Baltic States were formal members of the Soviet Union. Whereas in other Eastern Bloc countries, the Soviet Union

⁷ A pooled cross-sectional time series model did not show a statistically significant relationship between support for radical right parties and unemployment, but given the small N, these results cannot be relied upon.

established satellite regimes with some official autonomy, the Baltics did not have formal sovereignty and were essentially colonized by the Soviet state after World War II. This process included instituting Russian as the official language of all state institutions and incentivizing Russian citizens to move to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The mass numbers of ethnic Russians in the three states, who were seen as colonizers, presented a perfect opportunity for nationalist parties to gain support. However, among the three, only Latvia has had relatively successful radical right parties with an average vote of 9.47 percent in parliamentary elections between 1990 and 2010. Estonia's radical right parties received 5.43 percent and Lithuania's were the least successful in the entire CEE region with an average vote of .62 percent.

Following the collapse of state socialism, the newly independent states had to define themselves as nations: imagined communities based on a set of cultural commonalities, such as shared myths and memories, and united by common laws and economic institutions (Anderson 1983; Smith 1986). CEE's experience with national identity suppression during the Soviet era produced a situation in which an ethnic vision of nation served a particularly powerful frame (Smith 1995). As Smith writes, "the ethnic vision [of nation] has for some time underpinned a majority of Europe's nationalisms and it continues to do so, *especially in Eastern Europe*" (my emphasis, Smith 1995:14). When tied to visions of nationhood, longstanding ethnic cleavages have the potential to be more destabilizing than the presence of immigrants. One must only think of the many instances of ethnic cleansing that have taken place in this part of Europe. Such ethnic cleavages provide a potentially stronger base for radical parties, especially during times of instability and national identity formation. Thus, the absence of high immigration does not rule out success for right-wing parties. On the contrary, parties that purport ethnic visions of

nationhood should be particularly successful in CEE countries with high ethnic heterogeneity.⁸

Measures of ethnic, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity are displayed in Tables 2 and 3. I use three measures of heterogeneity as calculated by Alesina et al. (2003): ethnic, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity.⁹ The indices are based on a single year, but ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities are slow moving variables, which means that they do not fluctuate much within the relatively short time period of twenty years. The heterogeneity index for ethnicity, language, and religion is the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a population belong to different groups: the higher the index, the more diverse the country. Table 1 shows ethnic, religious, and ethnic heterogeneity measures by country. Table 2 displays the measures as averages by country group.

Table 1: Probability Measures of Heterogeneity by Country*

| Country | Ethnic | Linguistic | Religious |
|----------------|--------|------------|-----------|
| Bulgaria | 0.402 | 0.303 | 0.597 |
| Czech Republic | 0.322 | 0.323 | 0.659 |
| Estonia | 0.506 | 0.494 | 0.499 |
| Hungary | 0.152 | 0.030 | 0.524 |
| Latvia | 0.567 | 0.580 | 0.556 |
| Lithuania | 0.322 | 0.322 | 0.414 |
| Poland | 0.118 | 0.047 | 0.171 |
| Romania | 0.307 | 0.172 | 0.237 |
| Slovakia | 0.254 | 0.255 | 0.566 |
| Slovenia | 0.222 | 0.220 | 0.287 |

*Source: Alesina et al. 2003

⁸ Immigration and heterogeneity are not qualitatively the same. However, the point is that either can serve as a basis for an ethnically based political ideology, particularly during unstable times of national identity. More research is needed to determine the effects of heterogeneity versus immigration on support for radical right parties.

⁹ Prior to Alesina et al.'s index, ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity measures were combined and based on a 1964 Soviet study, *Atlas Narodov Mira*. The so called "ethnolinguistic fractionalization variable" (ELF) resulting from these data remained the standard measure of heterogeneity in social science. However, as Alesina et al. show, disaggregating ethnic, linguistic, and religious fractionalization produces different results in relation to economic indicators: the same may be true for voting behavior.

Table 2: Averaged Probability Measures of Heterogeneity by Country Groups

| Country Group | Ethnic | Linguistic | Religious | Composite |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
| High | 0.38 | 0.34 | 0.45 | 0.39 |
| Middle | 0.28 | 0.22 | 0.42 | 0.30 |
| Low | 0.32 | 0.32 | 0.54 | 0.39 |

As expected, high-support countries are on average more ethnically and linguistically diverse than low-support countries (see Table 2). Interestingly, the differences in ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity are smaller for the high- and low- support countries than for the high- and middle-support countries. Middle-support countries are the least ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse when compared to high- or low-support countries. The fact that low-support countries are the most religiously diverse suggests that religious heterogeneity may not be important for predicting support for radical right parties. However, the role of ethnic heterogeneity, perhaps the most important measure of the three given radical right parties' anti-ethnic minority platforms, is unclear. For instance, the probability of two random individuals belonging to different ethnic groups in high-support countries is only .04 higher than in low-support countries, and .1 higher than in middle-support countries. The relationship becomes even less clear when the heterogeneity measures are averaged together, as in the column labeled "composite" in Table 2. Here, high- and low-support countries have the exact same level of heterogeneity, and middle-support countries are not far behind. These data suggest that heterogeneity may not be a good predictor of support for radical right parties. Furthermore, ethnic heterogeneity, in particular, may only be relevant for radical right party support in high-support countries.

Part Three: Civic Participation and Radical Right Movements

Structural explanations could provide a partial answer to why radical right parties tend to be less successful in some CEE countries and not others. However, missing from this analysis is how radical right movements garner and maintain support and the role that civil society might play in building the social networks, membership base and organizational resources needed to sustain radical right parties. Civil society refers to the associational space between the state and private sphere, consisting of formal voluntary organizations, professional associations, recreational clubs, religious groups, veterans' organizations, and local or community organizations (Howard 2003). Studies of right-wing parties in Europe do not directly address the relationship between such civic organizations and radical right parties. But to understand how radical right parties develop their organizational capacity for recruitment of new members and sustain support between election cycles, examining the association between civic participation and support for the radical right is crucial. Theories of democracy have long highlighted the importance of civic participation for democracy and political participation. Empirical studies show that civic and political participation are inherently connected; individuals who participate in civic life are more likely to participate in political life. Here, I draw on and extend these theories of democracy to the CEE context. I then present data on civic participation in CEE.

According to the classical Tocquevillian tradition, a robust civil society is necessary for the success of liberal democracy. In addition to nurturing civic voluntarism and political engagement, both necessary ingredients for a healthy democracy, civic associations act as a “buffer” simultaneously constraining the reach of the state while shielding elites from mass demands (Tocqueville 1988; Putnam 2000;). Yet, two strands of research stemming from the Tocquevillian tradition pose contradictory predictions for the relationship between civic

organizations/participation and radical right politics.

According to mass society theory, societies lacking a well populated associational sphere that encourages cross-cutting affiliations (or multiple organizational memberships) are left with a “mass” of atomized individuals who are susceptible to authoritarian or totalitarian mass movements (Kornhauser 1959). In such societies, democracy is difficult to sustain, because individuals do not have an avenue for pursuing collective goals and engaging in politics. Picking up on this strand of thought, Putnam (2000) argues that without sustained civic participation, the core of participatory democracy is threatened as individuals become more disconnected from the government and each other. Extending this perspective to the case of radical right parties in CEE, mass society theory suggests that radical right parties should be more successful in vulnerable societies with an underdeveloped associational sphere and low civic engagement.

More recent research challenges the mass society perspective to show that a robust associational sphere with high participation can lead to authoritarian regimes, such as state fascism, as opposed to democracy (Berman 1997; Riley 2005, 2010). Examining the historical cases of fascism in Germany (Berman 1997), Italy, and Spain (Riley 2005), these studies find the roots of fascism took hold in regions where civic participation was strongest, because the party was able to co-opt civic associations in support of its agenda. Instead of acting as schools of democracy and pluralism, civic associations with active participation can facilitate the spread of a radical, anti-democratic agenda. In other words, there is no guarantee that high civic participation inevitably leads to the positive outcome of liberal democracy. Thus, whereas mass society theory suggests that radical right parties should succeed where civic participation is low, more recent research would predict the opposite: radical right parties should succeed where civic participation is high.

How does the CEE region fare in terms of civic participation? Overall, the CEE region exhibits very low levels of civic participation in comparison to older democracies: average organizational membership per person in the post-communist region is .91, while in older democracies the average membership is 3.41 (Howard 2003). Individuals in CEE tend to participate less than Western Europeans in all types of organizations across the board: religious organizations, sports/recreational clubs, educational/cultural groups, labor unions, political parties, environmental groups, and professional associations (Howard 2003). As the data in Table 3 show, non-participation increased in all countries except Slovakia and Slovenia, where it actually decreased from 1990 to 1999.¹⁰ However, this change in participation rates is likely due to the drop in labor union membership across all countries with the collapse of state socialism and mandatory union membership. Slovakia, Slovenia, and Czech Republic experienced the smallest drop in union membership and also the smallest change in non-participation. Notably, the increase in non-participation in both Bulgaria and Latvia is also the result of decreased political party membership (7.7 percent drop in Bulgaria and 16.5 percent drop in Latvia), which was not clearly voluntary during the socialist years.

¹⁰ Measures of civil society participation are from two waves of the *World Values Survey* conducted in 1990-91 and 1999-2001 and one wave of the *European Values Survey*, conducted in 2008. These surveys asked respondents the following identical question: "Are you a member of [insert type of group]?" The questionnaire consistently includes at least 15 types of civic organizations, such as women's groups, environmental organizations, labor unions, or professional associations. The questionnaire also allows respondents to indicate if they do not belong to any of the listed groups by marking "belong to none." This negative category is of primary interest, because it is an overall measure of (non)participation and serves as an indicator of general civil society development in a country. When civil society is underdeveloped and participation is low, mass society theory suggests that radical movements should be more successful. In other words, when non-participation is high, radical right parties should have broader electoral support.

Table 3. Non-Participation: Percent Respondents Who Do Not Belong to Any Organization

| | 1990/91 | 1999 | 2008 |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Bulgaria | 59.3 | 79.6 | 81.3 |
| Czech Republic | 37.8 | 40.5 | 49.5 |
| Estonia | 26.8 | 66.8 | 60.1 |
| Hungary | 49.8 | 70.8 | 79.6 |
| Latvia | 31.7 | 68.6 | 71.8 |
| Lithuania | 39.9 | 83.4 | 73.6 |
| Poland | 58.6 | 74.2 | 77.8 |
| Romania | 69.6 | 78.9 | 76.4 |
| Slovakia | 44.4 | 35.3 | 34.5 |
| Slovenia | 61.4 | 48.3 | 36.6 |

Figure 5 plots the data from Table 3 to show the trend in increasing non-participation over time. Participation rates in voluntary and civic organizations dropped in the region overall, but the picture changes when examining the change in non-participation across country groups. Figure 6 shows the absolute change in non-participation between 1991 and 2008 for the three country groups. High-support countries experienced the lowest average drop in participation rates. Or stated differently, non-participation decreased the least (12.32 percent) in the high-support group, compared with 15.92 percent for middle-support countries, and 22.72 percent for low-support countries. The relationship is quite clear: in countries where radical right parties were most successful, participation dropped the least, which suggests that there is a possible connection between sustained civic participation and electoral support for radical right parties.

Figure 5: Trends in Civic Participation in CEE by Country, 1991-2008

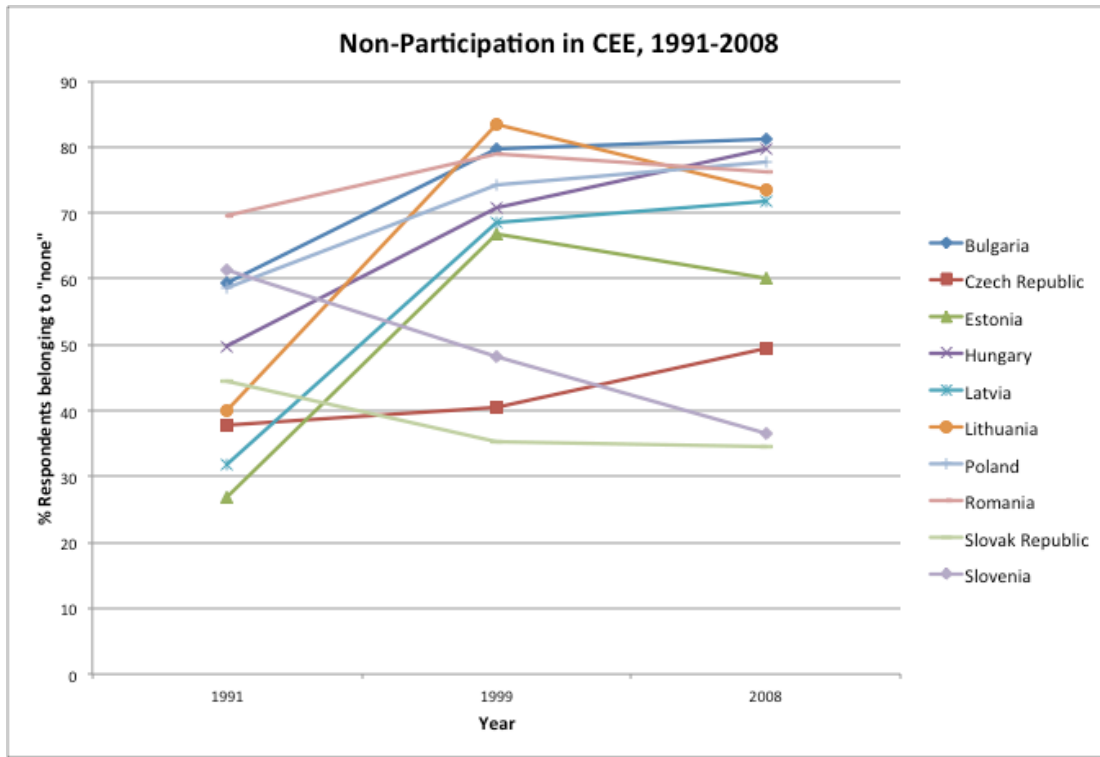
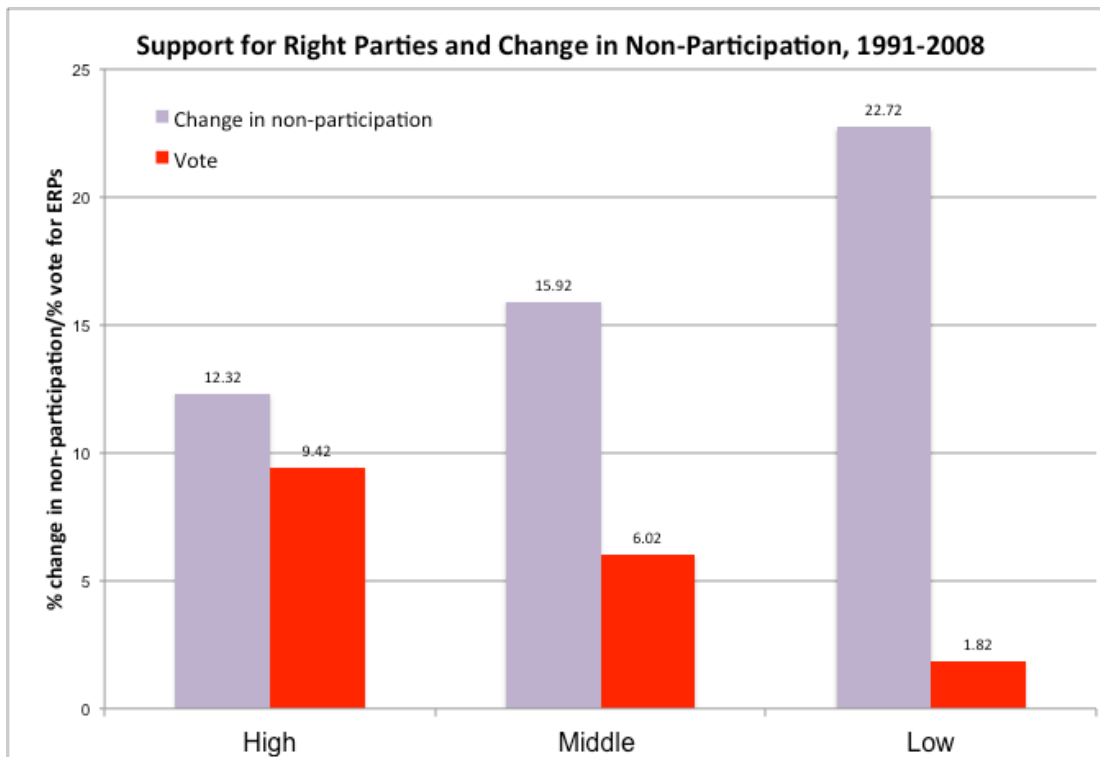


Figure 6: Change in Non-Participation and Support for Right Parties in CEE, 1991-2008



These data provide some support for both sides of the civil society debate: civic participation drops in CEE immediately following the collapse of state socialism, creating an organizational vacuum. However, participation rates decrease differently across countries: countries with particularly successful radical right parties also exhibit the smallest drop in participation while countries with the least successful radical right parties experience a drastic drop in participation rates for the same time period.

Conclusion

Research often cites structural variables, such as unemployment, economic growth and ethnic heterogeneity as key explanatory factors of support for radical right parties in Western Europe. Examining these variables in the CEE context, however, produces mixed results. Unemployment and ethnic heterogeneity have a positive relationship with support for radical right parties in CEE, but only in countries where support for radical right parties is already high. And even in those countries, the relationship seems tenuous. In the majority of countries (seven out of ten), unemployment and ethnic heterogeneity do not follow the expected trend. Low GDP per capita may matter, but again, the connection only exists in high-support countries. This study reveals the limits of both structural variables and aggregate level data for understanding the complexities associated with explaining support for radical right parties in CEE.

Examining participation in civic organizations yields equally mixed results: a drop in participation is associated with increased support for radical right parties in the 1990s, which follows the predictions of the mass-society thesis. Yet, participation remains the strongest precisely in countries with the most successful right-wing parties. This finding suggests that examining the role of civic participation and engagement in the formation of radical right parties could be a fruitful avenue for future research.

A rarely addressed issue in research on political parties is the relationship between political parties and non-political organizations in civil society. Survey measures show that individuals in CEE are unlikely to participate in organizational life, such as voluntary groups and clubs (Howard 2003), and generally distrust political parties (Rose and Munro 2003). Studies often attribute this outcome to the legacy of state socialism: during the Soviet era, the state suppressed independent organization, which in turn left an institutional vacuum when the state collapsed in the early 1990s. However, state socialism may not be the most important historical legacy for understanding associational life in post-socialist countries. Often overlooked is the role of informal connections, most notable in the “second economy” of late state socialism (Grossman 1987) that penetrated every aspect of life before Soviet dissolution.

This culture of exchange, in which individuals relied on personal networks to acquire goods and services, still affects economic exchange in CEE countries today (Kus 2010). I suggest that it could also affect the practice of politics: Parties function like networks in civil society, forging linkages between individuals and organizations that are often invisible to survey measures. When parties fail at developing such networks, they fail at the polls as well. Instead of examining internal party structures, future research should challenge how we understand parties and move toward a vision of parties as networks (Bearman and Parigi 2009; Schwartz 1990).

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