

Analysing the political cleavages in post communist europe politics essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Over the past decades, Considerable attention has been paid to political cleavages in post-communist Eastern Europe. Those who investigate this issue, tried to establish whether such cleavages exist, to map their character, and to explain their formation theoretically. Research initially focused on whether communist rule had created distinctive forms of cleavage in the region as a whole, or indeed obliterated social capacity to form any structured social or ideological divisions. The debates around these issues has turned to accounting for the formation and variation in cleavages by reference to factors such as long-standing cultural legacies, forms of communist rule and modes of transition from it, the effects of social structure and individual social experience in the post-communist period, and the impact of institutions and party strategies(Whitefield 2002).

In my essay I examine the emergence of parties in post-communist Romania and Hungary concluding that the theoretical basis of cleavages (the Lipset-Rokkan model) is almost impossible to apply in these countries. However, I argue that even an incipient cleavage suggests at least two questions about the significance of an ideological framework and a stable party system.

1. Introduction

The concept of a political cleavage is contested in important ways (Daalder 1966, Eckstein 1966, Dogan 1967, Zuckerman 1982, Bartolini & Mair 1990, Neto & Cox 1997), and whether cleavages exist in post-communist Eastern Europe might depend substantially on how the term is defined. Some authors who find that cleavages are weak or absent in the region use a rigorous definition of the term (Lawson 1999). It is argued here, however, that even

when the definitional barrier is raised to a high level, political cleavages are in all likelihood present in the region(Whitefield 2002).

Many studies have found a link between pre-communist historical legacies and institutional choice. For example Kitschelt argues that pre-communist experiences had an influence on the communist regime which ultimately has an impact on party cleavages. Indeed, he argues that pre-communist 'experiences can be distinguished rather easily, but the length of the political liberalisation phase in the 1980s and the significance of having had two or three rounds of free elections since 1990 may be disputable. While I do not believe that isolating these pre communist legacies is necessarily, I do believe that pre-communist legacies must be included in any analysis of post-communist social cleavages. I suggest that history is very important for the cases of Romania and Hungary.

Furthermore, if we go back to Dalton, he insists that religious cleavage has followed the same pattern of decline as for the class cleavage. As he sees, one possible exception to the rule of declining social cleavages involves race and ethnicity. Nevertheless, even today, social, religious and ethnic identities of citizens still have explanatory power in examination of voting behavior (Nieuwbeerta, 1998; Knutsen & Scarbrough, 1995).

The question on the relation between a countries social cleavage structure and political outcomes has become of extra relevance in Eastern European nations after the collapse of totalitarian regimes. Since the velvet revolutions in 1989 the political party structure in these nations had to be build almost from scratch, the question rises, according to Nieuwbeerta(1998), whether

these new political systems developed in a way similar to how it is organized in Western nations. Therefore, to what extent are party systems in Eastern European nations based on major socio-economic cleavages in these nations? At first it seems like that most newly founded parties in Eastern Europe represent such cleavages. For example in Romania and Hungary Social-Democratic and Liberal parties were created, as well as religious and nationalist parties.

The concept of a political cleavage, however, is not universally regarded as useful by political observers of the post-communist world (White et al. 1997, Elster et al. 1998). Indeed, in a highly influential and controversial account published soon after the collapse of communist power, Fukuyama (1992) interpreted the event as an indicator of the end of ideological division across all modern societies, East European ones included. The collapse of communism could be seen as demonstrating either broad support for liberalism or, if we want to put the argument negatively, the absence of any alternative method of organizing modern society. From this perspective, although transition in the region would certainly have its winners and losers, the end of ideological competition meant that the political cleavages that had divided populations across industrial societies, most famously characterized by Lipset & Rokkan (1967), were anachronistic. Differences among politicians and choices among voters would in this context be based on who could best do the job of delivering on liberal, market, and democratic policies (Whitefield 2002). But whether cleavages were envisaged or not, scholarly interest in the cleavage structures (or lack thereof) in post-communist states was often strongly grounded in pessimistic assessments of

their putative effects on party competition and on the stability of these new democracies (Cirtautas 1994, Comisso 1997, Elster et al. 1998).

According to these ideas, there are at least two important questions that should be answered.

First, although the general shape of the cleavage structures of post-communism is better understood, the mechanisms for their formation are unclear or disputed. Most explanations of cleavages in more established democracies emphasize the importance of prior social organization in providing sources of interest and political allegiance among the public that allow coordination of voters and parties in structured and relatively stable ways (Sartori 1969, Przeworski 1985). Such prior social organization, however, was largely absent across Eastern Europe.

Second, in order to speak with full confidence about the existence of cleavages, it is necessary to see stability and persistence in social and ideological divisions, but naturally these conditions are only weakly established empirically. There are also differing theoretical expectations about the stability of the social and ideological divisions in politics.

Considerable volatility is evident in support for particular parties, and political parties themselves have often been short-lived, offering voters little opportunity to reward or punish them. But is this volatility of supply and demand for parties a sign of instability in the cleavage structure? For many countries, there is limited evidence available to test these possibilities because follow-up studies that might allow over-time comparisons have not yet taken place; however, it should be noted that where such evidence is

available, it points to more stability than change in the structure of underlying social and ideological divisions, which strengthens claims about the existence of cleavages in the region and especially in Romania and Hungary.

2. The cleavage hypothesis

If we want to understand the idea and the formation of cleavages, we should first find appropriate explanation. Party nationalisation might be explained as a consequence of the territorial structure of social or socio-economic divides (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Caramani (2004, p. 15) addresses the centre-periphery and the urban-rural cleavage as "territorial" divides, connected to low levels of nationalisation. In contrast, "functional" cleavages, such as the economic cleavage in Western Europe, do not have a territorial character, so that parties organising along such cleavages are highly nationalised (cf. Caramani, 2004; Cox, 1999, p. 159). The explanation of party system structures by cleavages has been criticised though, because cleavages do not convert into parties as a matter of course, but this is produced by the political system itself (Zielinski, 2002, p. 187). Looking at Central and Eastern Europe, only a few scholars are looking for similarities of political divisions with social cleavages in Western democracies (Kitschelt et al., 1999). The view overwhelms that cleavages, especially if they are narrowly defined, are of limited relevance in the region (Elster et al., 1998, pp. 247-270).

However, one social divide appears to be an exception to the rule: The ethnic divide is

salient in Central and Eastern Europe (Evans & Need, 2002) and helps many parties to

mobilise their voters (Elster et al., 1998, p. 252). Ethnic minorities exist in almost all countries, and they vote in large numbers for their own parties. Furthermore, issues related to ethnicity help as well nationalist parties of the titular nation to mobilise their voters.

The investigation of ethnic divides in order to explain party nationalisation degrees may yield

promising results, as many of the ethnic minorities in Central and Eastern European countries

are territorially settled. If such ethnic divides become manifest in party politics, then the

ethnic structure of a country will explain why the electoral strength of political parties varies

across regions.

If we take into account the cases with Romania and Hungary, the best example could be inter-war Transylvania- the large ethnic Hungarian and German minorities constituted approximately 40% of the population, and all of the minorities were either Catholic or Protestant. If we add to this figure the number of Romanians that belonged to the Greek Catholic Church, then approximately 70% of Transylvania's population belonged to a Western Christian denomination prior to the communist takeover. These figures are

important because, as Kitschelt argues, these pre-communist legacies influenced the communist reform process. In the case of Transylvania and Galicia these cultural and religious differences had a marked impact on the regions during the communist period. Nevertheless, Transylvania has traditionally been perceived, even during the communist period, as ethnically, culturally and politically different from the rest of the country. Therefore in order to assimilate Transylvania, nationalism was an important ideological component of Romanian communism, particularly under Ceausescu. He promoted a form of 'national populism' characterised by 'pseudo-egalitarianism and the non-recognition of any kind of diversity'(Whitefield 2002).

However, the existence of diversity across post-communist states in the content of political competition is not evidence for diversity in cleavage structures. Support for political parties may vary as a result of many factors, discussed below, that are not connected to cleavages. And even if partisanship appears to be rooted in ideological and social differentiation, this may not result from social and ideological divisions in the population but rather from party strategies(Whitefield 2002).

According to the empirical investigation, that Whitefield and Evans had done, there is a relationship among social and ideological differences and partisanship that would be expected if political cleavages were present. Naturally, although economic differentiation was common to all countries (if not always to the same degree), not all social identities and differentiated social experiences were equally present in all states; in particular, the religious and ethnic composition of countries in the region varies markedly.
<https://assignbuster.com/analysing-the-political-cleavages-in-post-communist-europe-politics-essay/>

As a consequence, we found that the connection of social division to ideological division also varies; religiosity appears to matter much more to social liberalism in Catholic than in Orthodox states; and issues of ethnic rights are more firmly socially rooted where minorities exist and where the sense of social difference between ethnic groups is more strongly felt. This variation in the nature of social and ideological division is important because it appears to relate to the nature of divisions that emerge in support for political parties (Whitefield 2002).

TABLE 1: Political cleavages in post-Communist Eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary): social and ideological divisions to partisanship

Social bases

Ideological bases

Romania

1. Age, region (Bucharest), education
2. Ethnicity (Hungarians) economic liberalism, pro/anti-West
3. Region (Transylvania)

1. Social & political liberalism,

economic liberalism, pro/anti West

2. Ethnic liberalism

3. Pro-West, Jews

Bulgaria

1. Ethnicity(Turkish)
2. Age, Class(professionals vs. workers)
3. Religiosity

1. Economic liberalism, pro/anti-West
2. Ethnic liberalism
3. Nationalism, Gypsies

Hungary

1. Age
2. Religiosity
3. Class (urban-rural), education/class,
settlement size, denomination(Protestant)

1. Economic liberalism, pro/anti-West
 2. Social & political liberalism, Jews
 3. Social & political liberalism, nationalism
3. Politics between economy and culture- the case of Hungary

In order to continue to analyze the formation of cleavages in Eastern European states, I will try to give example with Hungary. Before that, I would like to point out some of the most important theories of Stein Rokkan linked with the work of S. M. Lipset. As a consequence of the early death of S. Rokkan, his work, in spite its richness and extension, can not be regarded as finished. Here are the basic ideas:

1. Territory as a key concept of politics in a cross pressure between culture and economy,

implying:

- the equal weight given to economic, political-territorial and cultural dimensions;

- the interaction between geographical spaces and socio-cultural membership spaces, between

center formation and boundary building;

- the conceptual map of Europe with an West-East axis differentiating between economic

conditions for state-building and a South-North axis between cultural conditions for nation-building.

2. The identification of four cleavages following the critical junctures of:

- the national revolution creating the center-periphery and the church-state cleavages;

- the industrial revolution creating the urban-rural and the labour-capital cleavages.

3. The cyclical movement of cleavages: towards a national-international divide. It is often

forgotten that Rokkan does not end his cleavage sequence with the 'worker-owner' conflict of the 'industrial revolution', but points to 'an intriguing cyclical movement':

- breakdown of a supranational order (Roman Empire)
- establishment of culturally and politically distinctive nation states
- 'conflict over national versus international loyalties'. (Lipset-Rokkan 47-48)

Although the last formulation relates to the 'communist' cleavage within the labour movement

(not relevant any more), but in his latest works he points to the centrality of a reformulated version of a center-periphery divide: that between homogenizing supranational standardization and cultural distinctiveness, roots, national identity. (Rokkan- Urwin, Flora 1983: 434).

4. The different political impacts of a gradual, organic sequence of cleavages (in most of North

Western Europe) versus the cumulation of state and nation-building cleavages together with the rapidity of enfranchisement and sudden modernization.

The second alternative - especially in the case of the discontinuity of or threats to national independence implies difficulties in transition to mass democracy. (Hungary is directly mentioned by Rokkan in this latter context.)

" Territorial-cultural conflicts do not just find political expression in secessionist and irredentist movements, however, they feed into the overall cleavage structure ... and help to condition the development not only of each ... party organization but even more of the entire system of party oppositions and interests" (Lipset-Rokkan 41).

5. The historical long term continuity of collective political identities
coalitions and oppositions

on the level of alternatives, of parties and of the support market to be mobilized.

" Parties do not simply present themselves de novo to the citizens at each election; they each have a history and so have the constellations of alternatives they present to the electorate." (Lipset-Rokkan). Emerging cleavages affect, however, former alliances and restructure the party system. Rokkan points also to the existence of a certain lee-way for parties to translate social cleavages. 6. The freezing of party alternatives with the final extension of suffrage (mostly in the twenties),

implying the inclusion of the lower classes.

In contrast to an expanding support market with a creative phase of parties (Cotta 102)

accompanied by a mobilization along cultural and territorial cleavages, the mobilization on the basis of purely economic cleavages comes only afterwards (Rokkan 1980: 118). The stage of mass democracy brings about an ever more closed electoral market with a mobilization controlled by the already existing parties.

7. The special role of social democratic parties on the left side of the labour-capital cleavage.

Due to their strength and "domesticability", their 'ability to maintain unity in the face of the man

forces making for division and fragmentation' (Lipset-Rokkan: 46), social democratic parties and the class cleavage in itself played a stabilizing and homogenizing, cohesive influence in most West European party systems. In countries with a troubled history of nation-building, marked cultural cleavages reduced their potentials.

But the very logic of pluralism in democratic capitalism helped their entry into national politics. These parties, "having joined the nation" contributed to the neutralization of the radicalizing effects of sudden industrialization. (Lipset-Rokkan: 46, 48, 50).

8. The 'radical rightist' anti-system cleavage.

"... The rising networks of new elites, such as the leaders of the new large bureaucracies of

industry and government, those who control the various sectors of the communication industry, the heads of mass organizations, the leaders ... of once weak or low-status groups, and the like..." constitute the focus of protest of fascist-type parties, which:

- are nationalistic, they "venerate" the nation and its culture;
- are anti-democratic;
- want to unite their supporters as one single 'pillar' lead by "deeply felt convictions about the destiny and the mission of the nation".

These xenophobic and racist parties may mobilize segments of the middle and lower classes. As

to their emergence and chances of success, "contrasts in the continuity and regularity of nation-building certainly played a role" (Lipset-Rokkan 23, 24, 25).

After we pointed out some of the most important ideas from the Lipset and Rokkan concept, now I will try to form several important assumptions:

- The evolution of the Hungarian party system confirms the classical sequence of European

cleavage formation with the initial and decisive emergence of identity-based territorial and

cultural divides followed later by the appearance of economic cleavages.

- Hungarian party competition seems to reflect and even to anticipate new developments of Western party systems.

- There are real historical alternatives expressing different conceptions of modernization, of

nationhood and of geopolitical location represented by the parties. For Rokkan and Lipset,

party alternatives and the party system itself freeze. In Hungary and in some other Eastern European countries, intervals, parties and party structure are unstable and fluid. But the alternatives contained in the cleavage structure are amazingly stable: not the party system, but the cleavage structure is frozen. In the formation process of the parties (1988-89), in the subsequent three elections from 1990 to 1998, the same cleavage sets have mattered and structured party competition, namely: the three cleavage families of Westernization vs. traditionalism, post-communism vs. anti-post-communism and pro-market commodification (winners) vs. welfare statist decommodification (losers).

- This special freezing of alternatives and cleavages has, however, taken place in the context of

a very much open and available electoral market . This deviance from the Rokkan-Lipset

freezing pattern is the unavoidable consequence of the long discontinuity of the party system,

the lack of traditions of mass democracy and the unstable interest structure of civil society.

- Due to the strong economic, social and political positions of the post-communist elites and

surviving value orientations in the electorate, 'the definition of the rules of the game' as a

systemic issue (Offe 1991, Mair 1997) is expressed by the salience of a 'post-communism -

anti-post-communism' cleavage family. It cannot be deducted from the Rokkan-Lipset

scheme, and by its very nature, cannot become a long-enduring historical divide, but can be

supposed to fade away.

- The taming of capitalism, the political regulation of the market with a political mobilization

along a commodification - decommodification axis is a crucial point of democratic

consolidation and legitimacy. Following from the freezing of the Hungarian political cleavage

structure in the phase of the dominance of the cultural-territorial and post-communist

cleavage families, the increasing importance of this socio-economic divide is coupled with its

absorption by or inclusion into the other two cleavage families.

- The post-1989 evolution of the Hungarian party system has brought about no political

mobilization along the line of a classical labour-capital class cleavage.

Finally, we should now indicate the main cleavages formed in Hungary, according to Mair:

1. The family of territorial and cultural cleavages

Traditionalist forces stress historical continuity, Hungarian nationhood, favour community over

society, are for strong authority, strong church. Their value orientations are more particularist than universalist, they have an inclination 'to love the rural', even if they are urban

Westernizers are outward-looking, for catch-up modernization, they favour individualism, multicultural diversity, they stress secularism and human rights.

2. The family of post-communist cleavages

This set of cleavages has several dimensions

- an ideological dimension of anticommunism which can be based either on particularist

national, religious identities or on the universalism of individual human rights and rationality;

- a political dimension expressed in the relationship to the Socialist Party looked upon as the

successor party;

- a power dimension of competing elites and of the re-definition of the rules of the game outside

and inside politics;

- a structural dimension reflecting the symbiotic dualism of the present society with a secto

rooted in late communism and a sector of emerging capitalism iv;

- an emotional and biographical dimension with a population split into two halves: one half who feel they lived better in the last years of 'real socialism' and another half thinking differently.

3. The family of socio-economic cleavages

With economic transformation progressing and with an overwhelmingly materialist electorate

this set of cleavages has become central in the society, but the early freezing of the party system

structured along the above mentioned two cleavage sets is still complicating the clear translation of this divide into programmatic and public policy alternatives.

4. Old Theories vs. New Parties: Romania Post-communist party system

Surprisingly, post-communist cleavages in Romania have been the spotlight of relatively little attention. Indeed, as Crowther writes: " If skeptics are correct, Romania should stand out as a strong case for the inapplicability of social cleavage analyses. Because of the peculiarities of its pre-communist and communist past, Romania is often taken as an archetypical example of the post-communist countries dearth of civil society". Or, in other words, it is almost impossible to test the theory of Stein Rokkan or S. M. Lipset, without necessary sharing Crowther's point of view on the inapplicability of social cleavage analyses.

Most recent works on the concept „ post-communist cleavages" commence with a few comments on Lipset's and Rokkan's cleavage theory applied to the case of Central Europe. One of the most respectful professors from Bulgaria- Georgi Karasimeonov indicates that Lipset's and Rokkan's cleavage theory was formulated on the special conditions and terms of a particular European western model. Karasimeonov contributions to the debate can be interpreted in the tradition of the analysis of the electoral behavior and party formation in transnational societies revealing at least four types of cleavages: residual (historical), transitional, actual and potential⁸. De Waele, seeks to clarify and categorize the relationship between the original theory of cleavages as it is applied to Western model and the post-communist experience undertaking his project with the view of three cleavages:

1. The first set of objective considerations influencing the emergence of the post-communist

party system concerns the economic cleavage. De Waelle argues that the socio-economic cleavage („ maximalist" vs. „ minimalist") comes from the communist regime's successful orientation towards destruction of the capitalist economy. De Waele himself flags up this problem with his own definition: the term „ maximalist" is used to describe the adherents of a fast transition. In theory, the claim that the „ minimalist" perspective is likely to have a socioeconomic basis has been highly dependent upon overall record of mixed progress with uneven and slow reform implementation. On the contrary, the „ maximalists" represented the turning point for the post-communism. „ The maximalists" launched new reform programs, a

macroeconomic plan stabilization and structural reforms, an ambitious "

<https://assignbuster.com/analysing-the-political-cleavages-in-post-communist-europe-politics-essay/>

shock therapy" for the Romanian economy, including the liberalization of prices and the foreign exchange market as well as the acceleration of the privatization.

2. The second cleavage, the so-called „authoritarian-democratic divide", refers to the inability of a significant part of the society to renounce in discursive terms the communist legacy (although, in Romania this did not necessarily translate into a rejection of all kind of authoritarian attitudes). In many recent studies on authoritarian attitudes in postcommunist Romania, researchers have pointed the electoral success of Vadim Tudor in 2000, „as a distinctly unpleasant surprise for many in the West". The case in point was the increase of supporters of a latent antipluralist attitude towards the European values arena.

3. The third cleavage line is between the communists and the anticommunists. The „old" attitude, a so-called „pre-communist" behavior was usually reactivated after the emergence of the new parties. Given the discontinuity of the transition, Ágh concludes that the confrontation between the two groups led to the formation of a multi-party and the „first generation parties". He also witnessed the fact that the new parties were formed „as second generation parties", and the third category, the so-called small „third generation appeared much later. In a similar way, Gill argues that it is difficult to establish the real significance of the cleavage between the two

types. He also indicates there have been at least three referential ways to see post-communism: „post-communism as a system", „post-communism

as a condition", „ post-communism as a situation". After this analysis of the main three cleavages that the Romanian post-communist system has experienced, it is almost impossible at this point to raise the discussion of a consolidated democracy. With politics in Romania still changing, the outlines of the three families of cleavages advanced in this article constitute a significant obstacle towards consolidation.

5. Conclusion

Finally I would like to go back to some of the main points I have presented:

- The evolution of the Eastern European party system confirms the classical sequence of European cleavage formation with the initial and decisive emergence of identity-based territorial and cultural divides, with their dominance over socio-economic divides followed later by the appearance of economic cleavages.

- The salient manifestation of the cumulation of cultural and territorial cleavages in the party system corresponds clearly with the cyclical movement in the framework of the Rokkanian

scheme demonstrating how globally the centrality of a national-supranational divide. The example with Hungarian party competition seems to reflect and even to anticipate new developments of Western party systems.

- There are real historical alternatives expressing different conceptions of modernisation, of

nationhood and of geopolitical location represented by the parties. These alternatives are older

than the most of the Eastern European electorate, but they deviate from the mainstream in Western Europe. In the formation process of the parties (1988-89), in the subsequent three elections from 1990 to 1998, the same cleavage sets have mattered and structured party competition, namely: the three cleavage families of Westernization vs. traditionalism, post-communism vs. anti-post-communism and marketization, commodification (winners) vs. welfare statism.

- This special freezing of alternatives and cleavages has, however, taken place in the context of

a very much open and available electoral market. This deviance from the Rokkan-Lipset

freezing pattern is the unavoidable consequence of the long discontinuity of the party system,

the lack of traditions of mass democracy and the unstable interest structure of civil society.

- The post-1989 evolution of the Hungarian and Romania party system has brought about no political mobilisation along the line of a classical labour-capital class cleavage. Instead, I have observed the following attempts for bringing the welfare statist decommodification cleavage in:

- coupling it with the post-communist cleavage,

<https://assignbuster.com/analysing-the-political-cleavages-in-post-communist-europe-politics-essay/>

- coupling it with the defence of national identity,
- coupling it with the religious cleavage,
- coupling (its radical variant) with an aggressive and racist social nationalism.

After all, I still believe that formation of cleavages in East Europe, according to the thesis of Lipset and Rokkan, is almost impossible to apply to these countries. However, the cases which I in detail discussed (Hungary and Romania), are the best example for the existing of cleavages in Eastern European states. Therefore, indicates that even the model of Lipset-Rokkan was more applicable for Western European countries, especially because of different economical and political development, the existing of cleavages in East Europe was possible even before 1989, and the model is still useful nowadays.