

The perils of political competition: Explaining participation and trust in
political parties in Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT

BESIR CEKA: The perils of political competition: Explaining participation and trust in political parties in Eastern Europe
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This thesis investigates the determinants of conventional political participation such as voting, contacting officials and attending political meetings in Eastern Europe. The central argument of this paper is that, in postcommunist Europe, vibrant and robust political competition has stifled direct political participation of the citizens. To make this case, I analyze survey data to identify the individual and country level factors that determine the likelihood of political participation at the individual level. The results point in one direction: the postcommunist polities that saw vibrant political competition in their electoral arenas also witnessed the highest levels of disillusionment with political parties and, consequently, with the political system. Decades of monopolization of the electoral arena by communist parties left Eastern Europeans ill prepared to appreciate vigorous political competition, which, depending on the intensity of the competition, tended to depress trust in political parties as an institution and, consequently, stifled political participation.

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Political competition and political participation in Eastern Europe

Introduction

Democracy is arguably the most central concept in the whole field of political science and yet it remains the most elusive one. Pinning it down, measuring it and then evaluating its quality has assumed a central priority in our scholarly endeavors. What makes a “high-quality” democracy? Any straightforward answer to this question must assume a universal conception of democracy, the existence of which is disputed. Nevertheless, many students of democracy have either implicitly or explicitly espoused Joseph Schumpeter’s (1975) minimalist definition of this system of governance which conceives of it as an “institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (Schumpeter 1975: 242, 269). At the heart of this definition are two issues—political competition and political participation—and, to a large degree, this paper is about unearthing an overlooked but perverse relationship between these two core elements of democracy¹.

The central argument of this paper is that, in postcommunist Europe, vibrant and robust political competition has come with a high price tag: it has stifled direct political participation of the citizens. In other words, the two core dimensions of democracy as

¹ See also Gerardo I. Munck (2006), in Andreas Schedler, ed, *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers). [Drawing Boundaries] for a similar conceptualization of democracy.

identified by Schumpeter not only fail to represent a unified concept but also directly undermine one another. To make this case, I take a bottom up approach and analyze survey data to identify the individual and country level factors that determine trust in political parties and the likelihood of political participation at the individual level. The results point in one direction: the postcommunist polities that experienced vibrant political competition in their electoral arenas also witnessed the highest levels of disillusionment with political parties and, consequently, with the political system. This, I argue, is due to the communist legacy of the one-party system with no political competition and the opportunities for rent-seeking unleashed by the closing down of centrally planned economies. Decades of monopolization of the electoral arena by communist parties left Eastern Europeans ill prepared to appreciate vigorous political competition. Depending on its intensity and the vigor with which parties exposed corrupt dealings, competition tended to depress trust in political parties as an institution and, consequently, stifled direct political participation.

The causal story I tell is rather complex and involves several steps, which I discuss in greater detail in the following sections. The basic argument runs as follows: intense political competition and, in particular, vocal and critical opposition parties that criticize and expose government scandals do much to convince the average Eastern European that hell has broken loose and that political parties are deeply corrupt institutions run by self-interested and power-hungry politicians. Mishandlings of the privatization process provided much of the ammunition for the opposition, which, when coupled with a political culture of distrust and apathy, tended to further erode trust in political parties. This distrust, I argue, depresses direct political participation as disillusioned citizens withdraw from public life. In more technical

terms, distrust in political parties is an intervening variable that mitigates the effect of competition on participation.

Furthermore, I argue that there is an interaction effect between partisanship and competition in explaining trust in parties. More specifically, competition has the effect of reducing trust in parties only for those individuals who have weak or no party identification. For intense partisans, political competition will have no effect on their trust for political parties as an institution. The theoretical motivation behind this wrinkle in my story comes from insights from political psychologists who have shown that strong partisans, through confirmatory bias and other psychological mechanisms are capable of interpreting evidence in biased ways and rationalizing contradictory evidence so it matches with their preconceptions (Westen, 2007; Kuhn, 1991; Kunda, 1990). So, for example, if the main governing party faces allegations of corruption, an individual that strongly identifies with that party will be far more likely to justify and/or dispute such allegations than say a non-partisan. Thus, she is less likely to lose trust in parties as an institution because her loyalty to her party will most likely remain intact. The effect of this normal political squabbling involving allegations and counter-allegations would be different for an individual who is not emotionally attached to any party. He would be more likely to get disillusioned with the political bickering and become convinced that the democratic politicians are as power-hungry and the parties they represent as corrupt as the previous regime.

While the main empirical section of this paper primarily uses cross-sectional data from a particular wave of surveys conducted in Eastern Europe between 1997 and 2001, my theoretical framework has dynamic implications as well. For example, my theory implies that as time passes and as individuals are able to form party attachments, the effect of competition

on trust in parties should fade away. Furthermore, as the privatization process draws to a close and as new generations of Eastern Europeans are socialized into democratic norms and rules, the communist legacies should matter less. Thus, the relationship between competition and trust should be further weakened. Therefore, in the final section of the paper, I investigate trends over time in the key variables of interest and offer some preliminary evidence in support of the dynamic predictions of my theory.

To return to the broader picture, my analysis takes arguments about the importance of communist legacies very seriously, especially so as they relate to the deep distrust in political parties and skepticism about political involvement (Rose, 2009). Unlike parties in other authoritarian regimes, the communist parties of Eastern Europe managed to penetrate and control virtually every aspect of their subjects' lives (Simons, 1993), to reduce political participation to mere façade (Howard, 2003), and, most importantly, to transform the institution of the political party into an anathema for millions of Eastern Europeans. As Rose (2009:153) suggests, "Communist party-states created what the Czech dissident (and subsequently president) Vaclav Havel termed the 'politics of anti-politics.'" The dissidents during communism were perhaps the most antipolitical of all. To get a taste for this passionate hatred towards the political, a memorable quote from György Konrád, the famous Hungarian novelist and dissident, will suffice: "Because politics has flooded nearly every nook and cranny of our lives, I would like to see the flood recede. We ought to depoliticize our lives, free them from politics as from some contagious infection. We ought to free our simple everyday affairs from considerations of politics...So I describe the democratic

opposition as not a political but antipolitical opposition, since its essential activity is to work for destatification (Stokes, 1996: 180).¹

Furthermore, communist legacies matter in another crucial way. The transition from communist-style economies to market based ones necessitated the privatization of the majority of the state-owned enterprises and the restoration of property rights. This process created massive opportunities for self-enrichment for the ruling elites. Thus, the privatization process provided the fertile ground for vigilant and critical opposition parties to expose, scandalize, and publicize mismanagements of this process. This, I show, further deepened political apathy and distrust in parties in the region.

It is against this background and political culture that I make my argument. We know a lot about how political competition affects the political system, the speed and depth of reform, and the state institutions in postcommunist Europe (Vachudova, 2005; Grzymala-Busse, 2006; O'Dwyer, 2006; Wright, 2008). However, we are in the dark when it comes to how competition affects both the attitudes and political behavior of citizens. Many scholars have been puzzled by the high levels of complete distrust in parties in countries such as Poland, Estonia, and Slovenia, which are not exactly known for unaccountable political party systems or dismal records in reforms (Klingemann, Fuchs, Fuchs, Zielonka, 2006). Furthermore, other notable scholars have been surprised to find that higher Freedom House scores on a range of democracy measures are correlated with distrust in political parties (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, *forthcoming*). This paper offers a theoretical framework and empirical

¹ This is an excerpt from Konrad's essay titled "Antipolitics" that he wrote in 1984 and which has been reprinted in Stokes "From Stalinsim to pluralism: a docmunetary history of Eastern Europe since 1945."

evidence that makes sense of such counter-intuitive attitudinal and behavioral patterns that we observe in postcommunist Europe.

This paper proceeds in five sections. Next, I discuss the relevant strands of literature that deal with political competition, participation, and trust. In the third section, I discuss the measures I use for the main variables of interest. In the fourth section, I describe the methods used and discuss the findings. The fourth section traces trends in political trust and party identification over time. The final section concludes with the implications of my findings.

Political competition and trust in parties

The quality of political competition assumes a central position in our understanding of democracy. Free and fair elections have become the touchstone against which we measure the democratic progress of a country. The Third Wave of democratization that began with the fall of the dictatorial regime in Portugal in 1974 and that lasted until the late 1990s unleashed new political creatures that needed to be conceptualized and classified. The competitiveness of the electoral arena became the predominant yardstick against which scholars of transitology classified and evaluated the democratic progress of regimes in transition (Schedler, 2006; Diamond, 2002). This section discusses three strands of literature that have dealt with political competition and its electoral dynamics.

First, many scholars have examined the role of political competition in deepening democracy in fledgling democracies by focusing on alternations of power and the strength of the opposition. The evidence is overwhelming—the sooner a country establishes a competitive political arena the quicker it sheds its authoritarian past (Vachudova, 2005; Grzymala-Busse, 2006; Wright, 2008). For Vachudova (2005) political competition is crucial

in explaining the different trajectories that six East Central European countries followed after the fall of communism. The countries that had strong opposition movements prior to 1989, such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary had better chances of electing liberal leaders during the first democratic elections and of institutionalizing a competitive political system. The exit of the old elite was the first crucial factor for democratization in Eastern Europe (Fish, 1998). Next, it mattered quite a bit if the new democrats faced competition immediately from other parties. In countries where opposition to the communist party was weak and where the old elites remained in place (e.g. Romania, Slovakia), we witnessed state capture and scapegoating minorities. For Vachudova, the main virtue of political competition is that it “limits rent seeking. It does so by exposing politicians to the scrutiny of diverse political rivals, interest groups, and voters” (Vachudova 2005, 14).

Grzymala-Busse (2006) makes a similar argument. She argues that a critical, plausible and clear political opposition to governing parties is crucial for establishing accountable formal institutions for monitoring and oversight. More specifically, she argues that a critical opposition that can criticize, expose, and offer a plausible governing alternative does much to constrain the discretion of governing parties and, thus, tends to reduce rent-seeking behavior. Along the same lines, Orenstein (2001) claims that political competition results in better policy outcomes by fostering learning and better governance. Others, most notably Wright (2008), have looked into the effect of political competition on regime stability. Using pooled data for over ninety countries, Wright shows that the initial level of political competition in a new democracy has a significant bearing on regime stability. More to the point, democracies with low levels of initial competition tend to fail because they face anti-system forces which seek to ascend to power through extrajudicial means.

Some scholars have been less enthusiastic about political competition and have pointed out the inherent perils of polarization that come with a competitive electoral system (Frye, 2002). In the context of postcommunist Europe, Frye (2002: 309) argues, “political polarization between ex-communist and anticommunist factions has had a devastating effect on economic growth.” Polarization has both increased uncertainty about the political system, depressing investment in long-term projects, and it has made it harder for governments to make credible policy commitments with regards to property rights.

Second, a recent and growing body of literature has studied the effect that the incidence of competitive elections has on political and economic liberalization in authoritarian countries (Pop-Eleches and Robertson, 2009; Teorell and Axel Hadenius, *forthcoming*; Cox, 2009). Both Teorell and Hadenius's study and Pop-Eleches and Robertson's article find that elections have positive effects on democratization. Teorell and Hadenius argue that elections have significant effects on democratizations scores in the aftermath of the elections but such effects tend to fade away in the years that follow. Pop-Eleches and Robertson present a different causal mechanism through which elections affect liberalization. In their account, pre-electoral and electoral processes such as campaigns and voting results reveal information about the relative strength of the contesting sides and, when the information is surprising to at least some key actors, we witness democratic breakthrough and improvements in democracy ratings. Interestingly, both of these studies find no positive effect for sham elections on democratization.

Third, the peculiarities of Eastern European electoral dynamics have drawn the attention of many scholars (Marks, Hooghe, Nelson and Edwards, 2006; Vachudova and Hooghe, 2009; Zsol and Toka, 2007). Many have argued that the structure of political

competition in the East is fundamentally different from that in the West (Marks et al., 2006) and that the European integration process has profoundly changed the character of political competition in postcommunist Europe (Vachudova and Hooghe, 2009). Others have examined party system institutionalization and party identification in this region. For example, Rose (2009) argues that electoral volatility, measured by entry and exit of parties from electoral competition, has persisted over time in Eastern Europe and has hindered the development of stable party systems. This has resulted in serious discontinuity in the supply of parties, and, as Rose (2009: 147) puts it, “The result of the continuing turnover of parties from one election to another is that a majority of Central and East European parties have contested only one election.” From the 155 parties that have contested elections in the region between 1990 and 2007, only 19 parties have competed in all the elections! Rose suggests that the cause of this persisting electoral volatility is changing supply of parties by political elites that does not reflect the demand for new political parties.

The legacy of distrust in parties might be at the core of this electoral volatility. Given that parties did not have strong roots in the society after the fall of communism, endemic distrust in existing parties might have convinced political entrepreneurs that they can capitalize on this distrust by creating new parties and running for office.² Whatever the causal link between distrust and electoral volatility, it is certain that a discontinuity in the supply of parties hinders party identification and thus further reduces party system institutionalization. In fact, for much of the 1990s party identification was very weak in

² It is conceivable that electoral volatility might lower the chances for strong party identification to emerge, thus causing distrust in parties. While one can certainly imagine a feedback loop that creates a vicious cycle whereby the link between distrust and electoral volatility is reinforced, distrust in political parties and fleeting preferences preceded electoral volatility in Eastern Europe.

Eastern Europe. As one New Europe Barometer (NEB) survey found, people can point out a party that they would *never* vote for—over 95 % could do this in Romania for example—but only about 20 percent identify with a particular party (Rose and Mishler, 1998).

The causes and effects of trust in political institutions and support for democracy have been studied extensively by numerous scholars (Kaase, 1999; Catterberg and Moreno, 2005; Putnam, 1993; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002). Herbert Kitschelt (1992), for example, makes a forceful case for the connection between market success and mass support for democracy in Eastern and Central Europe. He argues that there exists a pro-market/pro-democracy dimension of public opinion in the transition economies of the region and that the distribution of people along this dimension will be determined by the absolute levels of economic development in the country in question. Along similar lines, Adam Przeworski (1991) has attempted to model the political dynamics of transition societies as a learning process, in which citizens start with relatively little knowledge of market economies and often with exaggerated views of their capabilities as a result of the promises made by politicians. Their political response to the transition, in Przeworski's view, will be a function of the degree to which economic experience departs from their expectations.

However, the predictions of these early works that economic performance will largely determine support for democracy and its institutions have been only partially validated. For example, Evans and Whitefield (1995) investigate the link between economic and political performance on one hand and support for democracy on the other hand. Using survey data from national random samples of the populations of Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine they find that that “though there is a connection between economic performance and commitment to democracy, political factors are stronger

and explain more of the cross-national differences (p.488).” In fact, when they look at the link between GDP per capita levels and support for democracy, they find that the poorest three countries exhibit the most support for democracy, the opposite of what Kitschelt (1992) predicted. This last finding is consistent with my theoretical model. Generally speaking, poorer countries in post-communist Europe lacked vibrant party competition and the citizens of these countries were less likely to become disillusioned with political institutions as a result competition.

The importance of trust in democratic institutions for democratic consolidation has been made by several scholars. Schmitter (1994), for example, has argued that political trust is crucial for democratic consolidation. More generally speaking, the quality of democratic processes depends on the trust that citizens have on democratic institutions and their willingness to participate in such institutions. One observation that has been validated by comparative research is that trust in political institutions, especially trust in political parties, is significantly lower in Eastern Europe compared to both Western Europe and other new democracies of the Third Wave (Catterberg and Moreno, 2005; Rose, 2009). In the next section, I discuss the implications of such distrust and other factors for political participation.

Participation

Political participation has been extensively studied by some of the most renowned political scientists. Putnam’s (1995: 66) work has been very influential and his central thesis has been that “the quality of public life and the performance of social institutions (and not only in America) are... powerfully influenced by norms and networks of civic engagement” He has convincingly demonstrated that participation in local associations ranging from bird-

watching clubs to consumer protection groups is causally related to a range of indicators of political engagement including voting, and other forms of active political participation.

More generally speaking, a strong civil society, often understood as the ‘civic space’ between the private and the public sphere occupied by the engaged citizenry organized through voluntary associations and non-governmental organizations (Varshney, 2001), is believed to be crucial for establishing strong and stable democracies (Encarnacion, 2002; Hyden, 1997; Diamond, 1999; Gellner, 1994). Specifically, civil society has the potential to curb the power of the central government and its excesses by guiding, monitoring, and participating in the creation of public policy. In this sense, a well developed civil society has the potential to hold the executive accountable and, as such, provide the much-needed vertical accountability in a democratic state.

The development of civil society, however, is to a great extent conditioned by the degree to which democratic institutions and values have been established within a polity. In Eastern Europe, for example, civil society was seriously weakened by the communist regimes that reigned in the region for over forty years. The communist party had managed to penetrate the private lives of its subjects and its paranoid intelligence services had instilled deep mistrust among people (Howard, 2003). Engagement in the public sphere was reduced to routine participation in the communist party’s many organizations and no meaningful independent association of citizens took place beyond the party’s structures. Independent and critical voices within the ranks of civil society organizations were harshly suppressed and this led to a great degree of atomization of the citizenry (Howard, 2003). This is perhaps the main reason why we consistently see lower levels of participation in Eastern Europe as compared to both Western Europe and other new democracies.

Furthermore, the literature is rich in identifying individual-level determinants of political participation. Scholars have found age, educational levels, participation in the labor market and church attendance (Rose, 2006) to be positively related to participation. Others have found post-materialist values to be significant predictors of political participation (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002). Furthermore, trust has emerged as one of the key factors determining whether people will get involved in both civil society organizations and conventional political activities (Rose, 2006; Putnam, 2000). Somewhat surprisingly, Kaase (1999) found that political trust is negatively related to participation in Western Europe—the less trustful people are of the political institutions of the country the more likely they are to participate in unconventional political activities such as boycotts, citizen initiatives and street demonstrations.

While there is much dispute about global trends in participation, there is one striking regularity that emerges in virtually every study that compares postcommunist Europe to the rest of the world—Eastern Europeans are less likely to participate in the public sphere, however participation is operationalized (Rose, 2006, 2009; Howard, 2003). Inglehart and Catterberg (2002), for example, investigate levels of political participation across the world. While they agree with concerns voiced by those who lament the falling levels of conventional political participation such as voting or writing to a representative (Pharr and Putnam 2000; Crozier et al. 1975; Habermas 1973), they argue that “unconventional” forms of political action, such as signing petitions, participating in demonstrations and boycotts have been on the rise. While this trend has been clearly taking place in the richer democracies, the new democracies, most of which are post-communist, have experienced a

significant decrease in unconventional political action since the active days of regime change.

Conventional political participation such as voting has also decreased in several post communist countries. For example, as Simienska (2006) has pointed out, the level of participation in Polish parliamentary elections has been decreasing over time. While for the 1993 parliamentary elections, 52.1 percent of the registered voters showed up at voting booths, this number dropped to 47.9 percent in 1997, and it reached a record low of 46.3 percent in the 2001 elections. What caused this withdrawal from public life and political apathy (Rueschemeyer, Rueschemeyer and Wittrock, 1998)? Some have argued that this general decline in participation is a temporary period, which Inglehart and Catterberg (2002: 314) have called post-honeymoon decline that should fade away as these countries develop economically.

While it might be true that time might need to pass for democratic values and behaviors to be internalized by postcommunist societies, we still do not have a theoretical framework that explains how time matters. This literature does not explain why Eastern Europe is different³ and cannot account for variation among different countries in this region. As striking as differences between postcommunist Europe and the rest of the Europe are, there is rich variation in the levels of participation across the postcommunist world. Why are the Poles, the Estonians, and the Slovenians some of the most skeptical and disengaged democrats in Europe while their countries are held as the par excellence examples of democratic and economic progress? This paper is about answering this puzzle and, in the

³ Howard's (2003) study is a notable exception to this.

following section, I flesh out my theoretical framework and offer a causal story that links political competition to direct political participation.

Theories and Hypothesis

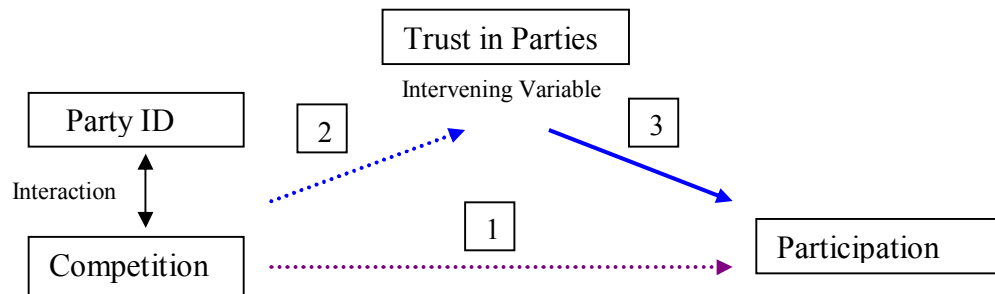
The main theoretical argument of this paper is that vibrant political competition has had the effect of eroding public trust in democratic institutions, particularly so in political parties and this has then negatively affected political participation. This, I argue, is primarily due to two factors—the communist legacy of distrust and the economic transition—both unique to postcommunism. Decades of communist party monopolization of the electoral arena had left Eastern Europeans deeply distrustful of political parties and ill-prepared to appreciate vigorous political competition. Depending on its intensity, competition, tended to depress trust in political parties as an institution and, consequently, stifle political participation.

There are three causal stories in this argument. First, I argue that political competition is directly causally related to distrust in political parties. Second, I argue that competition tends to depress trust in parties only for those individuals who have weak or no party identification. Competition does not affect the level of trust that intense partisans have in political parties. In other words, political competition interacts with partisanship. Finally, this distrust in political parties stifles direct political participation as disillusioned citizens withdraw from public life. In more technical terms, distrust in political parties is an intervening variable that mitigates the effect of competition on participation. The figure below provides a schematic illustration of my theoretical framework. The dashed lines indicate that the effect of one variable on another one is mitigated by either an interaction

effect or an intervening variable. The numbers above the arrows indicate the order in which I will test the different links. I now turn to each building block of this theoretical model and give a more detailed account of the causal mechanisms at play.

Figure 1:

Schematic representation of the theoretical argument



First, how does competition depress trust in political parties as an institution? The mechanism that causally links these two variables is a psychological one. Fierce electoral competition and, in particular, vocal and critical opposition parties that criticize and expose government misdoings do much to convince the average Eastern European that political parties are fundamentally corrupt institutions. As Levi and Stoker (2000) have pointed out, one trusts politicians and political institutions to the extent that there is no evidence to the contrary. Consequently, the more vigilant and scrutinizing the political parties are the more one hears about corruption, governmental incompetence, and failures. In short, the logic of political survival and competition leads political parties and individual politicians to exaggerate the failures of their opponents and this creates an impression of massive social, economic, and political ailments in the eyes of the average citizen.

The economic transformation that occurred in post-communist Europe played a crucial role in galvanizing pre-existing cynicism towards the political. The transition from

command economies to market based ones that started right after the fall of communism created spectacular opportunities for ruling political elites to engage in rent-seeking behavior and state capture (Grzymala-Busse, 2007). Hundreds of state-owned enterprises got privatized and this process allowed for many politicians to enrich themselves and divvy up the public property among friends and cronies. While the extent to which elites engaged in corrupt practices varies across countries, the scandalization of corruption cases was most pronounced in those countries where vigilant and critical opposition parties were able to expose government abuse. As Grzymala-Busse (2006: 283) suggests, “a critical opposition constantly monitors and publicizes the misdeeds of the government, criticizing its actions in parliament, questioning its motivations, and turning also to media channels to voice criticism.” This, in turn, confirmed to skeptical Eastern Europeans that parties were not to be trusted and that the new democrats were as corrupt as the communist politicians. As Zsolt and Toka (2007: 8) has argued, “The initial reservation against parties can be explained in terms of the communist legacy, but the various scandals surrounding party politics have certainly strengthened negative stereotypes concerning the actual motives of party politicians.” Numerous privatization-related scandals in the early 1990s are believed to have been major causes of the electoral defeat of the parties involved and, as Zsolt and Toka further suggest, they “generated much cynicism about the moral integrity of ...political parties in general (p.9).”

It should be noted that, at least theoretically, the extent to which ruling elites were involved in corrupt practices is not necessarily reflected in the number of scandals that were exposed and the attention they garnered. In fact, as Grzymala-Busse (2007) has argued, in countries such as Poland, Estonia, and Slovenia ruling elites were far less abusive of state

resources precisely because of the fierce political opposition they faced. Yet, survey data from the 1990s and 2000s show that the citizens of these three countries have been consistently the most distrustful of political parties, with over 90 percent of the respondents indicating that they have very little or no trust in political parties (Rose, 2009)!

My theory explains these puzzling findings in terms of massive information failures on the part of the citizens. Faced with media reports about numerous corruption scandals that vigilant opposition parties have managed to expose, the average Pole, for example, becomes convinced that politicians and the parties they represent are deeply corrupt and self-serving political creatures. In contrast, corruption levels in Bulgaria were arguably much higher during the entire transition period but the lack of powerful opposition forces with resources and political skill to expose and scandalize corruption cases resulted in Bulgarians being more trusting of political parties than the Poles!

While a critical opposition that checks the discretionary power of the ruling parties might be perceived as a sign of a healthy democratic system by citizens in older democracies, Eastern Europeans emerging from communism both lacked the political culture to appreciate vibrant political competition and were extremely distrustful of political parties. The communist legacy of distrust in political parties cannot be emphasized enough as it provided the foundation for the political apathy and distrust in democratic institutions that followed. Nowhere else was political involvement as tainted and political parties as hated. In fact, parties that ran in the first few elections avoided calling themselves parties. As the Czech Civic Forum famously put it during the 1990 elections “Parties are for party members, Civic Forum is for everybody” (Kopecky 2001).

Another set of factors that contributed to the link between competition and distrust in parties has to do with the particular dynamics of popular mobilization against communist regimes. In Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic the political opposition to communism enjoyed massive amounts of popular legitimacy. Opposition groups such as Charter 77 and Solidarnost had formed broad but loose coalitions that were united by their common opposition to the delegitimized communist parties. Once the common enemy was gone, there was not enough glue to hold such coalitions together and we naturally witnessed their break-up and the creation of tens of splinter political parties all democratically competing for power (Rose, 2009). The unfortunate effect of such natural break-up of broad coalitions was to convince citizens that their heroes were nothing more than power-hungry and self-interested politicians who fight among themselves to get a comfortable chair in the government. As Rose (2009: 141) puts it, “[c]itizens were disoriented, for instead of being compelled to endorse a one-party regime they were suddenly free to vote for a party that actually represented their views—if only they could figure out which party that might be.” Given these informational failures and fierce competition between former allies, it is not hard to understand the political apathy that ensued.

However, the effect of competition on trust in parties depends on how closely an individual identifies with a party, and this is the second causal claim of my theoretical framework. How does partisanship mitigate the link between competition and trust? My main claim is that the partisan brain is a biased brain. Whenever an individual with strong emotional attachments to a political party is confronted with contradictory evidence suggesting that, say, his party is involved in corrupt dealings, he is unlikely to be impartial in evaluating such claims. Thus, he will be less likely to lose trust in his own party and

consequently on political parties as an institution. The effect of such allegations is different for someone who has no emotional stake in any of the parties involved in the supposed corrupt dealings. Such an individual is more likely to be objective about the facts presented and thus more likely to reinforce her negative prejudices against parties which probably are significant given her lack of party identification.

This last point is supported by research from political psychologists who find that people are exceptionally capable of finding support for whatever they want to believe (Kunda, 1990). Findings from few studies conducted by Westen (2007) and his collaborators Stephan Hamann, and Clint Kilts will help illustrate this neuropsychological phenomenon. In the final months of 2004 US presidential elections, Westen and his co-researchers conducted a study where they scanned the brains of political partisans for activity to study the effects that new political information has on the subjects. The objective of the study, as Westen (2007: xi) puts it, was to “present them with reasoning tasks that would lead a “dispassionate” observer to an obvious logical conclusion, but would be in direct conflict with the conclusion a partisan Democrat or Republican would *want* to reach about his party’s candidate.” In other words, partisans were presented with claims that clearly suggested that their favored candidate had done something dishonest, slimy or morally unacceptable so that the researchers could study the brain activity and oral responses of the partisan subjects in the face of this negative information. What they found was that “when confronted with potentially troubling political information, a network of neurons becomes active that produces stress...the brain registers the conflict between data and desire and begins to search for ways to turn off the spigot of unpleasant emotion (xiii).” The brain succeeded in this as partisans mostly denied that there was anything wrong with the actions of their candidates

and their brains reasoned their way out of the unpleasant realities by finding convenient facts and figures that confirmed their preconceptions. It is interesting to note that political partisans were perfectly capable of rationally and objectively evaluating facts and claims about politically neutral figures where no emotional attachment was at stake.

Third, and this brings me to the last causal link, I argue that distrust in political parties is directly linked to lower political participation. If one is convinced that parties are corrupt institutions that serve the interests of their leaders at the expense of the public, he will be less likely to turn out and vote or work for a political party. In other words, if political parties are not seen as aggregators of societal interests, as our theories usually assume, and are instead considered to be in the business of rent-seeking and state capture, political participation will be lower. This last claim is more intuitive and perhaps explains much of the decrease in participation in postcommunist Europe that took place after the initial increase in political activity around 1989.

Having laid out the theoretical framework of this paper, I now proceed to discuss the measures I use for my key dependent and independent variables.

Measuring Political Competition, Participation, and Partisanship

We find many different operationalizations of political competition in the literature. As sketched above, ideological polarization, alternation in power, electoral volatility, effective number of parties have all been used to measure political competition (Grzymala-Busse, 2007). For the regression analysis, I use the effective number of parties (ENP) that

manage to win seats as a proxy for political competition (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979).⁴

Laakso and Taagepera introduced this measure to count parties that win seats in elections and to weigh them by their relative legislative strength. The mathematical formula used to calculate the ENP is the following:

$$N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2}$$

Where n is number of all parties competing in the electoral contest, and p_i^2 the square of each party's proportion of all the seats in the parliament. What this measure does is that it systematically distinguishes important parties from smaller and less significant ones. So, given that the proportion of the seats that each party wins is squared in the measure, bigger parties count more than smaller parties. This measure of political competition is particularly suitable because it directly taps into the intensity of electoral competition by measuring both the number and strength of parties in parliament. So, higher scores for ENP would indicate that the electoral system is more competitive and that several significant opposition parties have won seats in the parliament, thus increasing the heat and scrutiny that the ruling party(s) receives from the opposition.⁵

For illustrative purposes, I also use one innovative and particularly suitable indicator of robust competition: the average number of parliamentary questions asked by each Member

⁴ The actual calculations were done by Michael Gallagher from the Department of Political Science, Trinity College Dublin, and are available on his website at:
http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/Staff/michael_gallagher/EISystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf

⁵ Since turnout in the last parliamentary elections is one of the main variables I am trying to explain, I used the ENP measure for the elections that the respondents were asked about. So, for example, in Lithuania the surveys were conducted in 2001, and I use the ENP measure for the 2000 parliamentary elections in this country. The ENP measure is particularly apt for analyzing voter turnout, one of the measures of political participation, as election campaigns are the times when citizens are most directly exposed to intense political competition.

of Parliament. As Grzymala-Busse (2006:283) argues, “these inquiries held the government accountable and demonstrated that the opposition was constantly monitoring the government.” Such questions were then repeatedly discussed both in media and electoral campaigns and show the extent to which the opposition criticized, exposed, and berated the government—all these indicators of robust competition. Grzymala-Busse has calculated the average number of parliamentary questions asked by each Member of Parliament for nine Central and East European countries which range from as low as 0.84 (Latvia) to 4.42 (Slovenia).⁶ The drawback of this measure, and the main reason I do not include it in the regression analysis, is that we only have an average of the total parliamentary questions for the period between 1990 and 2004. In other words, each country has only one observation for the whole 14 year period under analysis.

Scholars have used numerous indicators of political participation ranging from the most conventional, such as voting, to more unconventional activities such as signing petitions, protesting, or boycotting (Rose, 2006). In this paper, I use survey⁷ questions that ask people whether (1) they have voted in the last parliamentary elections, and (2) how frequently they work for political parties⁸. These two measures are appropriate because they

6 The countries are: Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia and Bulgaria. There is only one indicator per country for the 1990-2004 period.

7 Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe 1990-2001. Cumulative Data from a fifteen country study in 1997-2001 and the 1990-92 Post-Communist Publics Study in eleven countries coordinated by Edeltraud Roller, Dieter Fuchs, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Bernhard Wessels (Social Science Research Center Berlin, WZB), and János Simon (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest).

8 The survey asked respondents the following question: How much time do you spend working for a political party or candidate? The possible answers were: Often, Sometimes, Seldom, Never. I created a dummy variable using information from this question so *Work for party* was coded as 0 if an individual never worked for a party and as 1 if he or she spend at least some time working for a party. The motivation behind this coding decision is statistical as it facilitates the interpretations of the results.

measure both the most frequent form of political participation (voting) and a more sustained and long-term forms of political participation (working for a party). Although participating in this last activity probably increases around elections, the time that people spend working for political parties taps into this more sustained political activism that goes beyond the one time appearance at the voting booth on Election Day.

Finally, I measure party identification by combining information from two variables. One asks whether people identify with a particular party and the other asks about the intensity of such identification. When asked about how close they feel to a particular party, people could answer, very close, fairly close, not very close and NA (which, in most cases meant that an individual did not identify with any party).

Controls for Political Participation

In this section, I discuss some alternative explanations that the literature has found to determine trust and political participation. The relevant hypotheses are included as controls in the regression analyses.

Almost two centuries ago, Alexis de Tocqueville (2000 [1835]) claimed that civic engagement in voluntary organizations leads to direct political participation. Tocqueville's theory postulates that as members of civic organizations have face-to-face contact with other members they learn to care more about the wider world and develop certain civic skills which induces political efficacy. Putnam (1993, 2000) and others have espoused this view of civic associations as "schools of democracy" and have found Tocqueville's theory to be supported by evidence. I operationalize social capital as the total number of organizational

membership per person.⁹ The hypothesis that I test in the multivariate regression analysis is that individuals that have higher average membership levels in voluntary organizations are also more politically active. Furthermore, interest in politics should be positively associated with participation. I control for this factor by including a variable that asks respondents about how often they discuss politics with others. I hypothesize that the more an individual discusses politics with other people the more likely he is to be politically active.

Furthermore, Inglehart has found that individuals that hold post-materialist values such as self-expression and gender equality as opposed to materialist values of economic and physical security are more likely to be civic minded and politically active (Inglehart, 1997). I run confirmatory factor analysis¹⁰ on several questions that tap into post-materialist values, and use the predicted scores to construct a Post-Materialist Index.¹¹ The hypothesis I am testing with regards to post-materialist values is that individuals that hold such values are more likely to be politically active.

Many previous studies have shown that more educated individuals that have higher incomes and live in smaller territorial units are more likely to participate. I include control variables for all these factors. Furthermore, age is found to be positively related to participation as older people have more time at their hands to participate. Others have found

⁹ The survey asks respondents to indicate whether they are members of free time associations, local associations, ecological groups, professional associations, sports clubs, student associations, religious organizations and a residual category of others.

¹⁰ Only one factor emerges with an eigenvalue greater than 1 (1.03647 in our case), indicating that the predicted factor taps into one dimension only—post-materialism.

¹¹ I ran factor analysis on questions that asked the respondents the extent to which they associated democracy with (1) political liberties such as freedom of speech, and freedom of association, (2) with freedom in moral and sexual matters, (3) with equal rights for women, and (4) citizens' right to participate.

gender to be important in predicting both political and nonpolitical participation, with men being more likely to participate than women (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995).

Controls for trust in parties

Trust in political institutions such as political parties is probably related to interpersonal trust. Some people might just be less trustful in general and we need to control for this. I include two controls for interpersonal trust: trust in neighbors and trust in coworkers. I expect that interpersonal trust is positively related to trust in parties. Furthermore, if one believes that parties only serve the interests of their leaders then, one is less likely to trust in parties. I control for this by including a variable that asked respondent whether they agreed with the statement that: Parties only serve their leaders' interests.

As I discussed earlier, some have argued that support for democratic institutions in Eastern Europe will depend on economic experience during the transition period (Kitschelt, 1992; Przeworski, 1991). To control for this, I include a variable that measures how well-off individual respondents are.¹² Furthermore, satisfaction with democracy as a system should be related to trusts in its institutions as well as political participation. As such, I include a variable that measures on a scale from 1 (totally dissatisfied) to 10 (totally satisfied) the extent to which the respondent is happy with the way democracy works in the country. Trust in parties might also depend on how exposed one is to media. Given that corruption allegations and other negative information that tend to erode trust in parties comes from media, people that spend more time reading newspapers should be more distrustful of parties than people who do not read as much.

¹² The measure of income categorizes people on a scale from 1 (poorest) to 10 (richest) based on their earnings. One of the implicit assumptions I make in using this variable is that better-to-do individuals have benefited more from the regime change and should be more likely to support democratic institutions.

As far as country level variables are concerned, I include Freedom House (Nations in Transit) democracy scores to control for democratic consolidation and internalization of democratic values¹³. I also include Freedom of Press scores and Independence of Media ratings to control for the role that professional and independent media play in uncovering and exposing corruption cases. Again, a freer and more independent media should be associated with lower levels of trust in parties. Finally, I also control for a set of socio-economic and demographic variables such as income, gender, sex, and size of community.

Statistical analysis, data and discussion of results

Having introduced the theoretical argument and empirical expectations, along with several alternative hypotheses identified by the existing literature, I now turn to statistical analysis in order to better understand the link between political competition and political participation in Eastern Europe. The empirical strategy I adopt is two-fold. First, I start by directly establishing the theoretical relationship between political competition and political participation. I then proceed by empirically testing the intermediary steps discussed in the theoretical section. First, I test for the interactive effect of competition on trust in parties, conditioned on party identification. Second, I test the direct causal link between trust in parties and political participation.

Before I discuss the results, I need to say few words about the statistical methods I employ in my analysis. I use hierarchical logistic models with random effects¹⁴ that utilize both individual level data (e.g. sex or age) and aggregate data (e.g. country measures for

¹³ Each of these country-level indicators corresponds to the year in which the survey was conducted in a particular country.

¹⁴ Here I follow Gelman and Hill's (2007) recommendation to always use random effects for multilevel modeling.

political competition). Single level models such as multivariate linear and logistic regression are valuable methods for establishing causal relationships and are widely used in our field. However, many populations of interest in political science have a multi-level structure. For example, when analyzing survey data such as ours, we might be interested in both individual factors and country level factors that explain a certain outcome (Gelman and Hill, 2007). Examples of multilevel populations include pupils (level 1) in schools (level 2), or people (level 1) in countries (level 2). If we choose a single-level analysis, we are not utilizing all the information we have in estimating our models.

I use survey data for my regression analysis. The “Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe 1990-2001” comprises of an excellent set of surveys that provides a wealth of information about Eastern European attitudes towards democracy and participation.¹⁵ Due to better data availability, I use surveys from the second Wave (1997-2001) of this study.¹⁶ These surveys are an excellent data resource for conducting comparative analyses because the questions asked are theoretically motivated and nuanced enough to allow for more sophisticated tests. Moreover, the dataset comes with over 500 variables, which allows us to control for many individual-level factors that determine political trust and participation.

1. Does competition impact participation directly?

Let’s begin by directly testing the hypothesized negative relationship between competition and participation. Although my theory suggests that the effect of competition on

¹⁵ The project was administered by Edeltraud Roller, Dieter Fuchs, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Bernhard Wessels, and János Simon.

¹⁶ The countries included in the multivariate regressions are: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Data coverage for Russia and Ukraine was not as extensive, so they were not included in the analysis.

participation is mediated through trust in political parties, we should be able to get at least some direct results. The tables below reveal some interesting results. The effect of political competition on voting is negative and the coefficient is relatively large but this result is not statistically significant at standard levels of significance (0.05). However, the probability of working for a party is negatively related to competition and this result is significant at the 0.05 level. In terms of size, this coefficient is the second-largest in the whole regressions. Holding all else equal, an increase of one unit in the ENP score corresponds to approximately 13 percent lower probability of working for a party.

To summarize, competition is negatively related to both measures of participation but it is only significant for one of them. This could be due to many things including the relatively small number of groups in the hierarchical analysis (10 countries), and the mediating effect that trust in parties has between competition and participation. Therefore a more careful and in-depth analysis is needed to show the complicated causal links between these two variables. I do that in the following section.

The regression results suggest some other interesting patterns. Unsurprisingly, interest in politics is positively related to participation. People who talk more about politics are more likely to both vote and work for a party. Membership in civil society organizations is positively related to both voting and working for parties, but its coefficient is only significant for *work for parties*. Putnam's claim that civil society organizations act as "schools of democracy" is at least partially supported by the regression results. Interestingly, post-materialists are more likely to vote but less likely to work for parties. The coefficient of the *Post-Materialism* variable is significant in both regressions. One interpretation of this contradictory finding is that, given that post-materialism is associated with challenging

authority, people that hold post-materialist values are less likely to work for parties because they tend to be hierarchically structured.

As we expected, *Democratic satisfaction*¹⁷ is positively related to both voting and working for a party as is party identification. The happier people are with democracy and the closer they identify with a political party the more likely they are to be politically active. From the socio-economic variables only income is consistently and positively related to participation. Wealthier people are both more likely to show up at voting booths and get involved in more sustained political activity by working for parties. Older people are more likely to vote but age does not seem to affect one's likelihood of working for parties. Also, people living in smaller communities are more likely to vote and work for parties than those living in bigger communities. One interpretation of this finding is that trust networks and civil society organization are denser and more personalized in smaller communities, leading to higher rates of participation (Putnam, 1993).

¹⁷ The coefficient for this variable is significant only at the 0.1 level for the work for party dependent variable.

Table 1: Estimation results : Vote

Variable	Coefficient	(Std. Err.)
Competition	-0.233	(0.269)
Membership	0.017	(0.039)
Post-materialism	0.114*	(0.045)
Party ID	0.555**	(0.038)
Discuss	0.349**	(0.038)
Dem. Satisfaction	0.082**	(0.017)
Size of community	-0.192**	(0.021)
Education	0.399**	(0.058)
Income	0.078**	(0.022)
Age	0.029**	(0.002)
Sex	-0.028	(0.065)
Intercept	0.901	(1.215)
<hr/>		
N	6953	
Log-likelihood	-3025.766	
Number of groups	10	
<hr/>		
Significance levels :	† : 10%	* : 5% ** : 1%

Table 2: Estimation results : Work for Party

Variable	Coefficient	(Std. Err.)
Competition	-0.524*	(0.237)
Membership	0.334**	(0.040)
Post-materialism	-0.181**	(0.059)
Party ID	0.460**	(0.040)
Discuss	0.741**	(0.054)
Dem. Satisfaction	0.035†	(0.020)
Size of community	-0.106**	(0.028)
Education	0.205**	(0.072)
Income	0.084**	(0.027)
Age	0.000	(0.003)
Sex	0.125	(0.083)
Intercept	0.491	(0.910)
<hr/>		
N	7082	
Log-likelihood	-2086.485	
Number of groups	10	
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Significance levels :	† : 10%	* : 5% ** : 1%

2. How does political competition affect trust in parties?

I now proceed by empirically testing the intermediary steps that link competition to participation. First, I test for the interactive effect of competition on trust in parties, conditioned on party identification. Second, I test the direct causal link between trust in parties and political participation.

Before we discuss the regressions results, it is helpful to plot the relationship between competition and trust in parties. Figure 2 plots the average country levels of distrust of political parties against the average number of parliamentary questions asked by each Member of Parliament, as calculated by Grzymala-Busse (2006). An estimated Least Squares regression line is fitted on the data. On the y axes, I have calculated the percentage of those

who indicated that that they trust parties very little or not at all. To make the comparison more appropriate and match it with the data on competition that comes as an average for the 1990-2004 period, I averaged the responses from the first and the second waves of the survey (1990-92 and 1997-2001 respectively).¹⁸ The figure reveals a striking pattern—the more competitive the political arena of a country is the more distrustful its citizens are. I conducted a simple Pearson correlation test for the two variables and they are highly correlated (0.80), and this relationship is significant at the 0.05 level.¹⁹ This is a very strong relationship, especially so given that we only have eight observations and they are measured on completely different scales. I should note that I ran similar analyses with the effective number of parties as the measure for competition and the positive relationship between competition and distrust in parties remained positive and statistically significant for both waves.²⁰

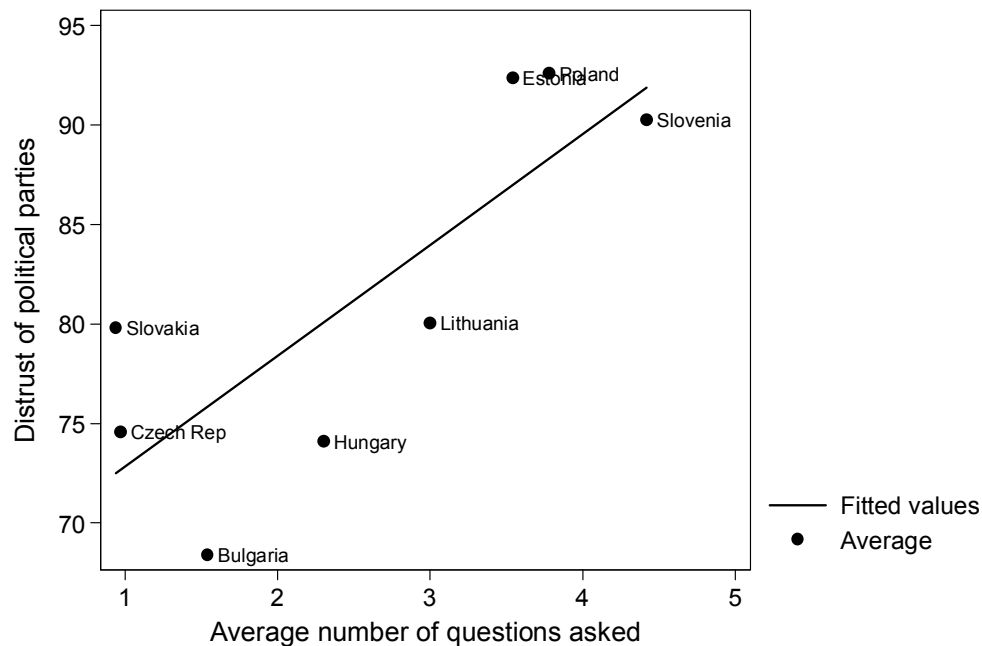
Figure 2:

The relationship between competition (1990-2004) and trust

¹⁸ I did for 8 out of the 9 countries for which Grzymala-Busse had calculated political competition. Latvia was only included in the survey in the second wave and thus is not included in the plot.

¹⁹ More precisely, the significance of the correlation coefficient has a p-value of 0.017.

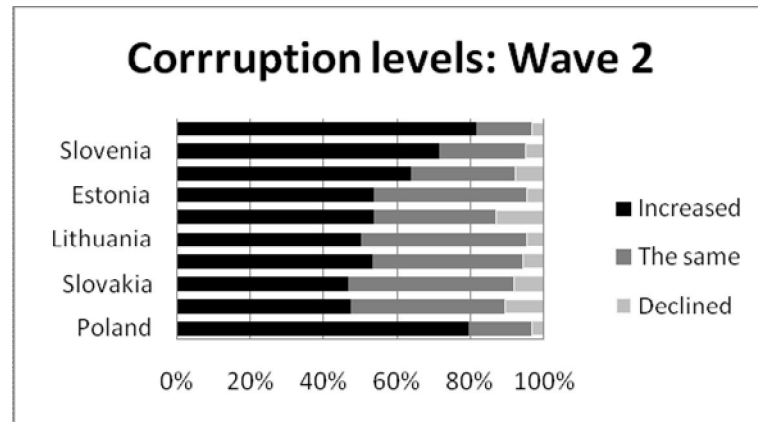
²⁰ The Pearson correlation test yielded a correlation coefficient of .85 for the first wave and 0.65 for the second wave, both of which are significant at the 0.05 level.



Furthermore, if we look at perceptions of corruption over time there is a striking trend—virtually all countries saw an increase in the proportion of respondents who claim that corruption has increased during the present government since the first Wave of surveys (1990-92). Particularly interesting is the fact that, Ukraine aside, the highest proportion of those who think that corruption has increased during the present government are to be found in Slovenia (71 percent) and Poland (79 percent)—our two highest scoring countries on one of the political competition measures. This graphs show that there is a link between levels of competition and perceptions of corruption.

Figure 3:

Change in the perceptions of corruption in the government



However, my theory predicts that the effect of competition on trust in parties depends on the intensity of party identification. Therefore, we need more sophisticated methods to test this prediction. I now turn to regression analysis and test whether there is an interaction effect between competition and party identification in determining trust in political parties²¹. To test for this interaction effect I constructed four dummy variables using information from the *Party ID* variable. Each variable corresponded to the intensity of partisanship that ranged from no party identification to very close identification, with the base being no party identification.²² I then interact each of these dummy variables with the measure for competition. Below is the table with the regression results.

²¹ The dependent variable in this regression is dichotomous measure of trust in parties, which was coded as 1 if people indicated that they trust parties either totally or to a certain point, and was coded 0 if people said that they had little or no trust at all in parties.

²² The question asked the respondents to indicate how close they felt to a party and the options were very close, quite close, not very close and NA. I then used another variable that asked the respondents whether they identified with any party so to parse out those who did not want to answer the intensity of partisanship question from those who had no party identification at all.

Table 3: Estimation results : Trust in Parties

Variable	Coefficient	(Std. Err.)
Competition	-0.381**	(0.118)
Comp*Not very close	-0.090	(0.192)
Comp*Fairly close	0.102	(0.103)
Comp*Very close	0.387*	(0.172)
Media	0.004	(0.450)
Freedom of press	0.019	(0.032)
NIT	-0.086	(0.442)
Self-interested	-0.746**	(0.085)
Not very close	0.446	(0.768)
Fairly close	0.202	(0.436)
Very close	-0.355	(0.710)
Newspaper	0.095*	(0.044)
Dem. Satisfaction	0.206**	(0.020)
Size of community	-0.039	(0.027)
Trust-neighbors	0.482**	(0.057)
Trust-coworkers	0.589**	(0.067)
Income	0.071**	(0.027)
Age	0.007**	(0.003)
Sex	-0.147 [†]	(0.083)
Intercept	0.811	(0.853)
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N	6128	
Log-likelihood	-2046.844	
Number of groups	10	
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Significance levels : † : 10% * : 5% ** : 1%		

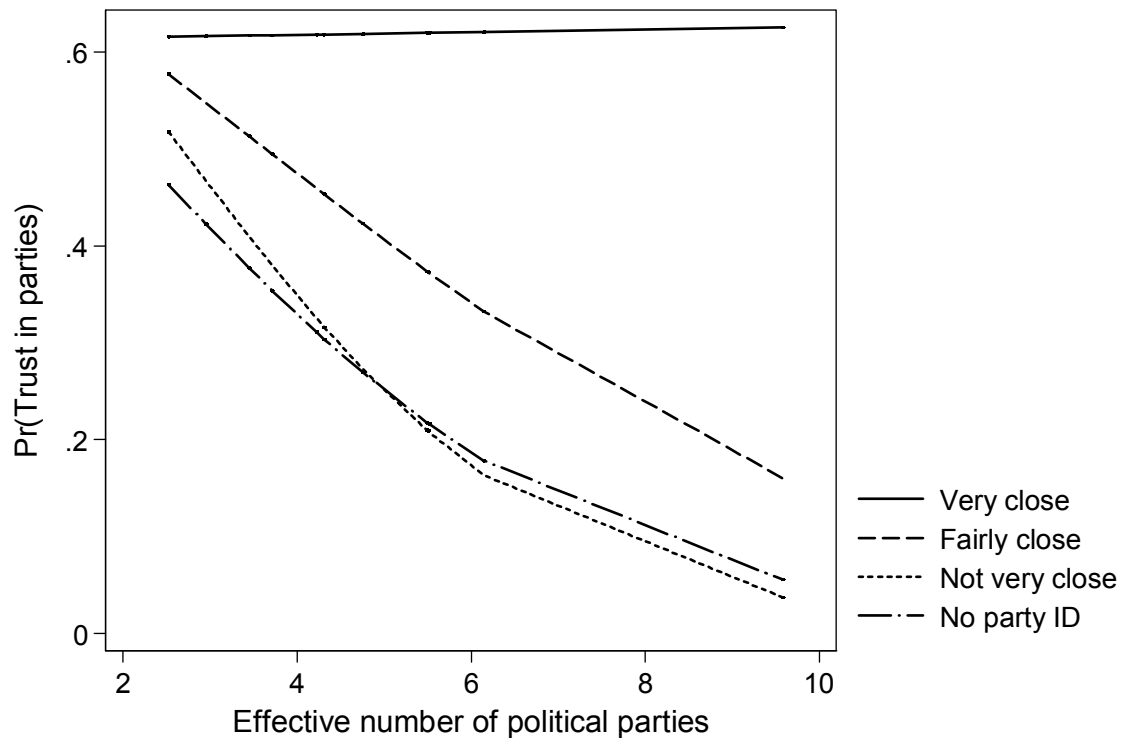
The results strongly support the hypothesis that the effect of competition on trust in political parties depends on the intensity of party identification. This effect however seems to be taking place only for those who identify very closely with a political party. As we can see from the coefficients of *Comp*Not very close* and *Comp*Fairly close*, the effect that competition has on trust for parties for people with weak or fairly weak party identification is statistically indistinguishable from the same effect for those in the base category with no

party identification. In other words, given the highly significant coefficient of the *Competition* variable, political competition tends to depress trust in parties equally for all those who either identify weakly with parties or do not identify with them at all.

However, and this is the most important result on the table, competition does not affect the extent to which those who identify very closely with a party trust parties. The coefficient on the interaction term *Comp*Very close* is statistically significant, positive and substantial enough to neutralize the negative effect that completion has on trust in parties. This interaction effect becomes even clearer if one looks at the graph below.

Figure 4:

The Interaction effect between Trust in parties and Party ID



This graph plots the predicted probabilities of trust in parties for the whole range of the ENP index for people with different levels of party identification. This graph is striking in that the solid line that corresponds to those who identify very closely to parties is flat, suggesting that political competition has no effect on the probability of trust in political parties for intense partisans. As predicted, logistic curves for all other categories are downward sloping indicating that as competition increases, the probability of trusting parties goes down. In substantive terms, controlling for the effect of all other variables in the regression, a one unit increase in the ENP index is associated with approximately 9.5 percent decrease in the probability of trusting parties for all but the very intense partisans. In sum, there is strong evidence suggesting that intense partisans are immune to the negative effects of competition on trust in parties. For those who do not identify very closely with a party, competition tends to depress trust in this political institution.

The regression output suggests some other interesting findings. Contrary to what I hypothesized, more exposure to media, measured by the frequency one reads about politics in newspapers (*Newspaper*), is associated with more trust in political parties.²³ There might be some selection bias in this variable as disillusioned citizens might be less likely to read about politics than say political partisans. If this is the case, trustful partisans will be overrepresented in this measure of exposure to political news and drive the results. As hypothesized, higher satisfaction with democracy is positively related with higher trust in parties, as indicated by the coefficient of *Dem. Satisfaction*. This result suggests that the more one is satisfied with the general functioning of democracy, the more likely she is to trust its core institution.

²³ The negative coefficient on the *Newspaper* variable is negative because reversed coding with higher values indicating less time spent reading about politics in newspapers.

Furthermore, the highly significant coefficients on the two variables measuring interpersonal trust, suggest that people who are more trusting of coworkers and neighbors are also more trusting of parties. Therefore, the evidence indicates that there might be some individual characteristics that make one generally less trusting than others. As far as demographic variables are concerned, I am surprised to find that age is positively and statistically significantly related to trust in parties. One would assume that the more time an individual spent living during communism, the less trustful of parties he would be. One creative interpretation of this result might be that, given that older voters are more likely to show up and vote on Election Day, they are also more likely to form attachments to parties, which tends to increase trust in parties. Unsurprisingly, the belief that parties serve only the interests of their leaders, measured by the *Self-interested* variable, lowers the probability of trust in parties and this variable is highly significant and has the largest substantive effect on the depended variable. It should be noted that none of the other country level variables—*NIT*, *Freedom of press*, or *Media*—is significantly related to trust in parties.

3. How does trust in parties affect direct political participation?

So far, my empirical analysis has yielded some support for the direct link between competition and participation and has decisively shown that increased competition tends to depress trust in parties only for those who are not intense partisans. I now proceed to show the final causal relationship between trust in parties and direct political participation to complete the testing of the entire theoretical framework. Since these last two equations are virtually identical with the first ones I ran (Table 1 and Table 2), with the main difference being I now have *Trust in parties* as the main IV, I will only discuss the results for the

controls to the extent they deviate from the previous ones. Below are the last regression outputs.

Table 4: Estimation results : Vote		
Variable	Coefficient	(Std. Err.)
Trust Parties	0.110*	(0.050)
Membership	0.010	(0.039)
Post-materialism	0.123**	(0.045)
Party ID	0.534**	(0.039)
Discuss	0.347**	(0.038)
Dem. Satisfaction	0.076**	(0.018)
Size of community	-0.188**	(0.022)
Education	0.379**	(0.058)
Income	0.070**	(0.022)
Age	0.029**	(0.002)
Sex	-0.030	(0.066)
Intercept	0.352	(0.398)
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N	6814	
Log-likelihood	-2967.483	
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Significance levels :	† : 10%	* : 5% ** : 1%

Table 5: Estimation results : Work for Party

Variable	Coefficient	(Std. Err.)
Trust Parties	0.523**	(0.058)
Membership	0.324**	(0.041)
Post-materialism	-0.178**	(0.060)
Party ID	0.384**	(0.042)
Discuss	0.748**	(0.055)
Dem. Satisfaction	-0.015	(0.021)
Size of community	-0.082**	(0.028)
Education	0.195**	(0.074)
Income	0.070*	(0.028)
Age	-0.001	(0.003)
Sex	0.133	(0.085)
Intercept	0.332	(0.381)
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N	6941	
Log-likelihood	-1995.403	
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Significance levels :	† : 10%	* : 5% ** : 1%

The most significant pattern that can be inferred from this table is that trust in parties is positively related to both forms of direct political participation. Although the effect that trust in parties has on voting is substantially lower than the effect it has on working for a party, both coefficients are significant at the 0.05 level. We are pretty confident that the more trustful of parties people are the more likely they are to vote or work for parties. For example, trusting parties somewhat as opposed to little corresponds to a 13 percent increase in the probability of working for a party and to approximately 3 percent increase in the probability of voting.

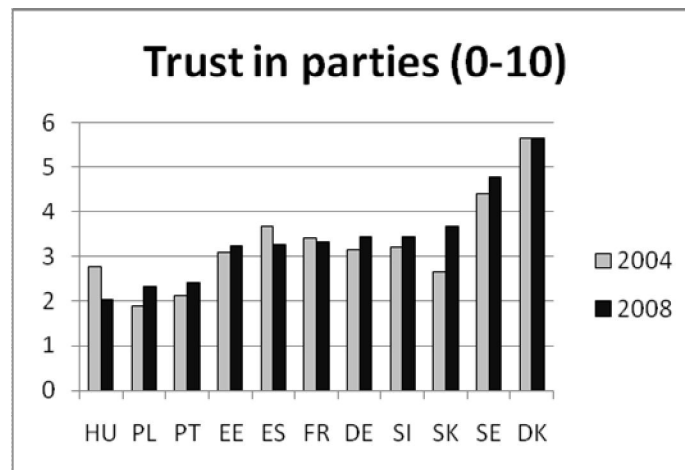
As far as control variables are concerned, the only change we observe is in regression output with *Work for party* as the DV. Satisfaction with democracy has changed signs (from

positive to negative) but the coefficient of this variable is not statistically significant. The same goes for the *Age* variable.

Trends over time

The surveys I have analyzed so far were conducted almost ten years ago. What has happened in Eastern Europe since then? I do not have space to marshal definitive evidence, but important indicators point to an increase in trust in political parties. For example, evidence from the European Social Surveys (ESS) suggests that, by 2008, levels of trust in countries such as Slovenia, Slovakia and Estonia became as high as or higher than in Western Europe.²⁴ Hungary is the exception to this trend.

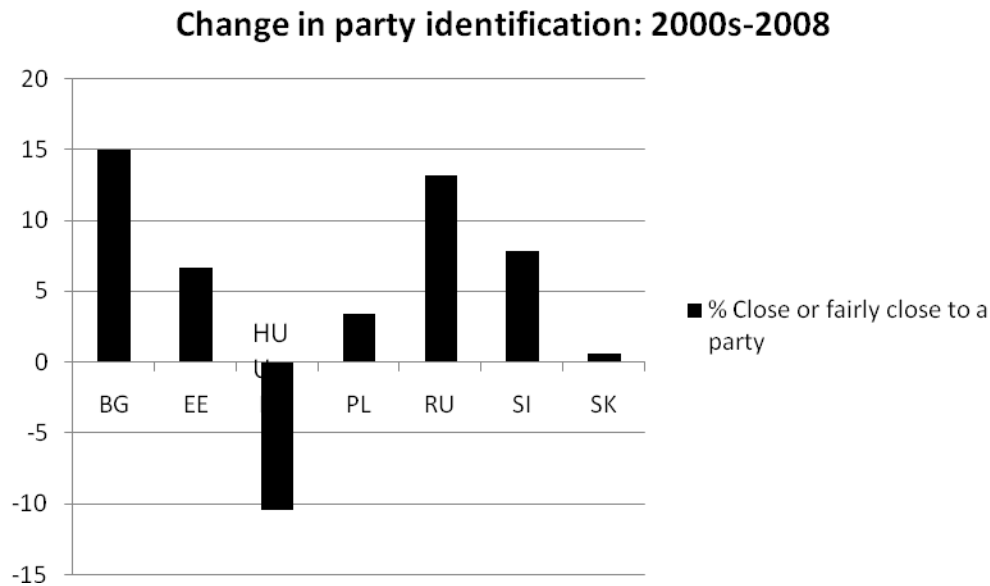
Figure 5: *Trust in parties over time*



²⁴ The surveys asked respondents to indicate on a scale from 0 (No trust) to 10 (Complete trust) the extent to which they trusted political parties. I used Data from two ESS surveys to construct the graph above. ESS Round 4: European Social Survey Round 4 Data (2008). Data file edition 1.0. Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data. ESS Round 2: European Social Survey Round 2 Data (2004). Data file edition 3.1. Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data.

Interestingly, survey data on party identification also seems to suggest that Hungary is the only country in Eastern Europe where people report to have less intense attachment to parties in 2008 than they did in 2000s (Figure 5).²⁵ More specifically, there was a 10 percent drop in the number of respondents who indicated that they feel very close or fairly close to a political party. Further research is needed to explain this trend in Hungary.

Figure 6:



To return to the broader picture, it seems that, as my theory would predict, an increase in party identification has been accompanied by an increase in trust in parties in Eastern Europe. With the exception of Russia and few other former-Soviet Republics, political competition has certainly not gone down either. This preliminary evidence suggests that the negative effects of competition in trust in parties might be fading away. There are several reasons as to why this might be happening. First, 20 years have passed and the communist legacies of distrust in parties might be losing their salience. Furthermore, the economic

²⁵ I used data from both the ESS and the second Wave (1997-2001) of Roller et al. surveys.

transition has worked itself out and the privatization process is drawing to a close, providing fewer opportunities for spectacular self-enrichment on the part of the leaders, thus limiting the number of scandals. Just as importantly, as new generations of Eastern Europeans are socialized into democratic norms and rules, the communist legacies should matter less. Thus, the relationship between competition and trust should be further weakened. Further research could explore the link between political competition and democratic support in a more dynamic fashion. In this way, one could evaluate the actual importance of these mediating factors and their interaction over time.

Concluding remarks

In this article I have shown that political competition, contrary to what most of the literature assumes, can have serious negative side effects for the healthy functioning of a new democracy. In postcommunist Europe, at least for the first ten years, the effects of political competition have been to depress direct political participation by the citizens. What are the implications of this argument? First and foremost, it offers a more complete understanding of the factors driving disillusionment with political life in postcommunist Europe. It also offers a systematic way of thinking through puzzling findings that show lack of support for democracy and its institutions in the front-runner countries of the transition. Where does this leave us? Do we need to rethink our theories of political competition? I would say not. There is little doubt that competition has been tremendously beneficial for postcommunist societies in that it has constrained governmental discretion and rent-seeking, it has provided for better governance, and it has improved economic performance. My hope is that this article

contributes to our understanding of Eastern European politics and the political apathy that so many informed observers have noted but have been unable to fully explain. Finally, and the evidence for this is inconclusive, we have reasons to suspect that Eastern Europeans are becoming more used to conflictual style of politics and have become more comfortable with political parties.

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