Societal and Political Cleavages

The founding elections of 1989 and 1990 were primarily anticommunist plebiscites. In the Czech and Slovak Republics and Poland, though not in Hungary, they introduced the second stage of party building: the organizational differentiation of ideologically heterogeneous and hitherto largely unstructured "civic movements" (Mangott, 1992: 104). Despite the crystallization of milieu parties, especially among Catholic subcultures (Enyedi, 1996), most political parties were weakly rooted in society and suffered from internal factionalization. Party systems were, on the whole, highly fragmented (Segert and Machos, 1995). Riviera (1996) tested the two hypotheses of party building in postauthoritarian systems: the "defreezing" of earlier, fundamental societal cleavages latent or frozen under the communist regime vs. "modes of transition" away from authoritarian systems. He concluded that both factors were less important in East-Central Europe than in Western and Southern Europe. "Rather it is the legacy of the communist authoritarian period – the command economy, the decomposition of civil society and the imposition of one-party rule – that seems to have the greatest effect on the early stages of party formation" (ibid.: 195).

Kitschelt (1995a, b) developed a multifactor model for ideal typical conflict configuration in the various postcommunist societies. In the following section, our goal is to arrive at an empirical identification of the societal and political cleavages which prevail in East-Central Europe. To do so, we proceeded in two consecutive steps:

1. On the basis of interviews with experts, we assigned the parties of each country to "party families" according to their programmatic orientation; specifically, communist or radical Left, social democratic or socialist, liberal, conservative/Christian democratic, (majoritarian) nationalists and minority parties.¹ In a few cases (the HZDS in Slovakia or the Peasant Party of Poland)
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this was not possible, so those parties are handled separately. For Poland, it was also appropriate to distinguish between social democrats of the postcommunist SLD and those of the former opposition, the UP.

2. We then compared the electorates of each party family with regard to organizational or attitudinal continuities between the old and the new regimes, images of democracy, ideological and political orientations, and distinctive sociodemographic features. If respondents indicated either no party preference or preference for one of the parties excluded under point 1, we also excluded them from this analysis. In each of the four countries, these respondents comprised about one fourth of the representative sample. As a further qualification, we would add that the sample sizes only allow for tentative conclusions, especially concerning sociodemographic variables.²

9.1. The Heritage of the Communist Past

The history of party formation – in particular, the creation of some parties as the successors of earlier communist or communist satellite parties and others as the successors of the opposition or dissident movements – has left its mark on the electorates of East-Central European parties or party families (Wightman, 1995). The constituencies of each of the communist successor parties studied³ contain an unusually high percentage of former CP or communist suborganization members. Conversely, the share of former Party members in other parties does not exceed the population average.⁴ Those who vote for communist successor parties (with the exception of Hungarian social democrats) generally have a more positive view of the old system in retrospect. Not surprisingly, this tendency is much stronger among supporters of communist or radical Left parties than among those who vote for communist successor parties now turned socialist or social democratic. Supporters of conservative, Christian democratic or liberal parties are far more critical of the old regime. A similar pattern is repeated in the assessment of system change: in comparison to other parties, the communist successor parties have a significantly higher proportion of voters who are very disappointed with system change or who never expected anything good to come from it, Hungarian social democrats again being the exception.⁵ Just the opposite is true of conservative,