

**Explaining the Formation of Electoral Cleavages in Post-  
Communist Democracies**

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## 1. Introduction

Democracy is comprised of a multitude of interlocking elements, from economic and social interests and their articulation, to the design of electoral laws and their effects, to the intricacies of bargaining within governing coalitions. From among these many elements we focus here on one central feature of the new democracies in post-communist Eastern Europe: how and why individuals and social groups in post-communist states are divided in their partisanship. The principal questions addressed are twofold: what are partisan divisions *about* in post-communist societies; and who or what *influences* the nature of these divisions?

In addressing these questions, this paper joins and advances a long and central debate in political science on the structures underlying partisanship. For reasons we discuss below, recent years have seen the rise of elitist and institutionalist explanations of such structures. We question these approaches and place again on the agenda the thesis that, at least in transition societies, the ideological and social divisions underlying partisanship are best explained ‘sociocentrically’ - that is, by the interests, beliefs and behaviour of individuals, families and social groups that are a product of the social structure of a given society.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time we distance ourselves from the dominant sociological perspective on the formation of political divisions in which emphasis is placed on the role of ‘civil society’. According to this approach, citizens’ ideological and social identities are formed via participation in a range of intermediate, non-state organisations and it is these in turn which provide the locus around which parties form and compete. On this basis, the weakness of civil society in Eastern Europe has made many observers question whether any structure

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that elites and institutions are not important in Eastern Europe for a range of other political process and outcomes; or that ideological and social divisions elsewhere are not shaped by these factors.

underlies partisanship. Again, however, though civil society may help account for the shape of party systems in Western Europe, we argue that the emergence of partisan divisions is not dependent on it.

In place of these top-down elite and institutional accounts and a focus on civil society, we offer a different - 'macro-sociological' - perspective that in some ways revives older traditions in political sociology while dealing with their difficulties. Our approach emphasises the importance of social structure, and the interests and identities associated with locations within it. It also treats voters as intelligent processors of their own interests and identities. They manage this without the existence of developed civil society, and they are able to translate these interests and identities into their partisan choices. Parties, moreover, have an incentive for successful competition to try to guess about voter preferences, and to signal their guesses as simply as possible. In terms of the two questions posed above therefore: political divisions in Eastern Europe are about the issues and challenges that are most fundamental to the interests and identities of citizens, and it is these interests and identities rather than those of elites or institutions that have the greatest influence on determining the structure of partisanship.

The rest of this paper considers theories of the structuring of partisan support and what they might lead us to expect in post-communist democracies. It then considers how empirical evidence on the ideological and social divisions that underpin partisanship in the region enables us to account for their formation and, in some cases, development, and to explain cross-national differences in their character. No less than twelve new democracies in Eastern Europe are included in the study from which this discussion is drawn: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. Almost every state of former-Communist Eastern Europe - with the exceptions

only of Belarus, Albania, and the former Yugoslavia, is thus covered. The data for these analyses come from surveys of the populations of these countries conducted between 1993 and 1998 using questionnaires designed by the authors in collaboration with colleagues from many of the countries involved. Although we do not present detailed survey evidence here, it can be obtained from some of our other current and forthcoming publications (i.e. Evans 1995, 1997, 1998; Evans and Need 1998; Evans and Whitefield 1995a, 1995b, 1998, 1999, forthcoming; Mateju, Rehakova and Evans 1999; Whitefield and Evans 1994, 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 1999).

## **2. Forms of Partisan Divisions and Cleavages**

What type of divisions, first of all, might we expect to find underlying partisan choices? Divisions associated with the electoral choices of citizens can be of various types and number, and of differing degrees of intensity, from those of passing significance, to cleavages involving reinforcing ideological and social differences. The range of possible ideological bases to partisan divisions are in principle extensive, but a number of these may be expected to be more likely contenders than others.

First, differences over the economy and distribution of resources among members of society. Related to this issue dimension are questions of free versus directed mechanisms of distribution, state versus private property, collective versus individualist strategies for economic advancement, the role of the state in redistributing income, desert versus need based conceptions of justice and so on. These issues may have a more or less complex set of interrelationships, and some aspects may be of greater importance in one set of circumstances than another. Nonetheless, it is a common - and probably correct - supposition that these

questions relate to a single underlying dimension of economic orientation, from a liberal, anti-state, individualist, desert-based position at one pole to a directed, state-dominated, collectivist and needs-based position at the other extreme, with many positions in-between. We refer to this dimension in the context of post-communist politics as one based around the issues of *economic liberalisation*.

Second, there are differences over social and political values; related to this dimension are questions of individual rights to pursue independent life-styles, religious beliefs, or sexual preferences; to stand for these views and practices against the opinions of authorities or of the majority in society. Many of the issues included within this dimension relate also to questions of moral traditionalism versus more 'progressive' opinions. This dimension we label as *social and political liberalism*. The position of any individual may be placed at any point on a continuum from extreme libertarianism to extreme authoritarianism - we use the words 'libertarianism' and 'authoritarianism' here without any intended normative overtones.

These two dimensions of beliefs and attitudes may or may not be closely related empirically. It is possible that these two potentially distinct dimensions of issues are in practice so closely correlated as to collapse into one (on this see Kitschelt 1992). Rights to pursue economic individualism, for example, might be considered in the same way as the right to pursue sexual freedom. On the other hand, it is possible to imagine societies in which endorsement of economic freedom is associated with moral intolerance, or circumstances in which there is little relationship at all between the two. The relationship between these two issue dimensions, in other words, is contingent and requires empirical investigation. The same may be said of a number of other dimensions that may structure the ideological divisions to partisanship.

The third general category comprises a number of aspects of identity relationships, especially those of a national or ethnic character. These may be related to either of the first two categories: as when a particular ethnic group is associated with one economic or religious position, or when tolerance of minorities is closely related in people's minds with tolerance of individual life-styles more generally. However, we expect that given the particular historical context of ethnic relations in Eastern Europe, this area of attitudes is likely to be independent of those concerning individual rights more generally. Thus it might be the case that individuals in the majority ethnic group are highly tolerant of differences within their own group but deny rights of citizenship and entitlement to ethnic minorities. Similarly, norms of tolerance may be held in general but not applied to particular groups or their customs. These possibilities point to the importance of measuring attitudes towards ethnic questions independently of those concerning liberalism more generally. Thus, we distinguish *ethnic liberalism*, conceived as a dimension of willingness to support or oppose the rights of minorities to full and effective economic and political citizenship, from more general issues of tolerance towards different social positions and life-styles.

Finally, in addition to these potentially centrally important lines of division in post-communist societies, as elsewhere – economic, social and political, and ethnic liberalism - we investigate the significance of issues that reflect the specific historical experiences of societies and groups in this region. Some of these concern political disputes over questions of state independence, boundaries and international relations; others relate to the status and experience of historically significant minorities – Jews and gypsies - whose relationship to the community defined by the titular majority has been the subject of dispute in many societies. Again, it is possible that these issues are correlated with one or more of those discussed above - though which one might be difficult to predict in advance. But once more, a number of

possible lines of division are evident: support for national independence against integration in broader international economic and political structures; support for Western involvement in a country's affairs; support for the historical rather than contemporary borders of the state where these differ as a result of wars, revolutions or secessions; and in revolutionary or transformed regimes, attitudes towards the old versus new state order.

These potential sources of ideological division are mirrored by possible sources of social division. The most obvious potential social divisions underlying partisanship are those derived from economic interests: social class and occupation - with their attendant implications for income, benefits, wealth and life-chances; economic sector, especially between agriculture, industry, services, and resources; between state and private ownership and control - and a variety of possible intermediate property forms; in employment status - between the employed, unemployed, those working in the home, and those on pensions; in the area of consumption, between forms of housing ownership and tenure, access to goods and services and so on. As the economic lives of individuals may be more or less complex, so too is the potential for complex interrelations and independence in the structuring effects of each of these economic distinctions. To these evident potential sources of differing economic interests we can add others that may or may not be fundamentally economic in character, such as region of residence, size of settlement, education, age, gender, but which bring with them differences in resources and the capacity to benefit, or otherwise, from the opportunities offered by transition economies.

A second potential source of social division derives from cultural differences often of an ascribed character. Religion is an obvious example of this, not only with respect to the distinction between religious believers and agnostics or atheists but also in terms of denomination. Differences founded on language likewise provide a potent source of identity,

again to a large degree ascribed, though in Eastern Europe these can also reflect individual choices or state decisions (see Laitin, 1996; Dave, 1996). Contingently related to both of these are differences of ethnic identity. Sometimes, such identities are closely correlated with religious affiliations, the Islamic Turkish speakers in Bulgaria, for example, while at other times language and ethnicity stand quite independently of a shared religious affiliation – such as is the case with Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians in predominately Catholic Slovakia.

As mentioned above, these social divisions may be associated with ideological divisions. We may even speculate that the relative stability of social attributes, such as religion, ethnicity and even social class<sup>2</sup>, will make it likely that correlated ideological divisions will emerge. The relationships between social and ideological divisions, however, may be complex and cannot be assumed *a priori*. As we show in the next section of the paper, some commentators have expressed doubts about the existence of well-formed relationships between social structure and ideological preferences in post-communist societies. And it is certainly unwise to *assume* that the links between social structure and ideological preferences simply mirror those found in the West. For example, while we would argue that class differences rooted in economic experiences may well be associated with attitudes towards inequality, redistribution and economic liberalization in a similar manner to that observed in, say, Britain (Evans 1993b), the USA (Shingles 1989), Sweden (Svallfors 1999), or any one of a number of countries (Evans 1993c), we expect other social groups to display patterns of ideological preferences that reflect the contingencies of transition societies. Thus age and education are

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<sup>2</sup> Class divisions in political behaviour are likely to some degree to reflect the extent of social mobility between class positions, whether in terms of experience (i.e. the studies in Turner 1992) or expectations (Evans 1993a). Nonetheless, even when there are relatively high levels of objective or expected mobility for individuals, we might expect class divisions in voting to exist as a result of



likely to have rather different consequences for economic preferences in Eastern Europe: older people may well carry with them the expectations and value commitments inculcated during the Communist era and they also constitute a relatively disadvantaged group in contemporary economic circumstances. For them, redistributive strategies should have considerable appeal. In the West, however, age tends to be of most consequence for *social* liberalism (Heath, Evans and Martin 1994) – with older age groups sometimes displaying lower levels of support for generalised redistribution than younger groups (Pampel and Williamson, 1989; Ponza *et al.* 1988). Likewise, although much research in the West has emphasised the effect of higher education on values associated with social liberalism (Hyman and Wright 1979; although cf. Weil 1985), in transition societies higher education also provides marketable resources that again have clear implications for economic interests and orientations. Thus the sources of economic liberalism are likely to vary according to the historically-specific experiences of sections of the population.

Similar qualifications apply to other dimensions of ideology and to partisanship itself. All of these relationships are contingent and need to be demonstrated empirically. They also need to be argued for and explained. In other words, there is a need for a testable theory of how political divisions emerge that can account for the structures of partisanship observed in post-communist societies.

### **3. Explaining partisan divisions and cleavages**

Two sorts of questions are central to explanations of the character of political divisions. First, why do political divisions arise; who or what creates them? This question is closely linked

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parties and other political actors identifying *aggregate* level divisions in political interests to which their policy programmes can be directed.

with a second: what in any given context are political divisions about, what is their content? The relationship between the two sorts of questions is important, because how one answers the first may crucially affect the second. Any theory of the emergence of divisions must as a corollary make predictions about the nature of divisions that are likely to be present in a given setting. We turn, therefore, to the question of the agents or agencies of cleavage formation and the divisions expected to result from their actions.

In their discussion of the fundamental issues of cleavage research, Bartolini and Mair point to a dichotomy of thinking on the subject:

The essential problem with the concept of cleavage lies in its intermediate location between the two main approaches to political sociology: that of social stratification and its impact on institutions and political behaviour, on the one hand, and that of political institutions and their impact on social structure and change, on the other. At the level of individual empirical research the two approaches are often mixed; at the theoretical and analytical levels, however, the synthesis is clearly difficult, and for this reason the concept of cleavage is often reduced ‘down’ to that of ‘social cleavage’ or raised ‘up’ to that of ‘political cleavage. Bartolini and Mair (1990: 215)

While agreeing with this general distinction between social and political conceptions of cleavage formation, it is useful in our view to distinguish analytically three levels of explanation rather than two. Though it is worth emphasising, as Bartolini and Mair do, that in practice the lines between these are blurred and many accounts are likely to be hybrid in character.

The first of these explanations may be labelled ‘bottom-up’, to highlight the stress put on the importance of sociological factors in explaining the character of political divisions. The second, not surprisingly, we label ‘top-down’ because it places greatest emphasis on elite or

institutional factors in shaping divisions. Making precise distinctions between these two ideal types is, of course, not exact and to cover the difficult cases a number of authors have emphasised the importance of '*mezzo*-structures' or the character of 'civil society' - which we put in a third category - comprised of organisations that stand between society and the state and elites. At 'the bottom', therefore, we would place individuals, families, social classes and occupational groups. In 'the middle' are organisations connected more or less directly to these social units - trade unions, for example, are examples of societal organisations, as are community associations, local church groups, sports groups etc. - which many would label as elements of civil society. At 'the top', we place a variety of elements: institutions that structure the rules of political competition such as presidential or parliamentary systems or electoral laws; leading politicians and people who might be regarded as having significant resources for influence, such as press barons or wealthy business people; and political parties.

The question is which of these is primary in defining the divisions underlying partisanship: whether it is social differences, organisations, or parties, institutions, and elites - singly or in combination. Most responses to this question emphasise that there is likely to be interactions between the levels, but the extent of interaction and the location of the main causal impetus is a subject of much debate. Naturally, the answer to the question will depend very much on the context, though it will be essential to specify the expected forms of contextual influence.

The most celebrated and influential work on political divisions is that of Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967). It is also among the most complex and difficult to summarise. Their explanation of the character of political divisions contains a number of the elements already outlined, including elite interests, patterns of development of 'civil society' - though they do not use this term directly - and in particular broad patterns of social division arising from general patterns of historic development. These latter, involving the famous four

aspects of state-building, reformation and counter-reformation, land versus industry, and capital versus labour, together form a rich basis of potential variation in the precise character of political divisions within any given society. This complexity is added to by the suggestion that the actual constellation of factors dividing the electorate of a given country in its partisanship at time  $t+1$  is also the effect of the country's divisions at time  $t$ , that is the point at which mass enfranchisement took place. This 'freezing' is the result of the work of the country's political institutions, including the electoral system and the party system. Lipset and Rokkan offer, then, an account which refers to all of the factors mentioned above: top-down elite interests and institutions, *mezzo*-level social organisation, and the bottom-up macro-societal elements of a country's development. As they argue:

Much will depend, of course, on the timing of the crucial steps in the building of the nation; territorial unification, the establishment of legitimate government and the monopolisation of the means of violence, the take-off towards industrialism and economic growth, the development of popular education, and the entry of the lower classes into organised politics. Early democratisation will not necessarily generate clear-cut divisions on functional lines. Lipset and Rokkan (1967: 12).

From this very catholic sociological approach, including as it does a vital element of path-dependency via timing, Lipset and Rokkan go on to broaden the range of considerations, reflecting much more 'top-down' and *mezzo*-level concerns as follows:

But cleavages do not translate themselves into party oppositions as a matter of course; there are considerations of organizational and electoral strategy; there is the weighing of pay-offs of alliances against losses through split-offs; and there is the successive narrowing of the 'mobilizational market' through the time sequences of organisational efforts... First we must know about the *traditions of decision-making* in the polity...

Second, we must know about the *channels for expression and mobilization of protest*.... Third, we need information about *the opportunities, the pay-offs, and the costs of alliances* in the system... Fourth, and finally, we must know about *the possibilities, the implications, and the limitations of majority rule* in the system. Lipset and Rokkan (1967: 26-27). (Italics in original)

As well as the sheer complexity of their approach, the Lipset-Rokkan account of cleavages is difficult to classify as one particular type of causal explanation. In our view, despite its great influence, it remains more of a reference point or a framework of concepts than a model for contemporary research on political divisions.<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, each of the strands of explanation in Lipset and Rokkan's paper can be found in contending accounts of cleavage formation proposed in subsequent analyses. However, the elite and mezzo-level strands arguably have the greatest number of clear adherents and, perhaps because the bottom-up perspective has been both most closely associated with Lipset and Rokkan's work and is the most weakly defended by them, macro-sociological explanations of political divisions have become especially unfashionable.

The central difficulty with the bottom-up account in Lipset-Rokkan lies in the fact that they did not provide a rigorous and generally plausible set of causal mechanisms explaining how broad macro-sociological factors could have been translated into structured divisions at the individual level without invoking further mediating factors. This compares with the plausible

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<sup>3</sup> This limitation can also be seen in current examples of empirical political sociology, such as that of Manza and Brooks, whose notion of sociological explanation appears to relate to 'social structure, group conflict, or political-organizational factors' (1999: 241). Despite the evident quality of their empirical research, such an inclusive conception of what is distinctive about a sociological explanation appears to leave little scope for anything *not* to be a sociological explanation and as such strips the concept of analytical power.

individual-level explanations in the other strands of argument found within their work in which structured political interests are essentially formed by already existing institutions or individuals with the influence that makes them capable of mobilising citizens in appropriate ways. Only structuring mechanisms such as these are held to have the capacity to translate differences of interests into politics, to create perceptions of interest in the population, or to allow only certain kinds of social distinctions to enter the political arena. In these accounts, social structure is largely relegated to a subsidiary role in which any differences that may exist within it will count politically only when organisational factors have been included in the equation - whether this organisation comes from elites, political institutions, or from the *mezzo*-structures of civil society.

An example of rather greater conceptual precision with respect to the mechanisms forming political divisions can be found in the work of Giovanni Sartori and Adam Przeworski. Although both to some extent rely on *mezzo*-level factors in their explanation, they can be more firmly placed in the 'top-down' category because of their emphasis on the role of parties. Sartori (1969), for example, rightly emphasises the importance of specifying the mechanisms for the translation of social differences that are widespread and multifarious into political divisions which are synthetic and relatively delimited in number. Something or someone must be responsible for taking differences at work or in the community and transforming them into structured divisions that unite large groups of people who are in many other ways heterogeneous on the basis of their political outlook and behaviour. For him, 'no idea has ever made much headway without an organisation behind it...' (Sartori 1969: 85). Or in a similar vein, as Neto and Cox (1997: 150) have claimed more recently: '... politicians can take socially defined groups and combine or recombine them in many ways for political purposes - so that a given set of social cleavages [what we would call social differences] does

not imply a unique set of politically activated cleavages, and hence does not imply a unique party system.’ A number of different organisations might accomplish the task of turning social difference into structured political division, such as parties and trade unions, and in this sense Sartori may be placed in both ‘*mezzo*’ and ‘top-down’ categories. The important point, however, is his emphasis on the centrality of organisation and the resources required to structure difference into division and these are likely result from the activities of groups that are already highly organised and have access to political power and resources.

Przeworski is equally committed to the importance of organisation, and especially parties, in his discussion of divisions in politics:

‘Class, ethnicity, religion, race or nation do not happen spontaneously, of themselves, as a reflection of the objective conditions in the psyches of individuals...[P]eople become conscious of social relations in the realm of ideology, individuals become aware of conflicts of interest at the level of ideology... [I]ndividual voting behaviour is an effect of the activities of political parties. More precisely, the relative salience of class as a determinant of voting behaviour is a cumulative consequence of strategies pursued by political parties of the left.’ (Przeworski 1985: 99-101).

So Sartori, Przeworski and others offer some support to both top-down and *mezzo*-level explanations of political divisions. However, other scholars have taken this debate further by identifying more clearly where causal primacy lies. On the institutional side, the classic argument was made by Duverger. Whereas Lipset and Rokkan placed the emphasis in their analysis of party systems on the character of pre-existing social cleavages, Duverger focused on the importance of the electoral system in structuring voter interests and channelling popular concerns into packaged policy programs. This way of considering the structuring of preferences has been taken up and expanded in the growing purposive choice approach found

in the work of Shepsle (1991), Katz (1980) and others. Institutional explanations of prominence in accounting for the nature of political divisions have in recent years also concentrated on the impact of presidentialism or parliamentarism (Riker, 1962; Lijphart, 1992; Shugart and Carey, 1992; Sartori, 1994). These institutions, in turn, have effects on the type of division that emerges. Presidential competition is expected to influence the character of divisions not just by the effect of the winner-take-all outcome and institutional or informal incentives to two-person races, but by personalising political disputes. In presidential systems, not only the nature but also the extent of ideological divisions is predicted by some commentators to differ from those found in other types.

A recent example of the application of a top-down perspective in the analysis of democratic consolidation is given by Chhibber and Torcal (1997) who in their work on Spanish political development claim that '[p]olitical elites are especially able to play a more active role in defining the social basis of party support in nation-states in which there is a marked absence of secondary organisation and party structures.' (Chhibber and Torcal, 1997: 28). They thus concede the potential for the determining force of '*mezzo*-structures' in shaping the nature of political divisions but make it clear that in their absence a causal explanation of the emergence of political divisions would by force rely on elites and/or institutions. Others arguing largely from this perspective include Frye (1997) and Kitschelt who claims that '... the deliberate choices of politicians, embedded into systems of institutional rules and strategic configurations, make a difference in the dynamic of party systems and the evolution of cleavages.' (Kitschelt, 1995: 448).

We now relate this general discussion of the factors causing the emergence of political divisions, and the nature of the divisions that are likely to result from these factors, to the



conditions of post-communist Europe. Before doing so, however, it is useful to summarise the argument so far. Three types of explanation have been identified: top-down - institutional and elite dominated; *mezzo* - where the organisations of civil society are predominant; and bottom-up, where macro-sociological factors are central. The first two are seen to have eclipsed the third in the literature, largely because they appeared to offer a more plausible micro-account of the formation of cleavages in which the causal mechanisms linking resources, interests and individual behaviour producing political divisions are clearly set out. Moreover, the first view has become to some degree hegemonic, perhaps because of the widespread recent influence of new institutionalism and theories of constitutional engineering which again have shown a degree of rigour in explanation not generally found in either of the two other accounts. Our aim is to challenge these recent orthodoxies concerning the formation and character of political divisions and to develop a bottom-up, sociocentric account in which the sort of broad macro-sociological factors considered by Lipset and Rokkan play a central role.

#### **4. Explaining the emergence of Post-Communist Political Divisions**

As is the case with cleavage research in long-established democracies, that on post-communism can be understood in terms of one of the three categories of explanation identified above. Again, some accounts combine elements of two or more approaches and emphasise the importance of interaction. Tables 1 and 2 set out in summary form what we believe are the major competing accounts of the conditions shaping the emergence of political divisions in the post-communist societies of central and Eastern Europe, and the predicted character and shape of these divisions from those conditions respectively. The

tables show the stances taken by six approaches; the 'missing middle', modes of transition, character of post-communist elites, nature of political institutions, comparative communist, and our own, sociocentric, argument. We discuss each of these in turn.

Tables 1 and 2 about here

As we have argued elsewhere (Evans and Whitefield 1993), civil society in Eastern Europe, conceived of as widespread mass membership in *mezzo*-level organisations which have influence on the state, was highly under-developed on the transition from communism rule, certainly by comparison with the role such organisations are held to have played in the earlier transitions in Britain and the United States. Interpretation of the significance of this absence of civil society for the emergence of political divisions in the region has tended to take two directions. The first insists on the necessity of civil society to the development of cleavages and claims that its absence will impede the development of any sort of coherent political divisions at all. We characterise this position as the 'missing middle' hypothesis (Evans and Whitefield 1993, pp528-531). Its influence on thinking on post-communist political divisions, especially in the early stages, has been considerable.

The impetus to this view of the absence of political divisions in post-communist states stemmed from a widespread acceptance of the distinctive and powerful effects of communism on the conditions for cleavage formation. Communist societies were often described as having been atomised by the combination of repressive and highly centralised state activities (Karklins, 1994; Zhang, 1994; Zaslavskaya, 1984) and by a reward system which facilitated individual rather than collective action (Smolar, 1996; Whitefield, 1993). In addition, the operation of egalitarian economic policies and the disaggregation of social resources - such as

property, education, status, occupation and wealth - were considered to inhibit the formation of social classes, and led to the emergence instead of social amorphousness and homogenisation (Parrot, 1997; Ossowski, 1963; Wesolowski, 1966; Connor, 1988; Bendix, 1969). The result, according to proponents of this approach, was a pattern of interest articulation at the level of mass collectivism - nation or society - rather than in median-level organised groups (Remington, 1990; Schopflin, 1993; Ziolkowski, 1990), and as a consequence, the absence of bases of social differentiation that would relate to partisan support.

The absence of *mezzo*-structures also inhibited the formation of a social identity from which political interests and allegiances might develop (Smolar, 1996; Sakwa, 1996; Eckstein, Fleron, Hoffman and Reisinger, 1998 *passim*). In the economy, severe restrictions on the market - including the labour market - and on the private use of property and private property itself, prevented the formation of intermediate structures such as corporations and trade unions. Institutions responsible for managing the economy were chiefly large-scale strategic and operational agencies of the state - state planning commissions and branch ministries - which operated highly redistributive policies and allowed enterprises to operate on the basis of soft budget constraints. Attempts to devolve economic decision-making on to intermediate organisations were largely unsuccessful. At the political level, the absence of *mezzo*-level institutions was evident in the power of the ruling Communist Parties and the consequent ban on free party formation, the absence of competitive electoral systems and representative institutions of government, and strong restrictions on freedom of information, association, and expression.

This lack of social and institutional bases was held to have affected the very existence of dimensions of issue space in which ideological divisions could emerge. There is some

evidence, for example, that a large majority of east Europeans were highly state-reliant and attached to egalitarian and welfarist social policies. As a consequence, it was held that populations were unlikely to be differentiated along a dimension of left-right issues (Kolarska-Bobinska, 1994; see discussion with respect to Russia in Whitefield and Evans, 1998b). Moreover, it has been argued that people failed to consider their interests in terms of policy trade-offs, and exhibited incoherent or inchoate patterns of interest articulation and belief structure (Bunce and Csanadi, 1993). Thus, both social amorphousness and the absence of ideological differentiation at the mass level, resulting from the weakness of social organisation, were expected to inhibit for some extended period of time the development of structured political divisions underlying support for parties. Moreover, the absence of historic party identification had the effect of intensifying the atomised relationship of individuals to the political process. This lack of a differentiated basis of interests undermined the stability of voter behaviour and, in the absence of clear and stable social and ideological bases to partisanship, voters would be prone to the sort of highly personalised or clientelistic, not to say demagogic, appeals that were outlined earlier in footnote 3 as an alternative to the structured political divisions that we are investigating (Jowitt, 1992).

Not all interpretations of the consequences of the absence of civil society are so pessimistic about the prospects for the emergence of patterned political divisions. A second perspective is in line with one we have already encountered in the work of Chhibber and Torcal (1997; see footnote 5): the absence of secondary associations has the effect of strengthening elites and/or institutions as determinants of political divisions. From this perspective, the character of the transition from communism, the nature of elites, and the new democratic institutions that were created in the aftermath, are the sources of emerging political divisions. First, the modes of transition and the new institutional architecture are sufficiently differentiated to

produce variation in the character of cleavages. Second, institutions generate incentives to those operating within them to shape the electorate in structured ways. Third, elites and institutions in combination or separately are sufficiently powerful - and indeed, in the absence of civil society may be thought of as overweening - to be able to shape the nature of divisions. These 'top-down' accounts, therefore, provide the organisational basis for cleavage formation, in the manner that Sartori or Przeworski insist upon, for post-communist societies.

It is also apparent, however, that East European states may vary in the extent to which they correspond to the types of case identified in 'top-down' approaches. First, modes of transition differ with respect to the extent of mass mobilisation or inter-elite bargaining. Second, the character of post-communist elites varies, particularly depending on whether the communists remain unreconstructed or are reformed. Third, institutions also differ in important ways.

The predicted consequences of these differences are numerous. First, by describing the inter-relationship between the degree of mobilisation and political strategies of masses and elites, the mode of transition makes claims about the character of the political system that will subsequently emerge, especially its party system. The mode of transition helps shape the degree of popular involvement in democracy via its influence on the number of parties, their social bases, and the sorts of issues that will appear on the political agenda. Countries such as Hungary, with negotiated elite transitions (arguably) may therefore likely to be much more restrictive in the mobilisation of mass support for parties and show ideological divisions that relate much more to elite than mass concerns than countries like Poland where mass mobilisation was of much greater importance to the transition. In the latter, a distinct social and ideological basis to divisions should be evident. Indeed, to return to the comparative approach outlined in the previous section, differences in the character of divisions should be

evident for each distinct mode of transition; and similarities evident where transitions are in common. Moreover, while definitions of any given transition mode are open to debate, any other definition should meet the same standard of explanation.

Similar implications follow from the differences noted between the historic positions of elites contending for power in post-communist societies, especially relating to the stance of the former communists and opposition themselves. Communists face the choice of reforming - by moving to the right and changing their name and image, and distancing themselves from the past - or to remain unreconstructed on these dimensions. Former opposition parties, many of which fought politically in the last days of the old regime as large encompassing alliances and movements, face the choice of splitting into smaller fragments with defined appeals or remaining as broad as possible. Different combinations of these strategies have been pursued across the region. The effects of these elite strategies ought also to be evident in the pattern of political divisions if, as some theories of political division assert, the character of elites is vital - particularly, as Chhibber and Torcal and Kitschelt have argued in transitional societies without civil society - to the salience of political and social divisions. Again the precise nature of these effects may be open to debate and, it must be noted, there has not as yet been any developed and testable comparative theory of such divisions advanced by elite theorists for post-communist society or anywhere else. However, evidence for distinctions or similarities following from the nature of elites should be clearly apparent in the comparative analysis.

This, finally, may also be said of the third variant of the top-down approach relating to institutional differences. As we discussed above, institutions are expected to shape the preferences of both the incumbents and those seeking to enter power, as well as the choices available to the electorate and the relative salience to the electorate of a set of policy

alternatives. By extension, institutions also affect the extent of personalisation of the relationship between electors and politicians and the capacity of politicians to control resources in discretionary ways that may create a basis for clientelism. Presidential systems in particular are frequently described as more personalised and clientelistic than the much more programmatic relationships of party competition generated by parliamentary government. Party list electoral systems are also expected to foster programmatic appeals and more disciplined party behaviour than district electoral boundaries in which candidates may seek to personalise relations with the voters. Moreover, as the incentives to parties and electors are influenced by the likelihood of winning alone or in alliance with others - as plurality systems increase the dangers of wasted votes by supporting parties of first preferences - so we should expect greater or lesser complexity to the main social and ideological divisions. Where small parties may gain representation based on a narrow appeal, so we should find the issue most associated with it separated from others; where building coalitions within a single party is necessary in advance of elections, so we should find more complex and synthetic ideological divisions. The same may be said for the social bases of partisanship as well. Thus, we should expect systematic comparative differences and similarities in the extent of programmatic structuring and in the nature of such divisions depending on the country's institutional arrangements.

The fifth set of hypotheses is a much more hybrid model in which the prior character of the communist regime is defined by a set of elite strategic, institutional and societal factors. We refer to this approach as comparative communist, because it emphasises the importance of country differences in the forms and inheritances of communist rule. In the first place, variations in the extent and form of *mezzo*-structures were considerable. In Poland, for example, the existence of the Catholic church and the Solidarity trade union were important

in explaining the success of counter-communist oppositional interest articulation (Smolar, 1996; Pelczynski, 1988). In the Soviet Union, the preservation of a federal political structure and a reward and distribution system in which ethnic labelling played a substantial part had a significant effect on patterns of opposition (Bremmer and Taras, 1993; Laitin, 1996). In Hungary, by comparison with the Soviet Union and other Eastern European states, there had been considerable success in shifting political power away from the main economic institutions (Palei and Radzivanovich, 1990; Migranyan, 1989), and a liberalising regime had succeeded in creating elites with whom the state could negotiate (Linz and Stepan, 1996), thus allowing for greater differentiation along issue dimensions and for the early emergence of parties (Tokes, 1990; Korosenyi, 1990). In Czechoslovakia, a hard-line regime had prevented the emergence of alternative political elites, even though the society was relatively pluralist, thus impeding the emergence of parties and forcing interest articulation into encompassing movements (Batt, 1993). In Bulgaria and Romania, the combination of a hard-line regime and a non-pluralist society produced a further distinctive transition pattern around the continued power of successors to the Communist Party - the BSP or the National Salvation Front (Kitschelt, Dimitrov, and Kanev, 1995; Linz and Stepan, 1996).

A comparative approach also suggests that modernisation was not uniform across the region. In some countries, like Romania, failure to reward educational attainment with social mobility and increased living standards produced a distinctive pattern of anti-communist interest articulation. Even where there was clear evidence of modernisation, as in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the form of regime - hard-line or liberal - affected the pattern of interest articulation. Variation among communist societies in terms of opposition, therefore, depended not on the absolute level of development, but on the impact of this development on



the diverse patterns of interest articulation and institutions (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Remington, 1990; although cp. Werning Rivera, 1996).

These various strands of difference in communist regime types and their varied legacies have been systematically summed up in the work of Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski and Toka (1999). The authors distinguish three types of communist regime - bureaucratic-authoritarian, national-accommodative, and patrimonial - based upon pre-communist determinants such as degrees of state autonomy, urbanisation, strength of development of working class organisation, importance of church, and democratic traditions (see also Markowski, 1997). Where the state was autonomous and the working class strong, bureaucratic-authoritarian communist regimes emerged; where these were weak and where the church was strong, national-accommodative regimes developed; where in addition to state weakness and low working class organisation the peasantry was in place, democratic traditions weak, and church organisation absent, so patrimonial communist regimes developed. Kitschelt and his colleagues assign the four countries in their study to each of these categories, and we have tried to extend the classification to the additional countries in our study, as shown in Table 1. From these regime inheritances, the authors go on to present expectations about the shape of political divisions subsequently, in particular distinguishing between the strength of economic divisions in bureaucratic-authoritarian states, that of social liberalism in national-accommodative, and the general lack of structure in patrimonial ones.

The final set of hypotheses about the shape of political divisions in post-communist states relates to our own 'bottom-up' approach. This proposes that it is differences in the broad, macro-sociological characteristics of a country that will determine the shape of the ideological and social divisions shaping partisanship. This 'sociocentric' approach highlights the importance of factors such as level of industrialisation and modernisation of the state; its

religious inheritance - Orthodoxy, Catholicism, secularism; its degree of ethnic heterogeneity; and its historic status as a country - whether breakaway or long-established. Societies in Eastern Europe may also be classified according to these criteria and as was the case with other approaches, divisions in ideology or in bases of social support may follow from it. Thus, in cases of ethnic heterogeneity, both ethnic issues and ethnic social characteristics may be expected to play a major role in shaping underlying partisan divisions. These may be even more intense in breakaway states where the issue of citizenship is not yet settled. Because of its doctrinal stance, where Catholicism is established, it may be expected to affect the salience of certain social rights issues, especially by comparison with Orthodox societies where the church has traditionally been much less explicitly ideological. Catholicism is also expected to make a difference to the social significance of religiosity to partisanship. Where, finally, markets are well-established and economies relatively developed, class and occupations differences are predicted to be more prevalent than other states. Once again, the strength of the sociocentric account just outlined will be judged on the basis of its capacity to deal with the comparative evidence. Where countries share similar societal features, they may be expected to display similar political divisions.

It should be noted that none of the approaches predicts exactly the same patterns of divisions cross-nationally. Thus, while sociocentric and *mezzo* approaches are fairly similar in their characterisation of Russia – at least in the early stages of transition (see Whitefield and Evans 1996, 1998b) - the important differences between them become evident when looking across a wider range of societies. The same may be said of differences between mode of transition, elite and institutional explanations: they appear similar for Hungary but differ when considering Poland. Unlike Kitschelt *et al.* (1999) who examine only four Central European states, we seek to test these competing theories on a range of countries that allow differences

between their predictions to be revealed. Our claim is that the evidence provides strongest support for one approach in particular: the bottom-up, sociocentric model. We infer this from the fact that it accounts parsimoniously for the patterns of divisions across almost all of the cases in our study (evidence on this is presented in various of our publications referred to in the introduction). The other theories notably fail, on our evidence, to account for the character of divisions, either by predicting differences that don't appear or by expecting similarities that are absent. Only the bottom-up account appears to fare well under comparative scrutiny.

## **5. The Micro-Foundations of Post-Communist Political Divisions**

Even if the sociocentric approach is consistent with the evidence on cross-national variations in cleavage structures, its theoretical underpinning remains to be specified. Social science is not simply about confronting hypotheses with evidence but about providing an explanation of how such a relationship could have come about. For us, such an explanation must be grounded at the micro-level in the understanding and responses of individuals and groups who, in the case of political divisions, must be mobilised into collective or, at least, coincidental forms of electoral behaviour. Sartori's dictum about the need for organisation in politics to translate a wide variety of potential social and ideological bases into actual ones requires a response. In this final section of the paper we therefore present an argument concerning the micro-foundations of our explanation of post-communist political divisions in terms of the conditions in which voters and parties find themselves in post-communist Eastern Europe.

Before specifying our own arguments, however, we should first consider the analysis of these

processes advanced in the recent work of Herbert Kitschelt and his colleagues (most recently, Kitschelt *et al.* 1999). Kitschelt's writings represent the main alternative attempt to elaborate a micro-theory of post-communist politics and we will therefore deal with his position before moving to elaborate our own. Readers who may be familiar with our previous work will not be surprised to see that our disagreements with him remain.

Like Lipset and Rokkan, Kitschelt is difficult to pigeonhole into one or another of the three explanatory approaches discussed in the previous section. On the one hand, as we have already quoted above, he argues with the elite and institutionalist perspectives that 'the deliberate choices of politicians, embedded into systems of institutional rules and strategic configurations, make a difference in the dynamic of party systems and the evolution of cleavages.' (Kitschelt, 1995: 448) On the other hand, he argues - in line with a bottom-up social structural account - that the structure of divisions will relate to the differential opportunities provided to holders of positions in the occupational structures of east European societies by transitions to market economies (Kitschelt, 1992). In addition, the distribution of social groups on the dimension of party support will be conditioned by the general level of economic development of a given society.

What is most notable about Kitschelt's approach is that it provides micro-foundations derived from the same rational choice assumptions for both voters' and elites' strategies. Thus elites design and respond to institutions based on their interests. So too, when possible, do voters. The cleavages that emerge from individuals' choices of parties are determined in particular by occupation and 'office based resources'. Indeed, these sorts of interests are particularly privileged in Kitschelt's account since he holds that, particularly, ethnic but also value-based divisions are also derived from economic interests and the extent of the market transition (Kitschelt, 1995: 461-64). Similar sorts of micro-foundations underlie his account of the

emergence of programmatic, clientelistic or charismatic competition. Here, however, the emphasis is much more on elite calculations of the investment costs necessary to establish one or other sort of partisanship, though again Kitschelt estimates that voters themselves must be included in any micro-explanation because of the costs to them of acquiring information (1995: 449-50). Only in the macro-circumstances that Kitschelt describes, we may infer, are the costs to voters and parties alike such as to make programmatic competition – competition based on ideological and policy-related differences between parties - a likely outcome.

Despite being the best and boldest effort so far to account for the nature of divisions in post-communist societies, we depart from and add to his approach in a number of ways. First, Kitschelt's expectations are that political divisions in Eastern Europe, either across the region as a whole (1992) or (in a later account, Kitschelt *et al.* 1999) within any given post-communist society, will be essentially uni-dimensional in character. For example, politics may be structured by support and opposition to liberalism *per se*. Against, this view, we expect to find in most states multiple dimensions of political division, and even where uni-dimensionality occurs, it is for different reasons than those advocated by Kitschelt. Second, we reject the reductionist tendency in the account of interests at the individual level that Kitschelt offers: the bases of divisions may need micro-foundations, but these need not be wholly economic in content as he suggests. Individuals' interests may be shaped by a wide variety of concerns that cut across their economic position, as with ethnic identity, religious belief, national pride, or social values. These may be related to economic status but certainly need not be shaped by it. Third, Kitschelt argues that the varieties of communist inheritance crucially affect not only the ideological and social character of the emerging political divisions but the extent of programmatic structuring itself. In many states, especially those in which a 'patrimonial' form of communism existed or where presidentialism has been chosen

in the post-communist period, the tendency will be for the lack of any programmatic basis to partisan choice and for the electorate to be structured by charismatic or clientelistic appeals. Our own view is that neither prior forms of communism nor presidentialism will act as strong impediments to the formation of programmatic party competition across a range of possible dimensions, or to these ideological dimensions having roots in socially differentiated experiences and identities.

Thus, although Kitschelt gives considerable and justifiable weight to the nature of individual (and party) calculations linking social conditions, individual interests, and elite behaviour, his propositions about the nature of divisions differ from ours in a number of ways. The source of the disagreement on outcomes, however, lies in differences in our theoretical perspectives on cleavage formation itself, which we see as resulting from the calculations of voters and parties operating under the following 'market conditions': i) the *supply conditions* of alternative parties available to the electorate; ii) the *demand conditions* of post-communism, namely the character of already existing interests and capacities for choice of the electorate; iii) scarcity of information available to voters about parties and parties about voters in the first stages of post-communist electoral competition. These conditions, we argue, give rise to strategic calculations by parties and voters about how to present themselves, on the one hand, and how to make partisan choices, on the other, that will account for the pattern of political divisions across the region.

The empirical assumptions of our theory are as follows. First, as is well known, the supply of parties and candidates for office in post-communist states has proved to be enormous. In no society have voters been faced with a shortage of choice at elections; in fact they have to the contrary regularly been offered a huge number of competitors for office. Second, on the demand side, citizens in Eastern Europe are by virtue of their experience of communist

modernisation and involvement in the transition process sufficiently informed of their ideological preferences - certainly more so than many accounts have suggested – to be able to use them as a basis for making electoral choices. Third, these experiences and preferences are themselves associated with location in different sectors of post-communist societies. Fourth, voters and parties have been operating largely without developed social organisational links, either through direct party membership or via secondary associations. Fifth, all of the states in the region instituted a strong element of proportional representation in their voting system. Finally, in general voters have been making choices in conditions of low levels of information about particular parties, many of which are new and in search of a marketable identity.

Support for the first five of these assumptions has again been presented in earlier publications listed in the introduction and in our forthcoming book on these issues (Evans and Whitefield forthcoming). The sixth we regard as endemic in the circumstances of a new democracy, particularly those in Eastern Europe in which, whatever the claims for ideological continuity with the pre-communist period, there is very little evidence for any partisan continuity in any state.<sup>4</sup> It is from these assumptions that we derive a micro-explanation of the basis for macro-societal factors emerging to shape political divisions independently of elite, institutional or organisational variables. The argument is as follows:

### *Parties*

1. The advantages to successful parties or candidates from winning or at least from gaining representation in the first post-communist elections were considerable; as were the costs of failing. Those parties and candidates that succeeded early in the new democracy were

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<sup>4</sup> See Szelenyi and Szelenyi (1991); Batt (1993); and Berglund and Dellenbrandt (1994).

rewarded in various ways: with the ability to be involved in setting institutional rules (to their advantage);<sup>5</sup> by the early establishment of political profiles that would lower the costs of competing in the next round of elections, as shown for example by the striking level of continuity of party representation in most states *after* the early elections;<sup>6</sup> with influence on policy in the vital stages of the transition processes;<sup>7</sup> and, naturally, through the spoils of office and government, which in the difficult economic circumstances for many in the market

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<sup>5</sup> This applies not only to the most extreme example, Romania, in which the National Salvation Front was effectively able to write the new constitution (cf. Eyal, 1993) but also to cases like Hungary and Poland, in which parties from the first election were able to pass new electoral laws for the second post-communist election. In Bulgaria, parties that gained representation in the first election had the advantage of participating in subsequent discussions on the constitution. Perhaps the clearest example is that of Czechoslovakia where the dominant parties in both republics were able to embark on policies that led to the break-up of the state; different winners would almost certainly have pursued different policies.

<sup>6</sup> This is largely true except for those states, such as Russia and Ukraine, in which the initial elections were characterised by weak levels of party development (Fish 1995; Bremmer and Taras 1997). Hungary is the most obvious example of continuity, in which the seven largest parties that contended the first election remained the largest in the elections in 1998. Even in Poland, where there was extreme party fragmentation after the first post-communist election, the largest parties in this period were most likely to continue to enjoy electoral success. In Czechoslovakia, after the initial break-up of the 'movement parties' – Civic Forum and Public Against Violence – there was also partisan continuity (Kitschelt *et al.* 1999, Wightman 1996).

<sup>7</sup> The case of the break-up of Czechoslovakia is the clearest case of such an effect. Moreover, at least with respect to social policy, there is systematic evidence that the enactment of policies in post-communist states has been influenced by parties' programmatic positions (Lipsmeyer 1999). Other scholars have pointed also to the influence of coalitions on the nature of privatisation programmes (Stark and Bruszt, 1998).



transition and in combination with (at least in some states) poorly regulated control over the privatisation process, could mean substantial private economic gain.<sup>8</sup>

2. Because the costs to politicians and parties of failing to compete successfully were high, they had clear incentives to market themselves effectively. Without long-standing allegiances to political parties, voters were 'up for grabs', unlike many developed party systems in which partisan identities insulated them from competitive appeals for their support. However, this also meant that parties had to attract voters without many of the commonly-used methods and sources available to parties in the West; namely, they had little long-term connection with voters, or organisational ties via intermediary organisations (with the exception of Solidarity in Poland).

3. With weak ties to voters and limited organisational resources, as well as high incentives to win (or gain representation), parties and candidates had to find relatively low-cost but effective ways to seek votes. Under these conditions, preference-shaping strategies such as those suggested by Chhibber and Torcal (1997) or (at some points) by Kitschelt *et al.* (1999), in which parties try to influence the views of the electorate or at least make certain issues more salient, were unlikely to be viable because they were costly and difficult to achieve, and risky – failure on this strategy could well mean missing out on the various benefits of office at the crucial stage in the transition.

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<sup>8</sup> Examples of this process have occurred in Russia, where corruption in the privatisation process has been endemic and the gains distributed in part at least as a result of representation in parliament (Breslauer 1993; Cohen 1999). The Lazarenko case in Ukraine is also a likely case in point. However, even in Central Europe, access to government has been shown to be of direct benefit to incumbents, as aspects of privatisation in Czech Republic indicate. Other financial incentives can

## *Voters*

1. Voters, for their part, possessed relatively well-developed awareness of their own interests and preferences. These interests were differentiated in important ways and along a number of dimensions by voters' social positions. Given that during the early stages of post-communism victorious electoral competitors could not only implement policy programmes that expressed or ran counter to the interests of voters, but could also influence the rules of the new democratic game itself, voters had clear incentives to select representatives who appealed to their interests.

2. Without long-standing allegiances to political parties (with the partial exception of the communist-successor parties in some states<sup>9</sup>) that could serve to shortcut the calculation of the costs and benefits of partisanship, voters had to make up their minds about how best to vote to achieve interest representation. However, they had to make choices in 'double-blind' conditions. First, they had little knowledge of competing candidates and parties or about how the rules of competition might affect outcomes. Second, they operated without experience of how other voters had behaved in the past.

How, in these circumstances, should parties decide to present themselves and should voters make choices about which of them to support? It is our argument that effective parties and candidates are likely to reason that they will increase their chances of gaining representation by orienting their appeals towards easily identifiable social groups and, similarly, to the most distinctive ideological constituencies. This is not at all to say that all parties or candidates

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also be demonstrated, as for example the award of lucrative state subsidies for electoral participation in Poland and Russia (Rozumilowicz 1999; Breslauer 1993).

<sup>9</sup> In some countries of course the Communist Party did have such an organisation but was too discredited at this point to provide an effective mobilising force, or was legally banned from electoral competition.

will make successful choices, only that these choice conditions will have affected which parties were electorally successful. Voters, for their part, are faced with having to calculate how to vote in response to signals sent by parties, some of which at least will have positioned themselves in the ways just outlined. In conditions of limited information about other voters' past behaviour, voters are also unlikely to be sufficiently informed to make strategic calculations about how to avoid wasting their votes. It is our argument, therefore, that they are likely to respond best to the party appeals which most closely relate to their own significant social experiences, identities and values.

The solution for parties and voters, therefore, may be seen as convergence on distinctive focal points, the presence and character of which depends on the historic social and ideological divisions within the country, as well as on the character of its most pressing contemporary challenges. Given the diversity of these historic legacies and challenges, we would expect considerable variation in the sorts of appeals made by parties, and choices made by voters. Thus there will normally be multiple forms of political division within societies, in which voters with distinctive experiences choose parties who reflect their interests and social position. While in the classic Downsian (Downs 1957) formulation a first-past-the-post electoral system might provide incentives to parties to converge towards the centre of a single issue dimension (Garrett and Lange 1989), at least over a number of electoral iterations, these conditions do not apply in the states studied. By the same token, while presidential run-offs may have the effect of reducing the choices of voters to a single dimension, presidential competition *per se*, in which voters are faced with multiple candidates seeking to appeal to distinct constituencies, does not. Rather than convergence on a centrist party, presidential candidate or a single point in ideological space, therefore, partisan divisions in post-

communist polities are likely to be structured by multiple lines of social and ideological cleavage.

## **Conclusions**

These then are the micro-foundations to the macro-sociological approach we advocate for explaining the formation of cleavages in post-communist societies. We can now begin to answer the two questions that were posed in the introduction to this paper. First, who or what creates and sustains the political divisions that emerge in post-communist societies? Our view is that under the choice conditions just described, it will be voters and their interests that are decisive rather than the interests and strategies of political elites, or the nature of the division of executive power. Parties and presidential candidates will opt for strategies that take voter preferences as cues for their public presentations; those that do not are likely to be electorally punished. How are voters made aware of parties and candidates positions without the existence of intermediate organisations of civil society? Simply, and via the media, which can provide enough information about the stances of contenders for office to establish in voters' minds whether or not a party is able to say something about their concerns. In these choice conditions, voters are the effective decision-makers with respect to the axes of electoral competition.

The second question concerned the nature of the political divisions and what they were likely to be about? Our argument points to historically established social differences, rooted in differentiated experiences, and likely to produce varied ideological perspectives on the part of citizens and voters, to which parties will seek to orientate their appeals and in terms of which voters will evaluate them. Thus, our theory would point towards the major challenges and inheritances facing a country - the transition to the market, the role of the Church in Catholic

societies, the position of ethnic minorities in heterogeneous ones, the fragility of national status in new states. This strategy of competition among parties, and the rewards for such a strategy by electors, provides the micro-link between macro-sociological characteristics and political divisions in post-communist societies.

In these conditions, one should expect 'bottom-up' sociocentric factors to predominate in the formation of cleavages. Elites may have plenty of say over other issues, but they will not be in a position to try and impose divisions on society. Institutions may well make a difference to democratic performance, and may also *over time* provide incentives to politicians to engage in coalitions that limit the choices available to voters. But in the initial stages of competition, we should not expect, for example, presidential systems to differ significantly from parliamentary ones with respect to the character of social and ideological divisions. Presidential candidates and parties face the same conditions of presentation and voters the same constraints on choice as those described above. Thus, rather than intensifying the influence of elites and institutions, the consequence of a lack of civil society must surely be to facilitate the expression of voter preferences and their consequent translation into political divisions.

Of course, once a party system has been established, the driving forces underlying cleavage formation might change. Parties in office may feel that they are relatively free to engineer new constituencies and to engage in preference shaping strategies. However, we would note that once established, the basic parameters of political division among an electorate are unlikely to be easily transformed. Parties who have survived the early rounds of electoral competition using this strategy have little incentive to alter their positioning. And while losers are able to mobilise and have the incentive to open new lines of divisions, the history of research into electoral alignments suggests that substantial electoral realignments are infrequent

phenomena requiring special circumstances (Key 1959; Shafer 1991; Evans and Norris 1999) and are likely to remain so (Geer 1991). As Lipset and Rokkan (1967) have emphasised, however, the initial forms that cleavages take place constraints on parties and voters alike: voters develop attachments, parties attract labels and reputations, and institutional mechanisms are put in place that have the effect of 'freezing' divisions for prolonged periods, so that parties can only manoeuvre at the margins. The political divisions established in the early post-communist era are likely to remain important to party support for a substantial period, as indeed we have been able to show in preliminary empirical analyses of over time trends in Russia, Ukraine, Estonia and Lithuania (Evans and Whitefield, 1996; Whitefield and Evans 1998b).

The aim of this paper has been to present the arguments and competing hypotheses that bear upon the issue of cleavage formation in post-communist democracies. And, more specifically, to argue for the primacy – at least in the formative stages of these party systems - of the role of social divisions in structuring political cleavages. A secondary goal has been to go beyond transitology and to integrate post-communist studies with current and past debates in mainstream of political science and thereby to rehabilitate a sociocentric account of political divisions against currently influential explanations based on institutions, elites, and social organisations. We have argued that this can be done without abandoning the need for micro-explanation of how society could have such an influence in the absence of meso-level organisations. This in turn should help shift thinking on post-communism away from a lament for democracy in the absence of civil society, or from a blueprint for constitutional engineering or elite socialisation, to one which sees public input as important to determining the character of the issue and social bases of politics. This fact should in itself increase our estimation of the prospects of democracy in Eastern Europe.

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