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Is left/right still the 'super glue'? The role of left/right ideology and issues in electoral politics in Western and East Central Europe

Walczak, A.

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Chapter 2

Long- and Short-Term Determinants of Party Preferences:

Analysis of Inter-Generational Differences in Western and East Central Europe

Co-authored with Wouter van der Brug and Catherine E. de Vries

Abstract

In this chapter we study differences between generations in the degree to which long-term and short-term factors affect party preferences in established and consolidating European democracies. Scholarly literature has shown that younger cohorts in Western Europe are less likely to be guided by social class, religion and left/right than older cohorts. Little is known, however, about the extent to which such differences exist for the effects of short-term factors. Similarly, inter-generational differences in the effects of long- and short-term factors in post-communist countries have remained largely unexplored. Based on the European Election Study 2009, we show differences between generations that are compatible with de-alignment of younger generations along traditional cleavages. Yet, we also see an increased importance of attitudes towards immigration among the younger generations, which could signal a form of re-alignment.

INTRODUCTION

Generational replacement is one of the main driving forces behind social and political change. As new generations reach the ballot box, they bring new considerations to the fore, reflecting the period in which they were socialised (Inglehart, 1985; Hooghe, 2004). People acquire certain behavioural habits early in life, which often tend to be very stable. Aggregate political changes may thus arise due to cohort effects where new generations have different party loyalties or different issue attitudes than the older generations which they replace.

Scholarly literature has indeed taught us that generational replacement is partially responsible for the declining impact of structural factors and ideology on party preferences in Western Europe (Franklin et al., 1992; Van der Brug et al., 2007; Van der Brug, 2010). These studies show that voting behaviour of younger generations is structured to a lesser degree by traditional cleavages such as social class and religion compared to older generations. In addition to these generational changes, electoral researchers have also demonstrated that left/right considerations have lost some of their capacity to structure party preferences in the recent years (Van der Brug et al., 2007). This is mainly due to the emergence of issues, such as immigration, which are not or only weakly related to left/right ideology (Van der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009) and the fact that larger political parties, especially those in the mainstream, have become less distinct in left/right terms (Pennings and Keman, 2003; Green and Hobolt, 2008). This decline in the importance of long-terms factors coincided with an increase in the explanatory power of short-term determinants, such as issue attitudes and performance-based factors (Van der Brug, 2010; Karvonen, 2010). So far, no systematic research exists that examines the role of generational change in the alleged increase in importance of short-term factors affecting party preferences. Confronted with these intertwined processes of diminishing cleavage-based voting and the allegedly increasing importance of short-term factors, electoral researchers have been facing new challenges in capturing what motivates voters at the ballot box. This study addresses the question to which extent these processes might be driven by generational replacement. We will therefore systematically compare different generations of voters in the extent to which their party preferences are determined by long- and short-term factors.

In this endeavour we look separately at the established democracies of Western Europe and consolidating democracies of East Central Europe. Western European societies have experienced a market economy and democratic freedoms for decades, so that the generational cohorts in these countries have lived in similar political circumstances. However, even within Western European countries, large differences exist in how long countries have been democratic, with Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Spain and Portugal having first parliamentary elections in the 1960s and 1970s. In turn, in Central and Eastern Europe, many of the generations grew up under communist rule. As scholarly literature so far lets us expect similar trends in the effects of long- and short-term determinants of party preferences in Western European countries (e.g., Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996), we develop expectations pertaining to the whole region. However, we account for possible variance by carrying out analyses for subgroups of countries and single countries, where we expect the effects to be different. Inclusion of East Central European countries in this study allows us to vary key economic, social, political and institutional contexts in which generations are socialised.

To date we know very little about the extent to which structural, ideological, issue- and performance-based factors structure voting behaviour across generations in the new member states of the European Union. The electorates of these countries have undergone utterly different socialisation processes, connected to the experiences of communism and transition to market economy than the electorates in Western Europe. Previous research taught us that the effects of vote determinants on party preferences indeed seem to vary across established and post-communist democracies (Van der Brug et al., 2008; De Vries and Tillman, 2011). The variation in the extent to which voter behaviour is structured in the post-communist countries and the varying conditions under which voters have been socialised in these countries point us to expectations which diverge from expected patterns in Western Europe. This chapter utilises this natural variation to test whether the determinants of party preferences between these two contexts indeed reflect differing trends across differently socialised generations. By means of a cross-generational comparative analysis of Western and East Central Europe we can infer whether we observe similar or diverging patterns in both regions.

The study proceeds as follows. In the next section, we discuss the relevant literature and derive expectations on the extent to which long- and short-term factors explain party preferences in established democracies of Western Europe and consolidating democracies of East Central Europe. Next, we test these expectations in a research design proposed by Van der Eijk and Franklin (1996). For this purpose, we employ the European Election Study 2009. Subsequently, we present our findings and conclude by discussing their implications.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Inter-Generational Change in Western Europe

Over the last three decades long-term structural determinants of party preferences (social class, religion, the urban/rural divide) and ideological considerations have lost their capacity to explain party preferences for voters in Western Europe (Dalton et al., 1984; Crewe and Denver, 1985; Franklin et al., 1992; Rose and McAllister, 1986; Evans, 1999; Oskarson, 2005; Lipset, 1981; Nieuwbeerta and de Graaf, 1999; Van der Brug et al., 2007). Before the 1970s, cleavages largely structured electoral processes as political parties claimed to represent interests of voters stratified by social categories. These categories, in turn, provided voters with party loyalties. In the course of the 1970s, the voter-party ties have weakened, leading Franklin et al. (1992) to conclude that *"almost all of the countries (...) show a decline in the ability of social cleavages to structure individual voting choice"*. Apart from social class, the capacity of religion to structure party preferences of Western European voters has also weakened. With the declining level of religiosity, voters' support for confessional parties has diminished (Van der Eijk and Niemöller, 1983; Norris and Inglehart, 2004; Jagodzinski and Dobbelaere, 1998). Although the third of the traditional cleavages – the urban/rural divide – has been less significant in Western Europe, with the exceptions of Ireland and the Scandinavian countries, its capacity to structure party preferences has declined as well (Rose and Urwin, 1969; Lijphart, 1982).

A similar trend has been observed for ideological considerations. Many previous studies have shown that across various European systems the behaviour of parties and voters alike has been structured largely

by the left/right dimension, which until the 1990s remained the dominant ideological dimension of competition (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1990; Klingemann et al., 1994; Hix, 1999; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Van der Brug et al., 2008). The left/right dimension constitutes an 'ideological super-issue' (Pierce, 1999), which summarises diverse policy issues in the domestic arena (Marks and Steenbergen, 2002). The meaning of the left/right dimension is not fixed, but may vary across countries and over time as new issues emerge, which are integrated in the left/right dimension (Gabel and Huber, 2000). Recent research points to a gradual decline in the extent to which left/right structures voters' choices at the ballot box (Van der Brug et al., 2007; Van der Brug, 2010). In addition to period effects by which these processes have been driven, the decline in the capacity of long-term factors to structure party preferences has a generational component (Franklin et al., 1992). Structural voting is mostly found among the generation of voters born before 1950s, which have been socialised in the era of cleavage politics. For younger generations, traditional cleavages do not explain voting preferences that well. Similarly, for voters born between 1950 and 1970, and socialised in the period of ideological polarisation, ideological considerations structure party preferences better than for younger generations (Van der Brug, 2010).

This brings us to the question which factors currently shape voters' party preferences and whether their effects are driven by a generational change. Scholarly literature suggests that short-term considerations such as voter issue attitudes or performance assessments have become increasingly important for voters (Enelow and Hinich, 1984; Rose and McAllister, 1986; Thomassen, 2005). Although there is considerable variance with regard to which issues are important in each country, research so far lets us expect three predominant issue domains. The economically booming years of the 1960s brought forward new generations of voters for whom libertarian considerations regarding life-style and society have become more important than for older generations (Inglehart, 1977; Scarbrough, 1998; Abramson and Inglehart, 1995). Among these issues, attitudes towards abortion, sexual minorities and the role of women in society have begun to weigh more heavily on voters' party preferences. In turn, for the older generations, socialised in the austerity of the post-war world, economic issues remained the predominant considerations. Recent literature suggests that nowadays the issues of immigration and EU integration have overshadowed other considerations in established democracies (Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008). In the process of globalisation, which accelerated in the 1970s, Western European societies have become more economically and culturally affected by immigration and the process of European integration, which has repercussions for voter preferences at the ballot box. In addition to issue considerations, scholarly literature points to the fact that voters choose the political parties more according to their performance in the government, the appeal of the leaders or their assessment of policies (Thomassen, 2005; Green and Hobolt, 2008). These performance-based factors seem to play a bigger role in structuring party preferences of the younger voters (Van der Brug, 2010).

Apart from a period effect which drives the changes in the issue- and performance-based voting, there are likely generational changes that are important. We will address this aspect in this chapter. The above considerations lead us to the following expectations on inter-generational differences. We expect structural voting to be most prominent among citizens born before the 1950s and to decline in strength for younger generations (H1). We expect left/right distance to be most prominent among voters born between 1950 and 1970 (H2). Moving to short-term determinants of the vote, we expect voting on economic issues to be strongest for generations socialised before the economic boom of the 1960s, i.e. those who were born before the 1950s (H3). Considerations regarding life-style and society will exercise stronger effect

on party preferences for generations born after the 1960s (H4). In turn, for generations born after the 1960s and socialised in and after the 1970s we expect immigration, EU integration and performance-related factors to structure party preferences stronger than for older generations (H5).

Inter-Generational Change in East Central Europe

Generational replacement in East Central European countries may result in patterns of long- and short-term factors structuring party preferences which are distinctive to those found in Western Europe. Cleavage voting takes on a different form in post-communist democracies as social class structures party preferences of voters to a weaker extent (Van der Brug et al., 2008). In East Central Europe social class stratification is weakly developed, as in the communist period class differences were thwarted. During the transition period, the capitalist class and the independently organised working class existed to a very limited extent and class divisions in political interests were weak (Lipset, 1994; Tworzecki, 2002; Kitschelt, 1992; Kitschelt et al., 1999). The market economy unleashed processes of economic interest formation, which were followed by party mobilisation aligned with these interests. As a consequence, class interests started to appear and structure party support (Evans, 1997; Evans and Whitefield, 2000). Subsequently, expectations have been aired that as the market economy gets fully established, the role of social class in structuring party preferences will increase (Szelényi et al., 1996, 1997; Evans, 1997, Jasiewicz, 2009). We may thus expect young voters, socialised in the transformation period (these born in and after the 1980s), to form their party preferences more on the basis of social class than older generations. As the former were socialised in a period where class interests were developing and were being picked up by the political system, social class may prove to be a more useful cue for them in getting their interests represented.

In contrast to class identification, religion plays a more important role for party preferences of voters in post-communist countries when compared to Western Europe (Van der Brug et al., 2008). This may appear surprising given the fact that religious expression was limited under communism. However, behind the secular façade of the regime, East Central European societies displayed different levels of religiosity (Flora et al., 2005), which were activated as an easy cue to guide voters' preferences in the politically unstable transition period. The religious cue became especially important in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, where religion was visible in the public life (Herbert and Fras, 2009) and where the church vs. state cleavage developed (Hloušek and Kopeček, 2008). However, the resurgence of religion after 1989 was paralleled by a process of secularisation, which encompassed generations born in the 1970s (Norris and Inglehart, 2004; Dalton, 1996; Need and Evans, 2001). Therefore, we expect religion to be more important in forming party preferences for generations of voters born before 1970 for whom religion may have become a reference point after the fall of communism. For generations born after the 1970s, we expect religion to play a less important role, because these groups were socialised after processes of secularisation set in.

With regard to the third structural factor – the urban/rural cleavage – we do not expect any clear generational differences. Post-communist countries have a particularly high level of social disadvantage in rural areas (Shucksmith et al., 2009), which translates into political behaviour and determines party

preferences (Lubecki, 2004; Jasiewicz, 2009). As this social gap between urban and rural areas has not diminished in the last twenty years of transformation, we expect that the urban/rural divide will play a comparable role in structuring party preferences for all generations of voters.

Next to these expectations about the structural basis of party preferences, we expect ideology to structure party preferences of East Central European voters to a lesser extent compared to their Western European counterparts (see also Van der Brug et al., 2008). Since the transition period, ideological considerations have played a minor role for voters in deciding which party to vote for, because the party systems have been in flux, with new parties constantly emerging or elites changing political affiliation (Szelényi et al., 1997; Tavits, 2008). Moreover, larger parties have converged on economic policies due to the legacy of communism and the prospect of entering the EU (Tavits and Letki, 2009; Vachudova and Hooghe, 2009). This has made left/right a less useful cue for East Central European voters. Even 20 years after the end of communism, the East Central European party systems do not appear fully consolidated. No generation of voters in post-communist countries has been socialised into a stable political system, where voters could fully undergo the learning process with regard to where to locate party positions in left/right terms. Therefore, we expect that the degree to which left/right structures party preferences does not differ much across generations.

Similarly, we expect few differences across generations in the degree to which issue attitudes structure party preferences in post-communist countries. The post-materialist value revolution, as described by Inglehart, appeared in industrialised democracies but did not encompass communist countries. In the latter, both economic considerations and concerns over personal freedoms and the structure of society have been important for all generations of voters (Szelényi et al., 1997; Tucker, 2006). The only issue examined in this study where we expect a cross-generational difference is EU integration. Since 1989, EU integration has been a salient issue and its impact on party preferences has been greater than in Western Europe (De Vries and Tillman, 2011). For the youngest voters, born after 1989, this issue may structure party preferences to a higher extent than for other generations. The youngest voters have been socialised in a political environment where the EU has been discussed either due to economic preparations before the accession or in the context of EU membership after the accession. In turn, the immigration issue plays a minor role in post-communist countries as these countries are mainly the 'sending' countries. Therefore, we expect no generational differences in the extent to which immigration structures party preferences.[12]

We develop similar expectations for short-term performance-oriented factors such as government performance and economic evaluations. As for the most part of the transformation period there was a consensus on which economic policies needed to be implemented (Vachudova and Hooghe, 2009; Tavits and Letki, 2009), the economic issues developed into valence issues where the performance of the government in economic terms has been important for voters in their choices at the ballot box. Roberts (2008) finds evidence of hyper-accountability in post-communist countries where vote shares of governments are strongly affected by economic performance. However, this pattern may not display generational differences as there is no reason to suspect that economic evaluations will be stronger for any particular generation of voters.

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[12] Certainly, some East Central European countries grapple with problems connected with ethnic and/or language minorities, but this is a different category to immigration on which we focus here.

To sum up, we expect to find the following generational trends in post-communist countries. Religion will explain party preferences better for generations born before 1970, but less for those born after 1970s (H6). For voters born in and after the 1980s we expect that social class will structure party preferences to a larger extent than for older generations (H7). We expect no generational differences in the degree to which the urban/rural divide, the left/right ideology and short-term predictors structure party preferences. This latter prediction pertains to socio-economic and libertarian-authoritarian issues, economic performance and government evaluation. The only exception, however, pertains to EU issue voting, which we expect to be stronger for voters born after 1989 (H8).

DATA AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter we employ the European Election Study 2009 which is a representative study of the electorates of all countries in the European Union. In order to meaningfully compare the effects of long- and short-term factors on party preferences across country groups and across generations, we employ a research design proposed by Van der Eijk and Franklin (1996). We create a stacked data matrix in which the unit of analysis is the respondent*party combination (Tillie 1995; Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; Van der Eijk et al. 2006). The outcome variable is the observed strength of support that a respondent assigns to all political parties in her party system. In each country, voters are asked how likely it is (on an 11-point scale) that they will ever vote for a list of political parties. These propensities to vote depict what makes a vote for a particular party attractive to voters. Propensities can be regarded as preferences, because voters generally decide to vote for the party they most prefer.[13] In the stacked data matrix the respondent appears as many times as there are parties for which voters' propensities to support are measured. Thus, the level of analysis is effectively changed from the individual level to the individual*party level. For the purpose of our study, we have created two stacked data matrices, one for established democracies, including Cyprus and Malta, and the other for consolidating post-communist democracies.[14]

Our variables of interest are long- and short-term determinants of party preferences. As our outcome variable in the stacked data matrices reflects preferences of voters for all political parties, the explanatory variables need to be transformed in order to reflect the relation between a respondent and each of the political parties. The effect of left/right ideology is estimated by a variable, which expresses the distance between each respondent and each of the political parties in terms of left/right. We employ a question which requires the respondent to indicate how she would place herself on an 11-point left/right scale, as well as how she perceives the political parties on an identical left/right scale.[15] For most

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[13] About 93% of respondents would vote for the party to which they give the highest propensity score. The use of vote propensities to analyze the determinants of party preferences has been validated by Tillie (1995) and Van der Eijk and Franklin (1996).

[14] Cyprus and Malta appear in this study as established democracies, because their party systems are more consolidated and their electorates have been socialised to electoral rules since those countries gained independence in the 1960s. In turn, the East Central European countries have enjoyed democracy only for the last 20 years, where only the youngest generation has been socialised in a free electoral system.

[15] The distance variable is computed as the absolute difference between a respondent's left/right position and her perception of where the political party stands in terms of left/right. If the respondent did not answer the question on the position of any particular party, we replaced the missing value with the national sample mean of the

variables, no distance measures can be constructed, so that the link between the voter and the party has to be constructed inductively. We do this before we construct the stacked data matrix in a set of separate analyses, one for each party in each political system, in which we predict party preference from the respondent characteristic(s) in question. For example, when creating a variable measuring the affinity between the respondents' social class and party preference, we run a series of regression analyses predicting the propensity to vote for each party on the basis of respondents' social class. The predicted scores of these regressions per party, y-hats in statistical parlance, are saved and used as the new explanatory variable. These y-hats are simply linear transformations of the original explanatory variables, scaled according to the outcome variable (i.e. the 11-point vote propensity scores).[16] They can be added to the stacked data matrix since they are comparable across parties and countries. Although we do not have distance measures for these variables, and thus we cannot express the voter-party relationship in the data matrix deductively, this transformation provides an inductive means to express that relationship. In this way, we created explanatory variables, one at a time, party-by-party and country-by-country, which could be included in a stacked data matrix in which the outcome variable is composed of party preferences for all parties across all countries.

The original dataset contains approximately 1000 respondents per country, so that the whole data set has 27,000 respondents. The propensity to support-question has been asked for 6 to 7 parties on average. Since the number of parties varies per country, countries with a large number of parties would weight more heavily on the results. To avoid this, we weighted the cases in such a way that each country has the same number of respondents*party combinations (6,115 per country). The stacked dataset employed in this study contains 165,105 records.

Our explanatory variables are operationalized as follows. *Religion* is a composite variable operationalized as the y-hats obtained in a regression where propensities to support parties are predicted by categorical variables which indicate whether respondents belong to a religious denomination, how often they attend religious services and how religious they see themselves. *Social class* is created in the same procedure from a question in which respondents were asked to indicate their occupation. The EES 2009 contains 12 categories of occupational status which are identical in all countries, and which have been included in the analyses by means of 11 dummy variables. The *urban/rural divide* is operationalized with the question whether respondents live in a rural area or village, small or middle-sized town, suburbs of large town or city or large town or city.

In order to tap into *socio-economic issues*, we use voters' responses to the following statements: "Private enterprise is the best way to solve your country's economic problems" (*Enterprise*), "Major public services and industries ought to be in state ownership" (*Ownership*), "Politics should abstain from intervening in the economy" (*Intervention*), "Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people" (*Redistribution*). For *libertarian-authoritarian issues*, we employ the following statements: "Same-sex marriages should be prohibited by law" (*Same-Sex Marriage*), "Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion" (*Abortion*), "People who break the law should be given much harsher sentences than they are these days" (*Law & Order*), "Schools must teach children to obey authority"

perceived party position. In this way, we lost only respondents who did not place themselves on the left/right scale.

[16] These scores present problems of analysis unless they are centred around the same mean for all parties. In practice we subtract the mean value for each party, turning all of them into deviations from zero.

(*Authority*) as well as "A women should be prepared to cut down on her paid work for the sake of her family" (*Family*). In order to measure the impact of *Immigration*, we use voters' responses to the following statements: "Immigrants should be required to adapt to the customs of your country" and "Immigration to your country should be decreased significantly". Voters' responses are measured here on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. For the purposes of operationalizing *EU integration*, we use questions on whether respondents regard EU membership of their country as a good or bad thing or neither, and whether they think that European unification has gone too far or should be pushed further.[17] Finally, *Government Performance* uses the question whether respondents' approve or disapprove of the government's record to date and *Retrospective Economic Evaluation* uses the question how the respondent assesses the economic situation in the country compared to 12 months ago.

In order to explore inter-generational effects, we have divided the respondents in 8 cohorts where each of them represents respondents born in 10 consecutive years. The oldest cohort gathers voters born before 1929, while the youngest stands for voters born in and after 1989, i.e. after the fall of communism in East Central Europe. We regress in each stacked data matrix the propensities to vote for political parties on our variables of interest for each generation. In order to account for the dependency among observations pertaining to the same respondent, we use the Huber-White-Sandwich estimate of variance (Rogers, 1993; Williams, 2000).

We will compare the effects of different predictors for each generational cohort, on the basis of the Adjusted R^2, which is an indicator of the extent to which the variable of interest explains the total variance in our outcome variable i.e. party preferences. The R^2 values obtained for every generation are gathered in a separate dataset, on the basis of which we will visually present our results. Formally speaking, there are no statistical tests of the differences between the different generational cohorts, because the analyses are not nested. Yet, it is important to realise that we have a very large sample of respondents, so that we think it is safe to interpret any meaningful patterns as real and not resulting from sampling errors. This is, after all, mainly a problem when dealing with smaller samples. However, we have conducted significance tests to assess whether R^2's from regressions improved significantly when adding a new variable to the equation. The analyses showed that improvements of the R^2 of .005% or more are statistically significant.

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[17] We explored the dimensionality of voters' attitudes towards socio-economic, libertarian-authoritarian issues, EU integration and immigration in each political system with non-parametric Mokken scaling (Mokken, 1971; Van Schuur, 2003). Socio-economic and libertarian-authoritarian issues scale differently across countries, thus we treat each item as a separate predictor. In turn, items related to immigration form a common scale both in countries of Western Europe and East Central Europe. In established democracies, the Loevinger H coefficient amounts to .44, while in the consolidating democracies the value of this coefficient is .32. Similarly, items related to EU integration form a common scale in Western European countries (H coefficient is .37) and East Central European countries (H coefficient of .52). Therefore, we have combined the items related to immigration in one scale and the items pertaining to EU integration into another scale before applying the y-hat procedure.

The analyses of generational differences in the extent to which long- and short-term factors determine party preferences across eight generational cohorts are presented in two figures. Figure 2.1 presents the analysis for the established democracies of Western Europe, while Figure 2.2 shows the results for the consolidating democracies of East Central Europe. The horizontal axis depicts eight generational cohorts, while the vertical axis shows the value of the increase in R^2 when adding the respective variable to a model. In these models we follow the logic of the 'funnel of causality' from the Michigan model (Campbell et al., 1960) where stable long-term predictors precede more unstable short-term predictors of the vote. When computing these R^2's, we present the increase in R^2 when a short-term predictor is added to a model that includes more long-term predictors of party support. Following this logic, the effects of social class, religion and urbanisation are simply the R^2's of bivariate regressions. These predictors are considered to be the most stable characteristics of voters, which are not affected by ideology or issue preferences. Since the purpose is to assess the total effect of these variables, we do not need to control for short-term predictors of party preferences. The effect of left/right distance is measured as the differences in R^2 between a model that includes only structural variables (religion, social class and urbanisation) and a model that includes these variables as well as left/right distance. Left/right positions may to some extent derive from religious affiliations and class positions, but not the other way around. The effects of the other (short-term) predictors of the vote are assessed by taking the difference between a model that includes structural predictors and left/right distance and a model that includes these variables as well as the respective predictor. In this chapter, results from such a 'funnel of causality' model are presented.[18]

We first turn to the results for the established democracies of Western Europe, which are presented in Figure 2.1. In line with our theoretical predictions, the upper left box shows that religion has the most explanatory power for generations born before 1949 (5% of variance explained). The predictive power of this variable decreases for younger generations and is minor for the youngest generations (2.5%). However, the effect of social class seems to be stable across generations. For each cohort the variance explained oscillates around 4%. As far as the urban/rural divide is concerned, its effect on party preferences is negligible, which is in line with previous studies. For each generation, this variable explains less than 1% of the total variance in party support. In addition to separate regressions of party preferences on each structural factor at a time, we conducted regressions for three factors combined and graphed the variance explained for each cohort. The pattern depicted by the line 'structural' shows that for the oldest generations (born before 1949) structural factors have more explanatory power (10%) than for the younger ones (around 6%). For the youngest cohort (born after 1989) structural factors explain the smallest amount of variance (5%). We can confirm our hypothesis H1 with regard to the inter-generational effect of religion and all structural factors combined, while the isolated effect of social class proves to be stable across generations. Left/right considerations, in turn, explain party support to the highest extent among all factors under study. For voters born before 1949, left/right considerations explain 15% of the total variance in party preferences. For the generation born between 1949 and 1959 the variance explained is the highest and amounts to 16%. For each subsequent generation, left/right explains party support to a lesser extent. For the youngest cohort born after 1989, left/right accounts for

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[18] However, in order to cross-validate these results, we have conducted bivariate regressions of propensities to vote on each of the explanatory variables separately. These results, presented in Appendix III, do not substantially differ from the 'funnel of causality' model.

12% of the total variance. This finding points in the direction of our expectations, according to which we would find the strongest effect of left/right among generations born between the 1950s and 1970s (H2), but this pattern is rather weak.[19]

Now we turn to results pertaining to short-term determinants of party preferences. Since the effects of these variables are much weaker than those of the long-term determinants, we changed the scales on the y-axes in order to better visualise the inter-generational changes. None of the socio-economic variables has a strong effect on party preferences: the increase in R^2 as a result of adding these variables is never more than 2%. We see only small differences between generations in how these issue attitudes structure party support. To the extent that there are differences, the effects tend to be weaker for the older generations than for the younger ones. This is in contrast to H3. Moving to libertarian-authoritarian issues, we see a similar pattern as for socio-economic issues. The effects of these issues are generally weak. There are small differences among generations, but the effects are slightly stronger among the younger generations. The latter finding is in line with H4. In turn, we see a clear generational effect for the immigration issue. For voters born before 1929 attitudes towards immigration have hardly any effect on party preferences (around .05%). Yet, for each subsequent cohort the effect of immigration on party preferences is stronger. The effect is particularly strong for each of the cohorts born after 1959. For the youngest cohort, immigration explains 3.5% of variance in party preferences, nearly just as much as social class.[20] While this finding provides support for H5, we do not see a comparable pattern for attitudes towards EU integration. The impact of these attitudes on party preferences is quite stable across generations, but it is weaker for the oldest and the youngest cohorts.

The last box in Figure 2.1 shows that government performance explains a substantive amount of party support. The effect is stronger than the effects of issues, and very similar to the effects of structural factors. For cohorts born before 1969, the variance explained amounts to an increase in R^2 of around 4 to 5%. Surprisingly, the explanatory power decreases for younger generations, while H5 predicted an increase. Equally surprising is the fact that economic evaluations have a rather weak effect on party support and there is little difference between the generations.[21] In sum, the analyses for Western Europe

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[19] We also conducted some robustness checks to assess whether there are important differences in inter-generational trends among Western European countries. First, we divided these countries in two groups according to how long they have been democratic. The first group encompasses oldest democracies with Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. The second group counts Spain, Greece, Portugal, Malta and Cyprus. In both groups we see the same inter-generational patterns regarding structural factors. The variance explained by religion and all structural factors combined decreases for generations born after 1949, while the effect of social class seems to be stable across generations. Furthermore, left/right explains the least amount of variance in party preferences for the younger generations born after 1969. With regard to generations born between 1950s and 1960s it is only in the first group of countries that left/right accounts for most variance in party preferences. In the second country group we do not see such a pattern. Secondly, we conducted a jack-knife test, where we excluded each country at a time from the analysis and re-estimated the variance explained. Also here, the results were substantially the same.

[20] The stronger effect of immigration is particularly visible in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. Here, the variance explained by immigration raises to 4% for generations born after 1979, while for oldest generation it is lower than .05%. A similar, although weaker, trend we observe for Spain, Greece, Portugal, Malta and Cyprus, where variance explained by immigration for the younger generations reaches 2%.

[21] The low variance explained cannot be attributed to a small number of observations for the youngest cohort. In fact, in the cohort born after 1989 we have 3227 observations, which is enough to yield substantive results. In addition, we find the same inter-generational trends for evaluations of the economy and government performance in separate analyses which we conducted for Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Ireland,

provide little support for the various hypotheses we derived from the literature. How about the consolidating democracies in East Central Europe?

Figure 2.1 Impact of Long- and Short-Term Determinants of Party Preferences in Western Europe across Generations
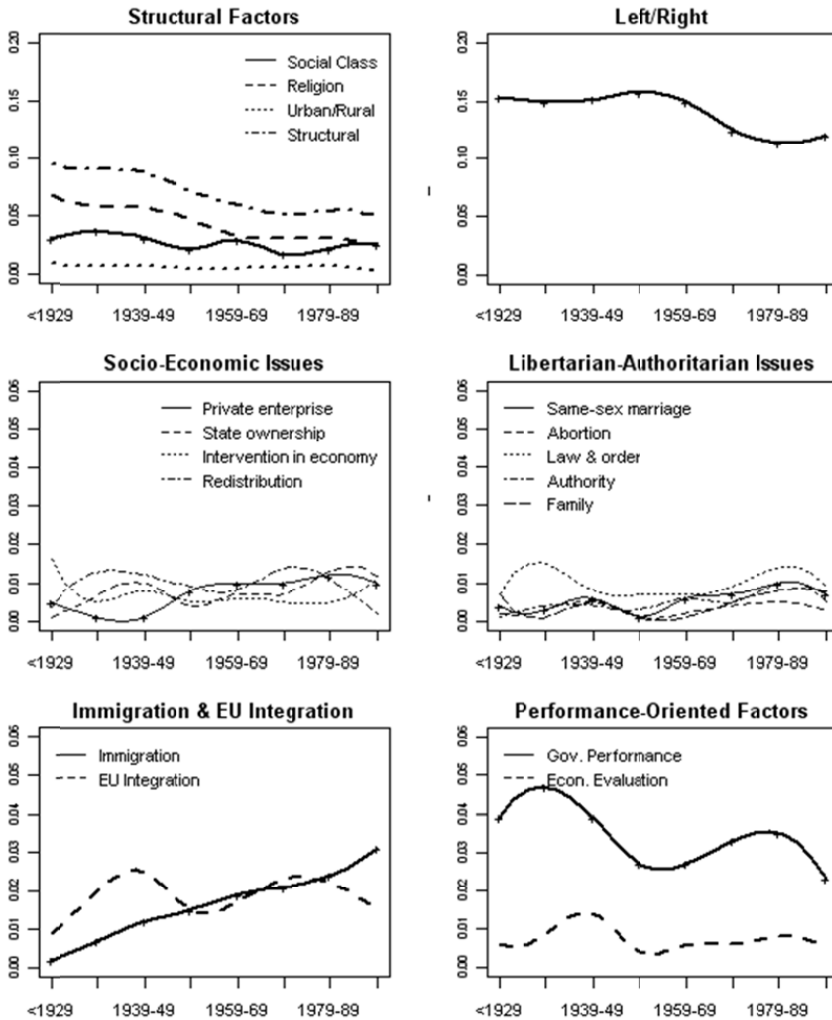
Notes: Figure 2.1 shows the extent to which long- and short-term factors determine party preferences in Western Europe for eight generations of voters. The vertical axis depicts the total variance explained in the outcome variable (i.e. party preferences) by each of the structural factors, left/right distance, attitudes towards issues and performance-oriented factors separately.

Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK on the one hand and Spain, Greece, Portugal, Malta and Cyprus on the other. These results hold if we remove one country at a time from the analysis.

Figure 2.2 depicts the extent to which long- and short-term factors determine party preferences across eight generations in East Central European countries. We focus first on long-term determinants. The most striking result is the strong effect of religion, particularly for the generation born before 1929. Here, religion explains around 16% of the total variance in party support. For subsequent generations born between 1939 and 1979 the amount of explained variance is much smaller and amounts to a bit more than 6%. For the youngest cohorts born after 1979 the variance explained by religion is the smallest, amounting to exactly 5%. This finding is consistent with H6.

As for social class, we see a slight increase in the amount of variance explained by this factor across generations. For generations born before 1939 social class explains only about 1.5% of the total variance. For the subsequent generations the explained variance increases to 3.5% and is the highest (with 4%) for the youngest generation born after 1989. This finding is consistent with H7. The third structural factor, i.e. the urban/rural divide, structures party preferences of East Central European countries to a weak extent. We find here no distinguishable differences between generations, as predicted by H8. When we look at the variance explained by all structural factors, we see a more or less stable line, where variance oscillates around .8. This does not surprise us as it is a composite of all effects, two of which – religion and social class – show opposite trends across generations.

The last long-term factor under consideration here – ideology – has a good capacity to explain party preferences of East Central European voters. For generations born before 1949 left/right considerations explain around 9% of total variance in party support, while for the generations born after 1949 this factor explains slightly less, namely 8% of total variance, and is quite stable across the younger generations. For the youngest generation born after 1989, left/right structures party preferences to the weakest extent, i.e. the variance explained in party preferences amounts to 5.5%.[22] We did not anticipate that we would see a declining pattern in the extent to which left/right considerations affect party preferences of East Central European voters, which resembles the one in Western Europe.

Now we turn to the degree to which short-term factors explain party preferences in East Central Europe. In accordance with our expectations we see hardly any distinguishable generational variation in the extent to which libertarian-authoritarian issues and immigration structure party preferences in post-communist countries. Furthermore, the effects of these variables are quite weak within all generations. In turn, we see that attitudes towards socio-economic issues explain slightly more variance for voters born before 1939, but this pattern is very small. Furthermore, we observe that EU integration explains party support best for the generation born after 1989, which we expected. For this cohort, attitudes towards EU integration explain over 3% of the total variance in party support. However, the effect of this issue is also relatively strong for the generation born during or shortly after World War II, which we had not anticipated.

As far as performance-related factors are concerned, we see that evaluations of government performance explain party preferences of East Central European voters quite well. Perhaps surprisingly, Figure 2.2 shows that this factor structures party preferences better for older than for younger voters. For generations born before 1939 government performance adds almost 6% to the explained variance in party

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[22] This drop in the variance explained has not been caused by the small amount of observations for the generation born after 1989. In consolidating democracies the size of this cohort amounts to 1741 observations.

preferences, while for younger cohorts it drops substantially. For voters born after 1989 government performance explains hardly any variance in party support (slightly above 1%). A similar, although not so steep, pattern, can be observed for retrospective economic evaluations. All these findings support our hypothesis H8, except for the part regarding ideology as we did not expect weaker effects of this factor for the youngest generation.

Figure 2.2 Impact of Long- and Short-Term Determinants of Party Preferences in East Central Europe across Generations
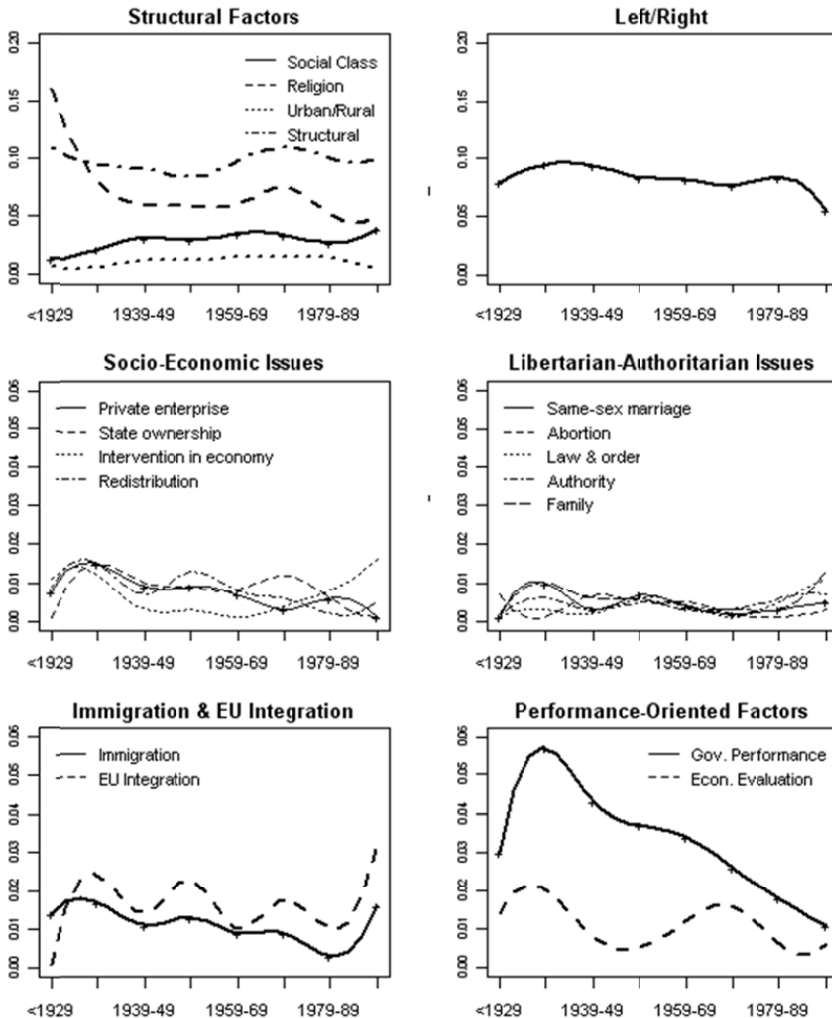
Notes: Figure 2.2 shows the extent to which long- and short-term factors determine party preferences in East Central Europe for eight generations of voters. The vertical axis depicts the total variance explained in the outcome variable (i.e. party preferences) by each of the structural factors, left/right distance, attitudes towards issues and performance-oriented factors separately.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Since the late 1960s, we have been witnessing a decline in cleavage-based voting throughout Western Europe (e.g. Franklin, et al., 1992). Traditional models of vote choice painted pictures of stable electorates strongly tied to specific parties through deeply rooted social divisions (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). This electoral landscape has been dramatically disrupted in the 1960s. Due to the processes of social and political modernisation, traditional linkages between parties and voters began to weaken, resulting in a steady rise of electoral volatility (Franklin, et al., 1992; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). This process of electoral change also gave rise to issue- and performance-based voting (Dalton, 1996). Confronted with these intertwined processes of diminishing cleavage-based voting and the allegedly increasing importance of short-term factors, electoral researchers have been facing new challenges in capturing what motivates voters at the ballot box. This study addresses the question to which extent these processes might be driven by generational replacement. We explored this question by comparing generational differences within established and consolidating European democracies. As the socialisation of the electorates has been starkly different between Western and East Central Europe, we utilised this natural variation to test if the determinants of party preferences between these two contexts indeed reflect differing trends across differently socialised generations.

Our study has shown that in established democracies long-terms factors such as social class and religion as well as left/right ideology exert weak effects on the party preferences of younger generations of voters. To a certain degree structural factors and left/right have been replaced by a stronger effect of issues among younger generations, particularly attitudes towards immigration, which explain party preferences of younger voters much better than for older cohorts. Since this study relies on cross-sectional data, we cannot clearly distinguish between life-cycle effects and generational effects. Prior studies have provided convincing evidence that early adulthood socialisation affects people's political behaviour also later in life (e.g. Franklin 2004; Lyons and Alexander 2000; Hooghe 2004). Therefore, it seems safe to assume that the differences in behavioural patterns between generations will, at least to some extent, remain to exist also later in life. On the basis of this assumption, we may interpret these results as evidence of de-alignment as well as re-alignment. To the extent that behavioural patterns of young voters are stable, their behaviour can be explained less well by long-term determinants than the behaviour of older generations. This suggests de-alignment. Yet, their party preferences are more strongly affected by attitudes towards migration policies, which suggests re-alignment along a libertarian-authoritarian dimension.

One of the guiding hypotheses of this chapter was that that young voters form their party preferences on the basis of short-term factors and older generations on the basis of long-term factors. Yet, this hypothesis has not been confirmed. Firstly, the differences between generations are quite minor. Left/right distance remains the strongest determinant of electoral preferences among all generations. Secondly, evaluations of performance of the government and the economy play a weaker role in decisions of younger generations than of older generations.

With regard to the consolidating democracies of East Central Europe, we observe larger differences between generations. For the pre-war generations in East Central Europe, religion is a very important cue that helps these citizens to orient themselves in a new party system that is sometimes still in

flux. Social class, on the other hand, has a stronger capacity to structure party preferences for the young generations, socialised in the transformation period. Attitudes towards the EU are also very important for these younger cohorts, while, just as in Western Europe, left/right considerations and performance-oriented factors have a weaker capacity to explain party choice.

These shifts have implications for the nature of political support, party platforms and political conflict. Furthermore, they may be at the root of electoral volatility (Crewe and Denver, 1985). Until the 1960s, parties with a large membership socialised younger generations to have party attachments on the basis of social cleavages. Parties are nowadays campaign parties without a large membership base. They do not socialise young voters to base their party preferences on social cleavages nor on ideological considerations. As a result, electoral decisions of younger generations are bound to become less structured, and hence more volatile.

What remains unexplained, and deserves further research, is why the performance-related factors account for party preferences of voters born after 1989 to such a weak extent. Both in established and in consolidating democracies we observe that the degree to which the evaluations of the government and the economy explain party preferences declines across generations, but it is particularly weak for the youngest cohort. The question arises whether this effect is attributable to a life-cycle effect. The youngest voters may still need time to develop the perceptual capacity of party promises and performance to be able to use the evaluation judgments at the ballot box. With the electoral maturing of these voters, we may see that performance evaluations may play a greater role for them in choosing which political party to vote for. Irrespective of this question that deserves further inquiry, we show that the process of de-alignment has been under way in both Western and East Central Europe. In the West, the issue of immigration has clearly become more important for younger cohorts, while in the East social class and EU integration explain party choice better for the generations socialised after the fall of communism. These processes may likely become more pronounced with further generational changes.