



**A product of their bargaining  
environment: Explaining government  
duration in Central and Eastern Europe**

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## **Abstract**

*Since the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, more than 60 percent of governments in Central and Eastern Europe have terminated prematurely. This article seeks to understand why some governments in the region survive longer than others. I argue that the nature of party system development in the region has facilitated the emergence of a polarized pattern of party competition. As the party system structures the government bargaining process, it is contended that indicators of bargaining environment complexity are essential to understanding why some governments are more durable than others. The Cox proportional hazards model is used to estimate the effect of bargaining environment variables. The results show that ideological diversity of the bargaining environment and the length of the coalition formation process are both significant indicators of government duration in Central and Eastern Europe even after controlling for economic performance, majority status and the regime divide.*

# **A product of their bargaining environment: Explaining government duration in Central and Eastern Europe**

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It has now been more than 20 years since the transition to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. In that time, a system of competitive party politics has emerged and across the region numerous governments have formed and fallen. However, it is striking to note that 62 percent of all governments in the region terminated for reasons other than the advent of regularly scheduled elections.<sup>1</sup> In Slovakia there were nine governments and just four elections between 1992 and 2006 while in Poland between 1991 and 2007, 15 governments served in office but only six parliamentary elections were contested. A comparison of government duration in Western Europe and CEE shows that governments in the former endure on average 54 days longer than the latter (Somer-Topcu and Williams, 2008, p 316).

This begs the question: why do governments tend to be relatively short-lived in the CEE? Up until recently, studies of cabinet stability and survival in CEE adopted comparative case study approaches (Toole, 2000; Nikolenyi, 2004) but there are now a sufficient number of cases (governments) to permit the use of quantitative techniques that are routinely used in analyses of government duration in Western Europe. Thus far, two studies have emerged that use such methods in a CEE setting. The first, by Somer-Topcu and Williams (2008) focussed on the role of institutional variables and economic policy outcomes. The second, by Tzelgov (2011),

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<sup>1</sup> Based on data from Conrad and Golder (2010), excludes Croatia.

found that coalitions that span the ‘regime divide’<sup>2</sup> and therefore contained a Communist Successor Party plus a party that was not affiliated with the *ancien regime*, tended to survive longer than other governments.

However, these studies overlook crucial structural attributes that the literature on party systems in CEE would suggest are extremely important. In this article I argue that the party system is the essential structure of the coalition bargaining environment within which governments are created and that the complexity of the bargaining environment influences the nature of any government that emerges. This ultimately affects a government’s prospects for survival. Understanding the role of party systems in CEE is crucial since they have undergone – and continue to undergo – a process of development and transformation. In many respects party systems in the region are unstable which, in turn, can impact on government duration. For example, with a high degree of party turnover is it rational or even possible for parties to behave in a future-oriented way? If not then there may be an increased incentive for *Party A* to break a coalition with *Party B* and form a new one with a party that has better electoral prospects than *Party B*’s.

I focus on the role of party ideology on government duration in the CEE region as well as the fragmentation of the party system and the number of days a government takes to form. Party ideology requires particular consideration in CEE. Somer-Topcu and Williams (2008) did not specify any ideological variables in their analysis of government duration while Tzelgov (2011) relied on data from the Comparative Manifestos Project (Klingemann et al., 2006) which can be problematic for CEE countries (Benoit and Laver, 2007; Tavits and Letki,

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<sup>2</sup> The regime divide, first proposed by Grzymała-Busse (2001), describes the division between parties that were affiliated with the former ruling Communist Parties in each country and those that were not.

2009; Savage, 2012). Furthermore, Tzelgov only examined the ideological composition of the government, not the party system as a whole (Tzelgov, 2011, p 544).

Overall, this paper shows that bargaining environment complexity is essential to understanding government duration in CEE. The ideological range of the parliamentary party system and the number of days a coalition takes to form each add significantly to our understanding of government survival in CEE and should be considered alongside economic indicators and the regime divide in future analyses. However, the fragmentation of the legislature is only marginally relevant to the length of time a government serves in office in the region.

### **Bargaining environment complexity and government duration**

Contemporary empirical studies of government duration tend to focus on the influence of cabinet attributes and unexpected events rather than party system attributes (Browne et al., 1984; Strøm, 1985; Warwick, 1994). The reasons for this are firstly, that the government is the unit of analysis in duration studies so it is logical that attributes pertaining to the cabinet, rather than the wider party system, are deemed to be causally proximate to its longevity. Secondly, it is an often-repeated maxim that events are the thing most feared by a statesman. It is these unexpected events that can disturb an equilibrium, such as a previously stable and harmonious government, with consequences that can include a premature termination. Taken together, cabinet attributes and unexpected events appear to provide a compelling account of government duration in parliamentary democracies.

Despite the preponderance of cabinet attributes and events explanations of government duration, bargaining environment attributes have tended to be included in most empirical studies, to a greater or lesser degree, even though they have not been the focus of the analysis. Furthermore, some *a priori* models have made bargaining environment complexity central to the understanding of coalition duration. Laver and Schofield (1990) theorized that complex bargaining environments produce inherently unstable governments because small changes in policy preferences or party strength can increase the incentive for coalition partners to dissolve a government and seek a more advantageous alternative (Laver and Schofield, 1990, p 157).

When the bargaining environment has been considered in empirical studies, they have largely focussed on indicators of fragmentation of the legislature such as the effective number of parties (Warwick, 1994; Martinez-Gallardo, 2011). In the two analyses of government duration in Central and Eastern Europe that have been published thus far, the effective number of parties (ENP) is the only indicator of the party system or bargaining environment complexity assessed in either (Somer-Topcu, 2008; Tzelgov, 2011).<sup>3</sup> Most scholars hypothesize that a highly fragmented bargaining environment will lead to a more difficult formation process. This will, in turn, produce governments that are less likely to fulfil their constitutionally mandated term in office. However, some studies have found that the effective number of parties in parliament is not significantly related to government duration once the number of parties in government is added to any model (Warwick, 1992, p 339; Saalfeld, 2009, p 340; Tzelgov, 2011, p 544). Warwick (1992) suggests that highly fragmented party systems usually necessitate the inclusion of more parties in the cabinet, which, in turn,

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<sup>3</sup> Tzelgov also considered the ideological diversity of the cabinet as discussed further in this article.

increases the ideological diversity of the government. This is central to Warwick's analysis of government duration as he states that such ideological diversity within the government leads to internal policy disagreements and an increased likelihood of premature termination (Warwick, 1992, p 347). Conversely, in their seminal study of government duration King et al. found that party system fractionalization did diminish cabinet duration; however, they failed to specify a measure of the size of the cabinet (King et al., 1990, p 861).<sup>4</sup>

The fragmentation of the legislature is a direct measure of the effect of the party system on cabinet duration but simple fragmentation may not add up to a more complex bargaining environment. For example, if the policy space is relatively simple and party preferences are convergent then it may be straightforward to form a durable government regardless of the number of parties that may need to be included. Conversely, one can hypothesize a situation in which an inherently unstable government emerges from a party system characterized by low fragmentation if, for example, one or more of the parties in the system is uncoalitionable or simply an unreliable governing partner. We should therefore consider further measures of bargaining environment complexity. One such measure is the length of the government formation process. There is some disagreement on the causal relationship between the length of the formation period and a government's prospects for survival. On the one hand, a protracted coalition formation period may indicate that negotiations were fraught and that the final governing settlement is a tenuous compromise that carries a high risk of unravelling (King et al, 1990, pp 858-9). On the other hand, a lengthy bargaining process could suggest that the governing framework (or coalition agreement) is highly detailed and that the difficulty in forming a government would oblige participants to stick with it and thus reduce

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<sup>4</sup> Majority status refers only to whether or not a government holds a parliamentary majority; it does not indicate the size of that majority.



the risk of instability (Warwick, 1994, p 37). Saalfeld has further asserted that drawn out bargaining processes can consist of a series of offers and counter-offers which have the effect of revealing more of the parties' privately held preferences such as their hold-out and walk-away positions in negotiations (Saalfeld, 2009, p 369).

The complexity of the ideological space in the bargaining environment could also influence government duration. Research into the role of ideology in government duration has usually centred on ideological diversity within the cabinet (Warwick, 1992; 1994). While that has proved statistically significant in empirical studies of established parliamentary democracies, Tzelgov (2011, p 544) found no support for the ideological diversity hypothesis in CEE. However, the ideological diversity of the party system as a whole has also been considered in many analyses of government duration. This has been measured in a number of ways including ideological range and polarization though interpretations of the effect of party system diversity have varied. Laver and Schofield (1990) suggested that ideological diversity indicated a more complex bargaining system that is susceptible to slight perturbations in policy preferences that can lead to government instability (Laver and Schofield, 1990, p 157). Warwick offers an alternative interpretation which hypothesizes that a diverse bargaining environment can result in more stable governments if party competition is bi-polar in which each bloc of parties has relatively homogenous policy preferences (Warwick, 1994, p 53).

This overview of the literature on bargaining environment complexity and government duration demonstrates that the causal direction of the relationship between the two can be unclear. Part of the reason for this lack of certainty over the direction of the causal relationship is the manner in which the study of government duration has developed. Formal

theories of government survival are still quite rare.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the study of government duration has largely taken place in the empirical realm where the focus has been refining the variables that are entered into quantitative models (Laver, 2003, pp 37-8). The relative dearth of *a priori* theories of government duration means that expectations of how variables will interact with government duration can vary depending on the political context. It is this context that we turn to in the next section.

### **The party system and ideology in Central and Eastern Europe**

The parameters of the government bargaining environment in parliamentary democracies are established by the party system, or more specifically, the parliamentary party system.<sup>6</sup> The party system contains the essential information that ultimately determines the level of complexity in the coalition bargaining environment such as the legislative weight of the parties and their ideological positions or policy preferences. It is here that the relationship between parties is established and contested. It would therefore seem that to understand the bargaining environment we must also understand the nature of party systems.

In ‘new’ democracies where party systems are less stable and less established, the pattern of interaction between parties is potentially very different to that which is familiar from Western European party systems. In countries such as those of CEE, both party system turnover and electoral volatility can be high which means that it is difficult for parties to behave in a future-oriented manner. For example, can a party in a governing coalition count on its current partners to remain in parliament after the next election? If so, will they still have a

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<sup>5</sup> There are, of course, notable theoretical studies of government termination such as Laver and Shepsle (1996) and Lupia and Strøm (1995).

<sup>6</sup> All references to the party system in this article refer to the parliamentary party system.

comparable number of deputies and similar influence in the coalition bargaining environment? If not, then the relationship between the parties is likely to change.

Party systems in Central and Eastern Europe have often been characterized as unstable since the transition to democracy in the late-1980s and early-1990s (Markowski, 1997; Olson, 1998). In many cases this has been as a result of greater fragmentation on the Right of the party system (Bakke and Sitter, 2005; Hanley, et al. 2008); a point which is emphasized by Tavits and Letki (2009) who demonstrated that 60 percent of all parties in the CEE region were ideologically right-leaning. Others have illustrated the level of this instability by drawing unfavourable empirical comparisons with the degree of party system stability found in West European democracies using measures such as electoral volatility and party turnover (Mair, 1997, p 197; Lewis, 2000, pp 148-9). In their study of CEE democracies over the period from 1990 to 2007, Rose and Munro show that on average, 30 parties have contested elections but an average of just two parties have fought *every* election in each country which suggests that party formations have not been persistent and that party systems in the region were changeable animals (Rose and Munro, 2009, p 48).

This level of instability is problematic for both governments and individual parties. The actors in CEE party systems have been subject to considerable change over the years and therefore, parties would have struggled to develop any significant degree of future orientation. Parties that were once allies, perhaps even partners in government, stood a reasonable chance of being reduced to insignificance or even removed from the legislature altogether as a result of poor electoral performances. This means that parties in a coalition may have an incentive to break the government and look to cement an alternative alliance for

the future if a current governing partner looks likely to be removed from parliament or returned with significantly fewer seats following the next election.

However, it could be contended that the notion of party system instability in CEE countries is a relic of the early years of the postcommunist period. As early as 2000 Toole (2000) found evidence that party systems in some countries were stabilizing and that competition for government took place between defined Left and Right ‘blocs’. More recent studies provided further evidence of party system stabilization in the region, particularly in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic (Bakke and Sitter, 2005; Tavits, 2008, p 548). Allan Sikk (2005) has shown that party systems in CEE may even be more stable than they first appear, at least in terms of the participants. Sikk distinguishes between ‘genuinely new parties’ and parties that are a continuation of previous entities in all but name (Sikk, 2005, p 399). By measuring the gains and losses of genuinely new parties, he shows that party systems have been more stable than one might surmise from using the standard measure of electoral volatility. Even so, levels of overall electoral volatility have remained high across CEE. This leads Sikk to conclude that the cartelization of the party system, which has prevented genuinely new parties from establishing themselves, adds a veneer of stability to party systems while instability between the actors already in those systems remains relatively high (Sikk, 2005, pp 408-9).

Of equal importance to changes in the identity legislative weight of actors in the party system, is the ideological persuasion of those parties. When party systems are so unstable with new parties entering the system and others leaving, it can be difficult for each party to know where the other stands on policy and ideological matters. New party formations may

issue manifestos and make speeches but these rarely reveal a party's holdout points and 'red lines' in policy negotiations. Furthermore, policy positions in CEE are not as straightforward as one might assume and do not necessarily fall neatly into established conceptions of 'Left' and 'Right'. As a result, parties find it more difficult to use the heuristic shortcuts that many use when identifying a party as (e.g.) 'left-wing'.

Conceptions of 'Left' and 'Right' can have 'nationally distinct, unstable, or unclear meanings' in CEE (Evans and Whitefield, 1998). The definitions of 'Left' and 'Right' are not necessarily tied as closely to economic policy in some CEE countries as they are in Western Europe (Kostelecký, 2002, pp 170-71). Parties of the Left have often adopted a liberal economic outlook more readily associated with the Right, particularly when those parties have entered into government (Tavits and Letki, 2009, p 567) while many parties of the Right have sought to demarcate their ideological territory in social or cultural terms (Hanley, 2004, pp 17-19). Vachudova and Hooghe have highlighted a further distinction of the ideological space in CEE. They used the 2002 Chapel-Hill survey of party policy positions to demonstrate that party competition in CEE took place along an axis which at one pole combined a traditional left wing economic outlook with traditional cultural values. At the opposite pole liberal economics was bundled together with a greater social and cultural openness (Vachudova and Hooghe, 2009, pp 206-7).

The uncertainty over ideological positions naturally filters through to party policy platforms. In the early stages of democratization, parties were often characterized as having weak programmatic identities (Kitschelt, 1995) and in some countries there is evidence that parties still do not have well-defined policy platforms. This is partly due to the restrictions placed on

party competition by the imperative of European Union accession together with the need to liberalize national economies (Innes, 2002). However, Kitschelt et al. (1999) have argued that party programmes crystallized over time, a view reinforced by recent research (O'Dwyer and Kovalčik, 2007; Hanley et al, 2008). Furthermore, Whitefield and Rohrschneider have shown empirically that there has been a great deal of stasis in party programmes which “indicates that by now issue positions are connected in predictable and stable ways” (Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2009, p 681).

Empirical studies of party politics in CEE have generally found that ideological considerations have only a marginal impact on political outcomes, including on coalition duration. Tzelgov demonstrated that the ideological diversity of coalition governments was unrelated to their longevity in CEE (Tzelgov, 2011, p 544). In the associated field of government formation, ideological factors have also been largely irrelevant. The earliest cross-national comparative study on this subject found that ideological considerations were secondary to the ‘regime divide’ when forming governments in CEE (Grzymała-Busse, 2001, p 87). Glasgow et al. have shown that the median party – an indicator of a party’s ideological position within the bargaining environment – is not more likely to provide the Prime Minister of governments that have formed in CEE which contrasts with their findings for Western Europe (Glasgow et al, 2011, pp 945-6). Although the government formation literature is only tangentially related to government duration the evidence of these studies reinforces the notion that ideological concerns have generally been secondary to the point of irrelevance in CEE party politics.

This discussion of party system development in CEE since 1990 has illustrated just how complex the government bargaining environment is in the region. Party systems may have stabilized to some degree but high levels of electoral volatility persist even where the incumbent parties do not genuinely change. Furthermore, the ideological positions of political parties can be unfamiliar in that they do not conform to traditional definitions of Left and Right, though that does not mean that these positions are not identifiable. Taken together, these factors suggest that bargaining environment complexity in the CEE region is potentially high. In the next section I outline how this influences government duration and specify the hypotheses to be tested in the remainder of this article.

### **Government duration and the bargaining environment in Central and Eastern Europe**

The study of government duration in CEE is still in its infancy. Although there are numerous studies of duration in established democracies to draw upon the models used in these may not be transferable wholesale to the specific context of CEE. However, the existing literature has influenced the choice of variables that have gone into models of duration in the region which has led to the exclusion of indicators of bargaining environment complexity. But as I have outlined, the bargaining environment in CEE countries is distinct from, and potentially more complex than, that found in Western Europe due to the combination of instability, volatility and idiosyncratic policy platforms.

Government duration in CEE has been the subject of two cross-national empirical investigations, neither of which considered the coalition bargaining environment to be central to expectations for government longevity. Somer-Topcu and Williams (2008) concentrated on the role of economic change and the majority status of the government, finding that

minority cabinets and increases in inflation significantly reduce a government's tenure. Tzelgov (2011) hypothesized that the 'regime divide' is the primary determinant of government longevity in CEE. Furthermore, he showed that regime divide governments were in fact more likely to persist through economic downturns than non-regime divide cabinets (Tzelgov, 2011, pp 537-8). Both Somer-Topcu and Williams and Tzelgov included control variables for the bargaining environment but these were minimal: the effective number of parties and in Tzelgov's case, the ideological diversity of the cabinet. Neither study showed that bargaining environment indicators were significantly related to government duration.

The results of those two studies leave us with a puzzle: if we know from previous literature that the bargaining environment can influence government duration (King et al., 1990; Warwick, 1994), and we also know that the bargaining environment in CEE is complex, why has this not been confirmed by empirical investigations? The answer to this question is firstly, the omission of relevant variables from empirical models and secondly, the use of inappropriate data to measure certain concepts – in this case, ideology.

### *Fragmentation*

In order to test the bargaining environment complexity thesis in CEE I specify four hypotheses. The first hypothesis evaluates the effect of party system fragmentation on government duration. King et al. (1990) have demonstrated that governments formed from more fractionalized legislatures tend to have a shorter lifespan. Warwick (1994) has also found that fractionalization influences government duration but it does so by necessitating the formation of cabinets with more parties that are likely to be ideologically diverse. Indeed, many studies find that the fragmentation of parliament is rendered insignificant by inclusion



of a cabinet fragmentation variable. However, the specific context of CEE needs to be considered when modelling duration. Previous research has shown shows that fractionalization in CEE legislatures is, on average, 24 percent higher than that found in West European parliaments.<sup>7</sup> The high degree of fragmentation in CEE suggests that there is value in revisiting the hypothesis of King et al. (1990).

H1. Governments formed from more fragmented bargaining environments face an increased hazard of government termination.

### *Ideological diversity*

The literature suggests that party ideological positions in CEE are complex and, according to some, incoherent. It might therefore be asserted that parties are unable to make strategic decisions about coalition partners based on ideological compatibility. Tzelgov's (2011) analysis certainly reinforces this interpretation in finding that the ideological diversity of the cabinet is not related to its prospects for survival. However, more recent literature indicates that party platforms developed coherence relatively quickly in CEE and are now readily identifiable (Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2009).

One of the reasons that ideological factors have not been shown to be relevant thus far is the measurement used. Tzelgov (2011) relied on data from party manifestos to position parties in the ideological space. The derived Left-Right variable that is included in the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) dataset (Klingemann et al., 2006) has been shown to be unreliable for positioning CEE parties on the ideological scale (Benoit and Laver, 2007; Glasgow et al.

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<sup>7</sup> The mean ENP of sixteen West European countries is 3.57 (Taagepera and Sikk, 2010), the mean ENP of ten CEE countries is 4.42 (Tzelgov, 2011)

2011; Savage, 2012). This is due to specific policy dimensions that are bundled together to create this dimension. The 'Left' is associated with interventionist economic policy and expansion of public services while the 'Right' is closely linked to liberal economic and traditional cultural values (Budge, 2001, p 56).<sup>8</sup> However, in CEE notions of 'Left' and 'Right' can vary; in some countries they are not associated with economic policy at all but instead more closely tied to social, cultural and religious outlook. Benoit and Laver have demonstrated via expert survey data that economic policy is the best predictor of party Left-Right positions in just six CEE countries while in the remaining countries social policy dimensions are the most accurate predictors (Benoit and Laver, 2007, p 93). Furthermore, the way in which economic and social issues are packaged together by parties can deviate from standard assumptions; it is common for parties to advocate a more state-driven approach to economic policy yet retain a traditional approach to cultural and moral issues.

In this article, I revisit ideological diversity hypotheses with new data from an original expert survey of party policy positions in CEE. The first hypothesis is Warwick's (1994) standard test of ideological diversity. This states that more fragmented bargaining environments increase the likelihood that more parties will need to be included in the cabinet, which in turn runs the risk of including ideologically more distant parties. The potential for policy disagreement within the cabinet is increased and therefore, the government is more likely to terminate sooner rather than later.

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<sup>8</sup> I would like to emphasise at this point that I am not levelling any criticism at the validity of the CMP data and particularly not the manner in which it is collected and coded. The CMP data is an extremely valuable resource for political scientists and has been used in many studies over the years. My concern here is that the standard Left-Right dimension in the CMP data, which is constructed after coding has taken place, is not suited to identifying the ideological positions of political parties in many CEE countries. This is not surprising as it is a variable that was constructed to identify the Left-Right position of parties in the original CMP data which did not cover CEE.

H2. Greater ideological diversity within the cabinet increases the hazard of government termination.

A further ideological diversity hypothesis relates to the nature of party system development in CEE. It has been suggested that the manner in which party systems crystallized in the region led to the development of polarized 'blocs' of parties. We have also seen that despite high levels of volatility within the party systems, many of the apparently new parties are in fact successors of previous parties in all but name (Sikk, 2005) and in that respect, they are perfect substitutes. This indicates that bloc competition may take place within CEE party systems but that the identity of parties that represents those blocs is subject to change. If party competition for government does take place in blocs, then we would expect that parties will form ideologically compact cabinets in CEE but that the bargaining environment itself will be diverse. Under such conditions, government duration will be inversely related to the ideological diversity of the party system (Warwick, 1994, p 53).

H3. Bargaining environments that are more ideologically diverse will reduce the hazard of government termination in CEE due to the nature of bloc competition among political parties.

#### *Formation time*

While fragmentation and ideology are structural attributes of the bargaining environment, the final hypothesis of bargaining environment complexity is an indicator of the difficulty of forming a government. King et al. (1990) included two such indicators in their original model of government duration: formation attempts and formation time. In this paper I consider only

formation time. The number of government formation attempts is a problematic indicator as it can be difficult to distinguish between formal formation attempts (i.e. investiture votes) rather than failed negotiations. Certainly within CEE, few potential governments attempt to undertake an investiture vote unless they are sure of success. The length of the coalition bargaining process is much simpler to determine objectively.

Expectations regarding the influence of the length of the bargaining process are mixed. On the one hand a long bargaining process could indicate a difficult negotiation that produces a sub-optimal coalition which is inherently unstable (King et al., 1990, pp 858-9). On the other hand, a protracted period of negotiation could suggest that the parties involved have produced a detailed working arrangement that is likely to lead to a more durable government (Warwick, 1994, p 37; Saalfeld, 2009, p 369). These are completely inverse expectations and therefore I specify two hypotheses:

H4 (i). Governments that emerge from a longer bargaining process are likely to be more durable.

H4 (ii). Governments that emerge from a longer bargaining process are likely to be shorter-lived.

### **Data and methods**

This study draws on data for governments in five CEE countries over the democratic period from 1989. The countries included in this analysis are the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The choice of these countries is logical and pragmatic. Firstly, these countries democratized at approximately the same rate if one considers accession to the

European Union as a benchmark of democratization. Furthermore, these countries were considered to be consolidated democracies according to the 2011 Freedom House *Nations in Transit* report.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, they all belong to the Central European bloc of former communist states and may be said to share similar cultural, historical and political trajectories. Finally, and on a pragmatic level, the data from which party ideological positions are derived covers only these five countries.

The time period covered by this analysis is 1990 to 2006. I employ the data provided by Conrad and Golder (2010) to determine the duration of each government over that period.<sup>10</sup> Lijphart's criteria are used to determine when a government ends and a new formation opportunity arises, these are: if there is a change in the party composition of the government; a parliamentary election is held; the Prime Minister resigns; or the cabinet resigns (Lijphart, 1984, p 267). Caretaker governments are excluded *a priori* as I consider these to be apolitical formations that are not intended to govern for extended periods. The final dataset covers 36 governments over a 16 year period, resulting in 778 observations.

The dependent variable is the duration of the government in months. The four independent variables have been operationalized as follows: fragmentation of the bargaining environment is measured as the effective number of parties (ENP) in parliament (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979). The ideological diversity of the cabinet is the range of the two most distant parties in the government. Similarly, the ideological diversity of the bargaining environment is the

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<sup>9</sup> In total eight former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe were considered to be consolidated democracies, the five chosen countries plus Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. Romania, Bulgaria and the Balkan states were not considered to be consolidated democracies.

<sup>10</sup> It should be made clear at this point that Conrad and Golder consider a government's duration to have ended upon the date of an election. Although the convention in most countries is for that government to continue in office as an acting Executive until a new government is formed, Conrad and Golder categorize these as periods of unofficial caretaker rule.

range of the two most distant parties in the legislature. Finally, the length of the government formation process is measured as the number of days between the fall of the previous government and the investiture of the new government.

A number of control variables are also included in the models of government duration. Firstly, an indicator of the government's majority status is specified. The literature on government duration has often shown that minority governments are less likely to fulfil their constitutionally mandated term in office. I therefore include a dichotomous indicator of minority governments in this investigation. Secondly, Warwick (1994) has found that the fragmentation of the bargaining environment can be superseded by indicators of the fragmentation of the government. As such, I control for the number of parties in the cabinet which is operationalized as a simple count. Thirdly, following Tzlegov (2011) I control for the 'regime divide' which is a binary indicator coded 1 if a government contains parties from both sides of the regime divide and 0 if it does not. Fourthly, Diermeier and Stevenson (1999) state that cabinets in the last 12 months of the constitutional interelection period (CIEP) are more likely to terminate due to short-term factors related to the proximity of the next election. This is also a binary variable indicating the final 12 months of the CIEP. Fifthly, I control for countries which operate under a constructive vote of no-confidence. Governments that existed under such rules are coded 1, all other governments 0. Finally, many studies of government duration have found that the economic performance of government can affect its longevity. Both Somer-Topcu and Williams (2008) and Tzelgov (2011) found this to be the case in CEE. I therefore specify control variables for inflation, unemployment and GDP. Inflation and unemployment are measured as monthly rates in each country while GDP is operationalized as GDP per capita in US dollars. Monthly Consumer Price Index inflation

data was acquired from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, monthly unemployment data is from Eurostat and the International Labour Organization, and GDP per capita was accessed via the World Bank.<sup>11</sup> Summary statistics for all variables are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Central and East European governments

	Min.	Max.	Mean
Duration (months)	2.17	46.85	21.63
Effective number of parties	2.04	11.29	4.83
Ideological range of parliament	0.98	3.48	2.56
Length of bargaining process (days)	1	109	27.30
Ideological range of government	0	2.89	1.10
Minority government	0	1	
Regime divide government	0	1	
Constructive vote of no-confidence	0	1	
GDP per capita (US\$)	2936	11739	5740
Inflation rate (%)	-0.37	1354.26	20.65
Unemployment rate (%)	0.30	20.60	10.04

### *Measuring ideology in Central and Eastern Europe*

Two of the hypotheses relating to bargaining environment complexity are associated with measures of party ideology. As stated previously, measuring party ideology in CEE requires a degree of sensitivity to the specific context of party politics in the region. The derived Left-Right variable in the CMP dataset does not provided a satisfactory measure of ideological positions in the region (Benoit and Laver, 2007) however, expert surveys can also be used to collect data on party ideology (Benoit and Laver, 2006, 2007; Whitefield et al, 2007) though these too can be problematic (Budge, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Due to missing data, in some cases monthly unemployment data were generated through linear interpolation of adjacent quarters. GDP per capita is reported annually. In this case, monthly data were generated by cubic spline interpolation from data for adjacent years.

Table 2. Results of an expert survey of party policy positions

	Czech Republic	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia	Slovenia
Tax	5.68 (0.51)	5.78 (0.27)	5.12 (0.33)	5.40 (0.45)	6.44 (0.17)
Foreign Policy	5.17 (0.59)	2.80 (0.36)	4.92 (0.48)	5.05 (0.49)	2.98 (0.43)
Public ownership	6.41 (0.40)	6.85 (0.33)	5.46 (0.09)	5.89 (0.47)	6.23 (0.23)
Social policy	6.14 (0.43)	5.41 (0.55)	6.44 (0.48)	5.82 (0.51)	7.21 (0.47)
Religion	5.27 (0.45)	6.19 (0.58)	6.21 (0.44)	5.30 (0.56)	5.53 (0.60)
Urban vs. Rural interests	4.84 (0.35)	5.73 (0.46)	5.88 (0.49)	5.70 (0.39)	5.92 (0.43)
Centralization	5.39 (0.31)	5.49 (0.18)	5.81 (0.31)	5.39 (0.56)	6.37 (0.16)
Environmental issues	7.04 (0.33)	5.71 (0.13)	6.56 (0.12)	7.37 (0.14)	5.68 (0.25)
Left-Right	0.07 (0.20)	-0.16 (0.21)	0.04 (0.17)	-0.11 (0.20)	0.07 (0.19)

Note: Standard error of the mean in parentheses

The range of values for each policy dimension is 1 to 11. The endpoints for these values can be found in Savage (2012). The Left-Right dimension is based on a factor analysis of the policy dimensions in the table. The minimum value is -1.93 (Left) and the maximum is 1.81 (Right).

The drawback of existing expert surveys is that they have tended to be a snapshot of party policy positions which tell us little about how those positions have changed over time. In 2003-04 I collected an expert survey of party policy positions similar to that of Benoit and Laver (2006) and Laver and Hunt (1992). However, this survey followed the example of Ray (1999) and asked respondents to place political parties on each policy dimension at every election since 1990. This method of data collection has some inherent drawbacks. For example, the number of experts that are capable of providing considered responses is naturally quite low. Rather than sending the questionnaire to every political scientist in a given country, the survey was targeted at experts of party politics of many years standing in each country.<sup>12</sup> The overall response rate to the survey was 23 percent from 110

<sup>12</sup> The initial source for building a list of potential respondents was contributors to the *European Journal of Political Research* annual yearbooks, however, personal contacts of colleagues in Department of Government at the University of Essex were also drawn upon extensively.



questionnaires which is slightly lower than the 28 percent response rate obtained by Benoit and Laver (2006) but given the exhaustive nature of the survey this represents a reasonable return. A further drawback of the survey lies in the limited resources available. Funding, time, and manpower constraints meant that data was collected for parties in five countries in CEE rather than every postcommunist state in the region.

The mean and standard errors of expert's estimates for all parties in each country are shown in Table 2 together with a composite score for the Left-Right scale in each country. The Left-Right dimension is used to test the ideological diversity hypotheses in this study. It is vital to note that this scale differs markedly from that derived from manifesto data. The Left-Right scale used here takes into account the specific meanings of 'Left' and 'Right' across the region so for example, in Hungary the terms Left and Right are more closely related to differences in social policy. In the Czech Republic the Left-Right dimension carries more familiar economic connotations. To test the robustness of the Left-Right estimates derived from this survey I have compared it to party Left-Right scores from two other expert surveys: Benoit and Laver (2006) and the Chapel-Hill Survey (Hooghe et al., 2010). The Left-Right measure from the survey used in this research correlates extremely highly with both of these surveys; the correlation with the Left-Right dimension from the Benoit and Laver survey is  $r=0.86$ ,  $p<0.01$  and with the Chapel-Hill survey it is  $r=0.82$ ,  $p<0.01$ .<sup>13</sup>

## Results

The dependent variable in this analysis is the duration of governments in months, therefore, the Cox Proportional Hazards (PH) model (Cox, 1972) is used to estimate the effect of

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<sup>13</sup> A more detailed discussion of the Left-Right positions of political parties in CEE, and a further discussion and validation of this expert survey can be found in Savage (2012).

bargaining environment complexity on government longevity. PH regression is a form of survival analysis that is used to estimate the effect of covariates on the ‘time to’ a specified termination event, in this case, a government’s removal from office. The PH model has become the standard form of analysis in government duration studies as it does not specify a particular distribution of the underlying hazard function which means that it is less demanding of the data (Warwick, 1994; Martinez-Gallardo, 2011). The entries in the tables below include the coefficient of the models and the hazard ratio.<sup>14</sup> Two separate models of government duration in CEE are estimated. The first is an analysis of every government in the dataset. The second model excludes the first governments in each country. The reason for this is that in most cases, the first governments of the democratic era were umbrella organizations of anti-communist parties. During this period, these parties did not compete with one another and in this regard, they existed outside of ‘normal politics’ to some degree and can be regarded as transition governments.<sup>15</sup>

The results of the analysis (Table 3) show that there is very little difference between the two models with no change in the direction of the coefficients for any variable and only one change in significance of note. That change in significance is important as it relates to the test of my first hypothesis. Drawing on the previous literature it was hypothesized that greater fragmentation in the bargaining environment would result in less durable governments. Table 3 indicates that the ENP in the legislature has a marginal effect on government duration in CEE. Using the full dataset in model one of Table 3 it is indeed shown that the greater

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<sup>14</sup> The hazard ratio offers a more intuitive interpretation of the PH model as it is similar to the odds ratio produced by logit models. If a covariate is judged to have absolutely no effect on the risk of termination in a specific month then the hazard is one and all hazards are judged against this baseline of no effect. So, if a hazard ratio is 0.75 then this indicates that that covariate reduces the risk of termination by 25 percent, while a hazard ratio of 1.65 indicates a 65 percent increased risk of termination.

<sup>15</sup> The exception to this is Poland, the data for which begins in 1991 after the period of the transitional government.

fragmentation of the bargaining environment does produce governments of a shorter duration, however, this effect is significant only at the  $p=0.10$  level . Furthermore, model two shows that when the first governments are removed from the dataset, the effect of bargaining environment fragmentation is rendered insignificant. This is not surprising since previous research has shown that the ENP in parliament has not been significantly related to government duration in CEE (Sommer-Topcu and Williams, 2008; Tzelgov, 2011). The established literature also indicates that the ENP is often replaced in models of government duration by both the number of parties in government and the ideological diversity of the government (Warwick, 1994). That is not the case in this analysis as Table 3 shows that each of those variables has no significant effect on government duration. This result allows us to conclude is that the greater fragmentation of party systems in CEE has largely not had an adverse effect on the lifespan of governments.

The fragmentation of the bargaining environment is just one measure of its complexity; policy and ideological positions determine how parties interact with each other. Parties that exist at opposite poles of the ideological spectrum are unlikely to find the common ground that will allow them to govern together. On the other hand, those parties that do share a degree of ideological compatibility may find it easier to negotiate the formation of a coalition government. It has often been intimated that ideology simply does not matter in CEE; according to this thesis, parties did not develop coherent policy platforms and few had effective organizations which resulted in parties behaving like classic office-seekers. In terms of government formation and duration, the result would have been the creation of ideologically disparate coalitions held together by little more than a shared thirst for power. However, I have shown earlier in this paper that parties in the region did in fact develop

coherent policy platforms relatively early. Moreover, it has been shown that parties also tended to form coalitions with ideologically proximate partners (Savage, 2012).

If we start from the proposition that ideology does matter in CEE then how does this affect government duration? I hypothesized that greater bargaining environment complexity leads to the creation of more diverse governments that have a greater hazard of termination. The models in Table 3 demonstrate that this is not the case: the ideological diversity of the government has no impact on its duration.

Table 3. Bargaining environment complexity and government duration in Central and Eastern Europe

	Model One		Model Two	
	Hazard Ratio	Coefficient	Hazard Ratio	Coefficient
Effective number of parties	1.44 (0.29) *	1.77	1.40 (0.33)	1.45
Ideological range of parliament	0.42 (0.14) ***	-2.53	0.44 (0.15) **	-2.39
Ideological range of government	1.09 (0.34)	0.27	0.91 (0.35)	-0.24
Length of bargaining process	0.97 (0.01) ***	-2.76	0.97 (0.01) **	-2.37
Minority government	1.44 (1.28)	0.41	1.25 (1.24)	0.22
No. of government parties	0.75 (0.22)	-0.98	0.74 (0.24)	-0.92
Regime divide government	0.35 (0.16) **	-2.31	0.34 (0.17) **	-2.18
Inter-election period	5.50 (2.57) ***	3.65	4.78 (2.19) ***	3.42
Constructive vote of no-confidence	1.27 (0.52)	0.58	1.11 (0.46)	0.25
Unemployment rate	1.00 (0.00)	-1.09	1.00 (0.00)	-0.84
GDP per capita	1.00 (0.00) **	2.17	1.00 (0.00) ***	2.49
Inflation rate	1.00 (0.00) *	1.85	1.00 (0.00) **	2.18
Observations	778		712	
Log likelihood	-82.34		-75.90	

Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*p=0.01, \*\*p=0.05, \*p=0.10

However, perhaps bargaining environment complexity does not interact with government duration in CEE in the same way it does in Western Europe. There is evidence to indicate that the development of party systems in the CEE region has resulted in the emergence of ‘bloc competition’ among political parties (Toole, 2000). Rather than converging on the ideological centre ground in typical Downsian fashion, parties are located on one either pole of the

ideological spectrum and the search for potential governing partners takes place within these polarized blocs rather than across them. This results in complex bargaining environments that are ideologically diverse but which produce governments that are robust because they are formed within tight ideological spaces (Warwick, 1994, p 53). Table 3 provides some evidence for this assertion. The ideological diversity of the parliamentary bargaining environment significantly reduces the risk of government termination in both model one and model two. Moreover, the hazard ratio shows that the risk of termination is reduced by at least 66 percent for each extra degree of ideological space that separates the two most distant parties in the party system. This effect is significant at the highest level in model one and is only marginally reduced in model two.

The finding that the ideological diversity of the bargaining environment reduces the risk of government termination is important for our understanding of party politics in CEE. As indicated previously in this paper, many formal analyses of political processes have produced results that show ideological variables as insignificant, which is contrary to the literature on parties and party system development. The results of this analysis allow us to understand how ideology affects one political process in the region, and it does so in a way that may be unexpected. Instead of bargaining environment diversity increasing the likelihood of government termination, the data presented here shows that it reduces the risk of premature termination because it is indicative of polarized party systems that are characterized by competition between distinct blocs of parties. Governments that emerge from these blocs are naturally more robust, partially due to their compatibility but also because of the fact that parties within these blocs have nowhere to go should they seek to defect – it is not simple for

a party to cross from one bloc to another. There is therefore an imperative to maintain existing party alliances, including governing coalitions.

The final indicator of bargaining environment complexity that I test is the length of the government bargaining process. Hypothesis H4 (i) suggests that long bargaining processes are indicative of thorough negotiations which produce governing arrangements that are detailed and will be more robust than governments that emerge from shorter negotiations. Governments that are formed from lengthy bargaining processes may also have an incentive, or feel a duty, to sustain the arrangement due to the effort expended in coming to a settlement in the first place. Conversely, hypothesis H4 (ii) states that governments formed as a result of long bargaining processes are likely to be less stable as they are indicative of difficult negotiations that produced a sub-optimal outcome. Table 3 shows that in both models one and two, the length of time that a government takes to form is inversely related to its risk of termination. In other words, governments that emerge from longer and more complex bargaining processes are significantly more likely to serve longer in office, thus confirming H4 (i).

Figure 1 illustrates the survival function for governments above and below the average length (27.30 days) of the bargaining process in CEE. Governments that took longer than average to form have around an 85 percent probability of survival by the 10<sup>th</sup> month of their governing tenure while cabinets that formed from shorter than average bargaining processes have just over a 60 percent chance of survival at the same point in time. The risk of termination for governments from shorter bargaining processes exceeds 75 percent after around two years

(24 months) in office while cabinets that formed as a result of longer bargaining processes take almost twice as long (43 months) to reach a 75 percent probability of termination.

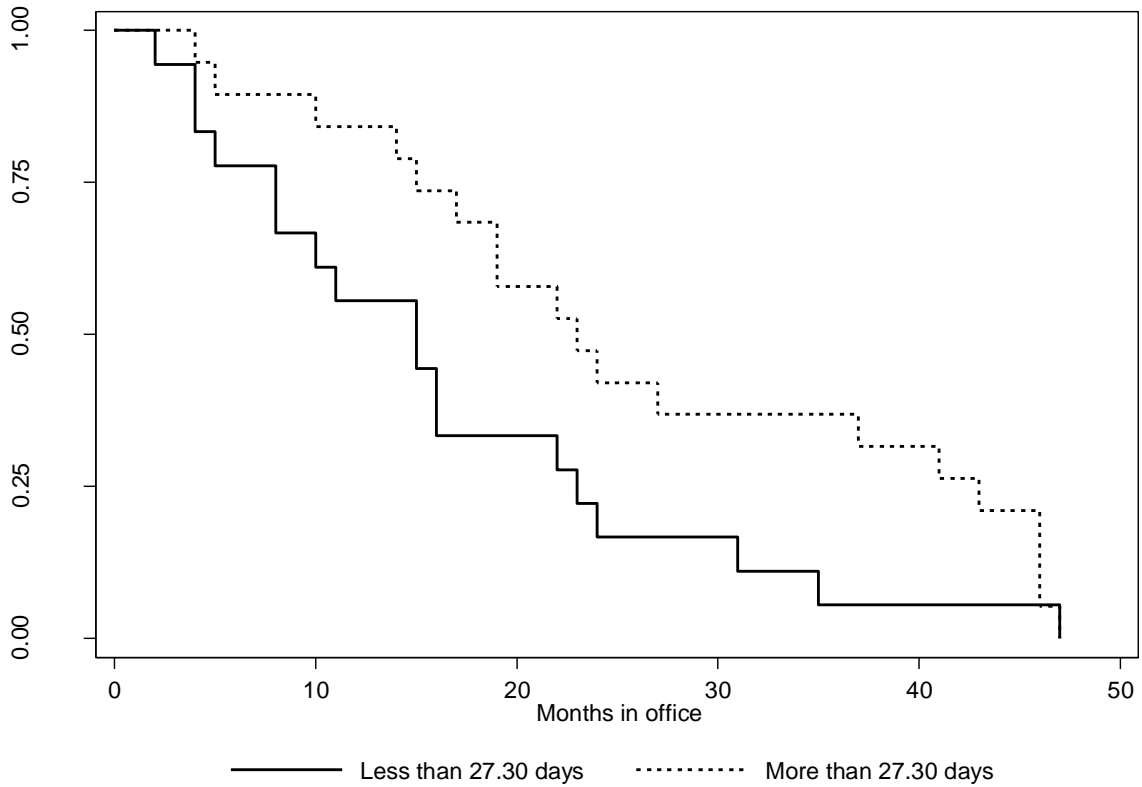


Figure 1. Kaplan-Meier survival function of Central and East European governments by length of the coalition bargaining process

Taken together, the results of the statistical analysis presented in this paper show that bargaining environment complexity is a significant influence on government duration in CEE. Although fragmentation of the bargaining environment is not especially relevant, particularly in the period of ‘normal politics in the region, the ideological diversity of the party system is a significant indicator of how likely a government is to fulfil its term in office. Furthermore, governments that emerge from protracted bargaining processes in CEE are likely to survive in office longer than those that are formed from shorter government formation processes.

The control variables in the models each have the expected effects on estimates of government duration. Rising inflation is significantly associated with an increased risk of government termination.<sup>16</sup> The data also shows that governments in CEE run a much greater risk of termination in the final 12 months of the constitutional inter-election period. Similar to Tzelgov, I too find that regime divide governments are significantly more durable than non-regime divide cabinets.

## **Conclusion**

The question of why some governments survive longer than others is one that is especially pertinent in Central and Eastern Europe where almost two-thirds of cabinets terminate prematurely. In this article I have argued that party system development has significantly influenced government duration in CEE as the party system sets the parameters of the government bargaining process from which cabinets are formed. Party systems in CEE have developed in a manner that has facilitated the emergence of bi-polar party competition which leads to highly ideologically diverse and complex bargaining environments. These diverse bargaining environments may be characterized as polarized in that parties have coalesced around poles on either side of the ideological spectrum with few parties capable of crossing from one bloc to the other. In this political landscape, complex bargaining environments produce more durable governments.

The notion that bargaining environment complexity can influence government duration is often overlooked, particularly if one directly transplants empirical models designed to explain

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<sup>16</sup> I also specified models of government duration without time dependent covariates. In these models I replaced monthly GDP with the change in GDP from the beginning a of a government's tenure to its end. These models show that the total increase in GDP over a government's tenure significantly reduces its risk of termination. These results are available from the author on request.



West European governments to a new political context such as CEE. Based on an analysis of party system development in CEE, four hypotheses of bargaining environment complexity were specified in this study. Two of these provided little support for the bargaining environment complexity thesis; the ideological diversity of the government is not associated with its duration in any way while party system fragmentation has a marginal effect on government durability.

Stronger support was offered by measures of ideological diversity of the bargaining environment and the length of the coalition negotiation process. Governments that were formed from ideologically diverse bargaining environments were more durable than those formed from more compact environments. This supports the view that party competition in CEE takes place in polarized blocs. In this scenario governments are more durable because parties have fewer incentives to destabilize the government as their prospects for participating in an alternative coalition are limited due to their ideological distance from parties in the opposing bloc.

I also found that longer, more complex coalition bargaining processes resulted in significantly more durable governments. Why longer bargaining processes lead to more durable governments is uncertain though it has been hypothesized that drawn out bargaining processes are an indicator of a thorough governing arrangement rather than one that is hastily put together with important details overlooked (Saalfeld, 2009). Parties involved in long coalition negotiations may also feel a greater duty to maintain that government once in office (Warwick, 1994).

Overall, this article has shown that bargaining environment complexity is central to explaining government duration in CEE. Other factors are also significant, such as the regime divide and economic performance, but these must be considered together with bargaining environment indicators that are linked to party systems in the region.

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