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Why there is (almost) no Christian Democracy in post-communist Europe

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Abstract
Compared to its West European counterparts, post-communist Christian Democracy is notable for its lack of success. Even in the most religious of post-communist democracies, no Christian Democratic (CD) party has claimed a plurality of the electorate. At the same time, there is a considerable range in average electoral support from 1990 to 2010, i.e. from 0.7 percent in Estonia to as high as 18.4 percent in Slovakia. The most successful CD parties have arisen in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Lithuania, and (with qualifications) in Macedonia. The reasons for this success lie not in popular religiosity, state–church conflict or alliances between CD parties and churches. Instead, where parties can point to a history of nation and state-building in the inter-war period, they receive an initial electoral boost from this historical legacy. Yet even these favourable historical reputations have transitory effects: by the second or third elections, the impact of inter-war support rapidly faded.

Keywords
Central and Eastern Europe, Christian Democracy, historical legacies, religion

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I. Introduction
The political landscape of post-communist democracies in Europe reveals a striking absence: in contrast to Western Europe, there is little support for Christian Democratic
political parties, as defined by their programmatic commitments. Even in the most religious of post-communist democracies, no CD party has claimed a plurality of the electorate. They certainly have not dominated politics the way that post-war Austrian, Belgian, Dutch, German or Italian CD parties have. Post-communist CD parties have not come anywhere near the achievements of their Western counterparts, ‘rightly considered the most successful western European political movement since 1945’ (Kalyvas, 1996: 2).

There are two aspects to this puzzling absence: first, post-communist CD parties averaged less than a third of the support of their West European counterparts, as Table 1 shows. In several post-communist countries, CD parties failed to arise at all – if we average the support for CD parties across all countries, post-communist Christian Democracy obtains less than a fifth of the West European support. Second, within the consolidated post-communist democracies there is a considerable range in average electoral support from 1990 to 2010, from 0.7 percent in Estonia to as high as 18.4 percent in Slovakia. CD parties have been most successful in Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Lithuania, countries with very different patterns of religiosity and state–church cleavages.

Of course, the context in which post-communist political parties emerged differs from that of their Western counterparts: post-communist parties were founded (or resurrected) overnight, rather than developing gradually over decades. Post-communist parties arose at a time when technology and media campaigns trumped mass organizations and local roots. Unlike their Western counterparts, they did not have explicit and material Church support, nor were they the main anti-communist bulwark. Finally, both West European and post-communist CD parties faced severe policy constraints by the end of the twentieth century (Kitschelt, 2004: 10). Thus, both genealogy and context seem to conspire to preclude post-communist Christian Democracy.

Yet some post-communist parties were able to overcome these obstacles. The variation in support for post-communist CD parties suggests these factors did not ‘bite’ equally. How, then, can we explain this variation? To summarize, CD parties succeeded where they were perceived as more Democratic than Christian: specifically, where they had favourable historical reputations as state and nation-building parties rather than as agents of clericalism. Christian Democracy was not perceived in the same terms as in Western Europe: it was one of many anti-communist options and its distinguishing feature was its religious agenda – unless the party could claim a past as a secular nation-builder. Few parties could claim this legacy, and it proved evanescent for those who

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Average support for Christian Democracy.</th>
<th>Post-communist Europe</th>
<th>Western Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average vote for CD in countries where CD competed</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average vote for CD across all countries</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average vote for CD 1990–2010</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data: European Election Database (http://www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database.) Unit of analysis: election result.
could: after the first two elections, the inter-war record faded as a source of party support. As a result, Christian Democracy failed to take off as a widespread post-communist political movement.

II. Potential explanations

There are several reasons to expect the rise of CD parties in post-communist countries: popular religiosity and clerical–secular cleavages, the parties’ historical representation of Church–State conflict and their anti-communist stance, and the organizational and material resources the Churches could have offered nascent parties. Yet, as we will see, these factors explain neither the relative absence of CD parties in post-communist democracies, nor the variation in their success.

First, in Western Europe, ‘there was no secret to the post-war electoral success of Christian democracy: it relied primarily on the successful yoking of political choice to religious commitment’ (Conway, 2003: 48). Popular religiosity has historically served as a precondition for Christian Democracy (Bale and Szczerbiak, 2008). Given the high rates of religiosity (and a church–state cleavage) in countries such as Poland, Croatia, Lithuania and Slovakia, we might expect CD parties to represent these cleavages. Yet the relationship between religiosity and Christian Democracy is not a simple translation of religious belief into political mobilization. Even ‘the presence of large Catholic populations in a country is analytically and empirically insufficient for predicting the emergence of a common Catholic identity in politics, even less the formation of a political party’ (Kalyvas, 1996: 10). Support for post-communist CD parties illustrates the loose relationship between religiosity and the demand for its political manifestations. Thus, the most religious of post-communist countries, Poland, may have a self-identified 95 percent Catholic population, but over 80 percent of poll respondents disagree with the notion that the Church should have an influence either on government policy or on popular votes.3 Post-communist Polish clerical parties rapidly lost electoral support after 1991.4 More broadly, the electoral success of all post-communist CD parties is not correlated to religious belief or attendance, Church influence on policy, or the ‘demand’ for a more politically active role for the Catholic Church, as Table 2 shows.

Alternatively, we might expect a curvilinear relationship between religiosity and the rise or success of CD parties: in profoundly secular countries, CD appeals would be irrelevant, while in deeply religious ones they would be taken for granted. In moderately religious societies, CD parties could gain support and mobilize in defence of religious interests. Yet, again, there is no such pattern in post-communist countries. The Czech Republic is among the most secular countries in Europe, yet its CD party had successfully maintained its electoral support (averaging around 8 percent) until 2010. Similarly secular Estonia, on the other hand, had no CD to speak of. A secular–religious cleavage did arise in Poland and in Hungary (Kitschelt et al., 1999), yet no party explicitly represented it beyond the first few years – instead it was subsumed in broader cultural cleavages. This is a reminder that many social, political and economic cleavages are simply left unexpressed (Sartori, 1976). Instead, the strategic interactions of politicians, especially in the early elections, help to establish ‘which social cleavages will be depoliticized and which will be established as permanent bases of political conflict’.
What we need, then, is an account of why elites would try to mobilize some of these cleavages, and which of these efforts succeed with voters. A second explanation of CD success focuses on the parties’ genealogy and the role of Church–State conflict. Particular historical configurations produced CD parties in Western Europe in the nineteenth century: thus, these ‘parties can only be understood historically. Arising in the second half of the nineteenth century, they were essentially parties of religious, that is Catholic, defence’ (Hanley, 1994: 3). Kalyvas (1996) also argues that the rise of the parties began with a liberal and secular attack on the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century. The secular state moved to assert control over education and family in the process of the consolidation of the nation-state, and a threatened Church fought back by mobilizing Catholics. This political mobilization then enabled newly autonomous and politically active Catholics to form CD parties in spite of Church intentions. CD parties are thus the contingent outcome of conflict between the Church and its liberal opponents (Kalyvas, 1996).

A reproduction of the exact historical configurations would be unlikely, if not impossible, after 1989 and the collapse of communism. Nonetheless, if Church–State conflict is the central force in the creation and success of Christian Democracy, we would expect that where a secular state tried to limit church privilege, or where the Church and its

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CD vote</th>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Belong</th>
<th>Attend</th>
<th>Efficacy</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CD vote</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief in God</td>
<td>0.014 (0.95)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging to a religious denomination</td>
<td>0.064 (0.95)</td>
<td>0.67 (0.000)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance at religious services</td>
<td>0.14 (0.56)</td>
<td>0.77 (0.000)</td>
<td>0.46 (0.000)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church influence on public policy</td>
<td>0.29 (0.48)</td>
<td>0.69 (0.007)</td>
<td>0.74 (0.003)</td>
<td>0.87 (0.000)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular support for Church influence on politics</td>
<td>–0.11 (0.68)</td>
<td>0.004 (0.98)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.55)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.85)</td>
<td>–0.13 (0.65)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Catholic</td>
<td>0.15 (0.52)</td>
<td>0.35 (0.01)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.67)</td>
<td>(0.60) (0.000)</td>
<td>0.45 (0.102)</td>
<td>0.28 (0.074)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


(Zielinski, 2002: 201).
adherents saw religion was in danger from leftist secularism, we should see greater potential for CD parties (Kalyvas, 1996: 97). Yet neither genealogy in Church–State conflict nor the parties’ anti-communist stance explains their success (or lack thereof). Where Christian Democracy arose in post-communist democracies, there was little anticlerical or secular mobilization: the Slovak Church did not come under political fire until a decade into the democratic transition, long after its CD parties had arisen and succeeded. The Czech Catholic Church faced considerable problems in obtaining favourable economic rulings, including restitution of Church property, but the ostensibly CD party did not arise out of either Church mobilization or to protect Church privilege. Finally, the Slovenian and Lithuanian churches faced little hostility, yet CD parties did relatively well.

Nor were the CD parties the main anti-communist force, either during the collapse of communism or as the main competitor to the communist successors afterwards. Poland had a powerful Left party that was a direct successor to the former ruling communist party — yet several parties opposed it, and were much more successful than the clerical ZChN. It may be that competition for the traditional anti-communist and CD electorate (women, rural, conservative voters) led to low support for the proto-CD parties (Bale and Szczersiak, 2008: 492). But this only pushes the question further: why did other parties succeed in obtaining that traditional electorate and CD parties did not? Meanwhile, CD parties succeeded in the considerably more secular, urbanized countries with moderate Left parties, such the Czech Republic and Slovakia, where CD parties were neither the result of a State–Church conflict nor the main anti-communist voices.

Broadening the set of structural preconditions for Christian Democracy, rigorous socio-political research by Bale and Szczersiak (2008) includes popular religiosity, competition on the right that was delegitimized by its association with totalitarianism, a Church hierarchy that threw its considerable weight behind the CD party, and a party structure that allowed the CD parties to offer policy concessions in exchange for Church support while maintaining autonomy. Poland, they argue, only had religiosity as a facilitating condition, and was thus unable to support CD parties. Yet the absence of these historically important conditions has not consistently precluded CD parties in the post-communist setting. Slovakia and, arguably, Lithuania share the Polish configuration, yet CD parties have done well. In the Czech Republic and Slovenia, all of these preconditions are missing, yet CD parties have been able to compete successfully.

A third explanation, therefore, changes the focus to the strategic interactions of Church and party. As they emerged after World War II in Germany, Italy and elsewhere, CD parties were an obvious ally for the Roman Catholic Church, given the ideological similarities and affinities to Church teaching (Warner, 2000: 10). Political parties in these new democracies also faced multiple challenges: ‘[P]arties need to establish roots quickly; they need to differentiate themselves from competitors, becoming a known entity distinct from others; and they need to reconcile the ideology of their founders with the perceived demands of the new political context. Interest groups help . . . ’ (Warner, 2000: 10). Not surprisingly, then, we might expect nascent post-communist parties to exchange policy concessions for Church support (mobilizing its adherents and even material resources). Of course, caveats abound: the Church discriminates among potential political partners, and alliances with CD parties are hardly automatic, not least because of the tenuous connection between CD party interests and that of the Church.
We would therefore expect that CD success would be predicated on the expected value of the exchange of party policy concessions and Church mobilization. Where the Church sees a political party as both the one way to enforce its policy preferences and likely to enter government, the Church is willing to mobilize its adherents through both exhortation and coercion, and to more generally throw its support behind party goals. It can provide access to its organizational resources, reputation, training of campaign staff, voter education, votes and financing (Warner, 2000: 29). This was the case in post-war Italy, where the Church provided enormous organizational resources (and the support necessary to ensure democracy would survive) in exchange for legislative concessions, including anti-Left and anti-communist stances, financial privileges, and so on. Where the party can obtain support elsewhere, or the Church can rely on other policy channels, the exchange does not take place and Christian Democracy fails to benefit.

Yet this kind of alliance presented three problems in the post-communist context. First, active church support for political parties, even in very Catholic Poland, was no longer acceptable in 1990 the way it had been in 1945. The times (and the political context) had changed, the result of Vatican II and broader social and political shifts. Second, where parties are new, it is unclear which ones will become pivotal or powerful – and thus useful to the Church. Thus, even as post-communist parties could benefit from organizational and material resources of the Church, the Church did not have the same clarity. Established parties could stand a better chance, since their likely support is clearer – for example, even if its degree of continuity with pre-war parties was questionable, the Italian CD party was a known quantity, a party whose support and likely reach were already known. Third, even if they could benefit from the organizational reach and material support of the Church, political parties, especially CD ones, may not want too close an alliance. If they become too dependent on the Church for electoral support, they are vulnerable to Church policy blackmail, and their appeal may be limited to voters who espouse Church preferences. Not surprisingly, shortly after establishing its alliance with the Church, the Italian DC began its efforts to gain greater autonomy from the Church, bringing huge swathes of the economy under state control to establish networks of clientelism and voter dependency that then substituted for Church support and obviated the need to meet Church policy demands.

In fact, in post-communist democracies, CD parties succeeded without the support of the Catholic (or other) church, as in the Czech Republic, Slovakia or Slovenia. If anything, the support of Church hierarchy for specific parties subtracted from their broader support, as in the unsuccessful efforts to establish self-declared CD parties in the early 1990s in Poland (Bale and Szczerbiak, 2008). And while individual priests and even bishops spoke out in favour of certain political options, none of these nascent CD parties received the full and open backing of the Church, much less access to its organizational or material resources. The one place where we see a CD party explicitly try to enact Church preferences (and even push for policies more radical than the Church had envisioned) is in Slovakia, where the KDH was trying to differentiate itself from a broader, more moderate CD rival, the SDKÚ after 2000. Here, party competition, rather than an alliance with the Church, drove the embrace of Church policy preferences. Nonetheless, this account draws our attention to the strategic considerations of party and church elites – and their willingness to invest in particular identities, coalitions and constituencies.
III. An alternative account

Popular cleavages, genealogy and church alliances thus do not explain the curious dearth of CD parties. Post-communist Christian Democracy appears to be a different creature altogether from its West European eponymous parties. This suggests that we need to examine the parties themselves and the circumstances that dictated the choice of party identity and its resonance within post-communist societies.

In the newly competitive democratic party systems that arose after 1989, political entrepreneurs invested in party labels and identities. Their own political origins and preferences clearly played a role, but so did the costs and benefits associated with particular party identities in an uncertain and volatile electoral environment. Such party labels mattered in post-communist politics from the very beginning. For example, ‘despite the informational noise that exists in Poland’s fluid party system, party labels . . . act as markers of political responsibility, and as such they constitute an important link between citizens and their representatives’ (Zielinski et al., 2005: 392).

One trade-off facing these elites was that distinctive political labels would provide greater certainty in identifying voters and alliances, but they could cost the new parties broader electorates and coalition potential. Specific party labels were relatively risky, for both elites and voters: ‘[E]ven if parties declare themselves to stand on one end of the political spectrum, voters lack the years of experience with the parties necessary to build up confidence that the parties will behave in the manner they promise’ (Tucker, 2006: 40). The more uncertain and volatile the electoral environment, the riskier a narrow party identity, both because a narrow identity could mean a restricted electorate and because it could limit the pool of potential governing coalition partners. As a result, parties in post-communist Europe tended to pursue glittering generalities rather than specific commitments. Beyond the ‘regime divide’ between parties from the communist and anti-communist camps, early ideologies were amorphous. The modal party name was Democratic, possibly Liberal, definitely Civic, rather than Social Democratic, Christian Democratic or Socialist, all names with a storied (and more distinctive) history.

A CD label tended to be seen as particularly narrow and controversial. The distinct post-communist political context after 1989 changed the meaning (and value) of the CD label, compared to its post-war Western European counterparts. In post-war Western Europe, an investment in Christian Democracy was a relatively certain proposition. The CD parties emerged as a chief counterweight to potential radical Left threats, yet their image was untainted by wartime collaboration. Their anti-communist stance meant critical material and organizational support from both the United States and the Roman Catholic Church, support that allowed the parties to survive and to establish themselves after the war. West European parties could thus rely on more stable electorates and on positive associations with their labels during the return of democracy after World War II.

In the post-communist context, Christian Democracy closely identified the party with clericalism and the policy preferences of the Church (Markowski, 1997; Tworzecki, 2002), rather than with broad Christian teachings, a conservative social market and explicitly non-clerical and non-nationalist claims of universal values. It specified an intended (and likely limited) electorate, associated the party with the Church and
suggested a pro-clerical doctrine. This identity therefore limited the strategic flexibility of the party, committing it ideologically (or at least symbolically) with the Church and its conservative social teachings. Nor were CD parties the one credible anti-communist bulwark: instead, they were but one of several anti-communist democratic parties. Precisely because their anti-communism made them indistinguishable from several other (bigger, more credible) parties, the one distinguishing characteristic of post-communist CD parties was their tie to religion. And here, as noted earlier, Vatican II and broader political shifts precipitated a widespread popular (and legal) rejection of an active role for the Church in politics. Across the post-communist world (and across Europe), broad majorities after 1989 rejected the proposition that the Church should be involved either in governance or in voting decisions (Grzymala-Busse, 2008). As a result, a CD identity was not as a priori valuable in post-communist countries after 1989 as it was in the post-war period in Western Europe. Not surprisingly, ‘religion as an electoral magnet is very much like a real magnet: it has the disposition to both attract and repel. Strictly speaking, then, having religion as an electoral asset means that Christian Democracy can never become a full-blown catch all party’ (van Kersbergen, 1994: 35).

Yet some CD parties could transcend these narrow and controversial identities by dint of their historical reputation as very different, moderate and generally secular parties. The inter-war period of independence in East Central Europe saw several CD parties arise and compete – and political leaders could hope to invoke these pasts in persuading post-communist voters (as did the leaders of other resurrected historical parties). Even if used instrumentally and cynically, these reputations could convince voters, at least at the outset. And here, the specific historical context of democratic politics in the region mean that one source of more favourable reputations that could build support for the parties beyond the religious milieu would be the parties’ performance during the inter-war episode of independence, nation-building and (in some countries) democratic politics. This earlier national history could make Christian Democracy palatable and credible, freeing it from negative associations of narrow clericalism and helping to gain a broader electorate.

Throughout the region, national sovereignty and in some cases democratic competition arrived (however briefly) in 1918–38. Where these inter-war reputations were less about clerical connections than about capable governance, they would increase the parties’ coalition potential and ability to portray themselves as moderate governing parties. Such state and nation-building would consist of the parties’ continued participation in governments, their record in these governments and their stances towards independence and democracy. Where CD parties were seen as stable and fundamental pillars of inter-war independence and governance, they could claim a favourable historical record after 1989, even if they had been subjugated after 1945 and rendered powerless for the next four decades. In the early post-communist elections, at least, voters could use these historical endowments to guide their choices. An inter-war history of state or nation-building, of competent governance or moderation, could ensure at least a trace of a favourable reputation, a reassurance that the party had once ably governed and defended national interests and could do so again.

These historical reputations, if made salient and if credible, could serve as an initial shortcut for voters faced with an array of unfamiliar parties. The past was a source of...
both party reputations and symbolic references for all resurrected historical parties. To be sure, the correspondence between inter-war and post-communist reputation was imperfect. For all historical parties, the danger was that their earlier identity no longer jibed with the preferences and demands of contemporary voters: parties had to reinvent themselves as relevant without losing their traditional electorate and, worse yet, without losing credibility. All parties had to adapt to the changed political and economic context. As a result, several ‘historic’ parties differed considerably from their predecessors. For example, the Hungarian Smallholders’ Party became a single-issue party focused on re-privatizing land seized by the communist state, rather than the broader centre–right coalition of the pre-war era (Wittenberg, 2006: 32). And in several cases, ‘the symbolism of the precommunist party is seen as little more than a calculated elite strategy to mimic traditions they see as providing ready-made, easily recognizable identities’ (Wittenberg, 2006: 33). The difficulties in adapting and in maintaining credibility are part of the reason why all historic parties average only 10 percent of electoral support in 1990–2010. Nonetheless, a reputation for moderation, competence and protection of national tradition could prove a powerful initial draw for voters in search of informational shortcuts and reassurance.

These historical resources, however, have a half-life. Over time, parties develop their own political records that supplant historical reputations. Their statements, governing patterns, policy decisions and choice of coalitions all influence voter perceptions and loyalties, replacing the parties’ historical reputations. These subsequent governing records and their position vis-à-vis other parties’ electoral offers would play a greater role in determining the voters’ decisions. And here the main concerns of post-communist voters centred on the economy and pocketbook issues rather than on solely cultural or religious views (Kitschelt et al., 1999; Tucker, 2006; Whitefield, 2002.) Thus, we have a two-stage explanation: the distinct political context and uncertainty of the early post-communist years help to explain why fewer parties with clear CD labels could succeed. An investment in post-communist Christian Democracy had far lower expected utility than it would have in post-war Western Europe. Among post-communist CD parties, those with favourable inter-war records of building the state and defending the nation could count on greater initial support than those with no such records. Governing records and ideological commitments explain subsequent support. Reputational effects will matter most in the first elections, when the inter-war history can guide voters more than the parties’ governing or electoral records.

IV. Empirical patterns

As noted above, a major difference between the post-war CD restoration in Western Europe and in post-communist democracies was the uncertainty facing the political parties. Political parties in Italy or in Germany returned after a shorter authoritarian period with voters and electorates that were more intact. Parties themselves had greater continuity of personnel and ideology. In short, CD (and other) parties could be more certain of the payoff from particular party labels. In post-communist democracies, the levels of uncertainty were higher. For example, one frequently noted aspect of the post-communist political environment has been the very high rates of electoral volatility, rates
that were twice as they were in Western Europe. From 1885 to 1985, the heyday of Christian Democracy, electoral volatility in Western Europe averaged 8.6 percent (Bartolini and Mair, 1990), rising to 12.6 percent in the 1990s (Mair, 2002). In post-communist democracies, volatility averaged around 30 percent, and has not decreased over time (Sikk, 2005; see also Powell and Tucker, 2009). If volatility indicates the kind of political uncertainty that leads political parties to shy away from clearly cut ideological profiles in order to preserve strategic flexibility in both vote-seeking and coalition-building, it is one reason why post-communist parties hesitated to adopt the CD label.

The most successful post-communist CD parties were the KDU-ČSL in the Czech Republic, the KDH and then the SKDÚ in Slovakia, the SKD in Slovenia, and the LKD in Lithuania. One striking correlation is between the existence of a pre-World War II CD parties and the success of CD parties in the post-1989 democracies (see the Appendix). Success here is relative: CD parties in post-communist democracies did not command large catch-all electorates (the partial Macedonian exception is discussed below). They were unable to gain the plurality of votes in any election, even where the party systems were highly fragmented. Another striking correlation is that all four of these countries regained their independence as states in 1989, emerging from the Czechoslovak, Yugoslav and Russian communist federations.

In the absence of governing records or contemporary identities (which would have determined support for communist successors and the anti-communist opposition), support in the first free elections was influenced by historical reputations. In all the cases of relative CD success, the parties could claim direct ties to predecessors that advanced the cause of state-building and independent nationhood, serving in democratic governments, building administrative institutions and defending independent state status in the inter-war period.

These reputational effects are most salient as informational shortcuts in the first elections. During the time of the greatest electoral uncertainty, volatility and risk for both parties and voters, the inter-war history could guide voters -- signalling the CD parties’ anti-communist stances, a relatively conservative societal orientation and a continued support for independent statehood. Subsequently, all parties would be more subject to judgments based on their records as parliamentary parties, coalition partners and electoral competitors. This argument does not presuppose an extensive socialization into the CD milieu, the development of strong political norms or party loyalties, or even an understanding of CD doctrine as practised elsewhere (see Wittenberg, 2006). Instead, it simply assumes that the CD label identifies a nascent party as non-communist and resonates with a favourable historical reputation for the party.

Thus, historical support for CD parties in free elections during the period of independence prior to communism correlates to the results of the first free elections after communism’s collapse (0.58 correlation at 0.014 p level). Inter-war support is a strong predictor of the electoral success of CD parties in the first election. Does this pattern hold up? To examine how the impact of inter-war CD support on the post-communist CD vote changed over time, I collected national electoral results from all free elections held in post-communist countries, along with historical vote results in the inter-war free elections where they were held. I estimate the impact of the inter-war vote on post-communist support using OLS as follows:
Table 3. Decreasing impact of inter-war voting on post-communist CD support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-1989 election round</th>
<th>Effect of inter-war CD support (std errors)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>0.381 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>0.232 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>–0.010 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>–0.051 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.602</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Units of observation: election result for CD party. N = 81, R² = 0.16 Data: European Election Database, Rothschild (1974).

\[ V_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 V_{t0} + \beta_2 N_{2-5} + \beta_3 V_{t0}N + \varepsilon \]

Where \( V \) is the vote-share, \( \beta_0 \) is the intercept, \( V_{t0} \) is the CD support in the inter-war period, \( V_{t1} \) is the support in the first free elections, \( N \) is a vector of dummy variables for the 2nd through 5th free elections and \( V_{t0}N \) is the interaction term for CD support in the inter-war period and the 2nd through 5th free elections. The coefficients reported in Table 3 are the linear combinations of coefficients for the inter-war support and for the inter-war support interacted with successive results of the post-communist free elections.

The results show that even the most favourable historical legacies lose their ability to attract and to retain voters. Beyond the first or two elections, the parties’ historical reputations, no matter how favourable, lost their power to attract voters, in keeping with the expectations of the model. As Table 3 shows, the impact of historical support lessened with each election, losing its power to draw an electorate. By the third democratic election, the impact of inter-war support is negligible: and, instead, other considerations began to determine whether or not the parties would continue to receive support.

Moreover, CD support in the first free elections does not predict future CD success. Even if they could rely on a favourable reputation at the outset, CD parties quickly had to obtain support based on their contemporary record. And here they were in a bind: their historical reputation was that of moderate coalition partners, not close allies of the Church. Yet the conservative Christian voters were the one mainstay of their support – as a result, the CD parties were caught between drawing on a religious electorate, which called for relatively narrow sets of appeals and attempting to broaden their strategic flexibility and coalition potential, which demanded a more centrist, broader vision. Their very moderation, as we will see, made them vulnerable to competition from other centre–Right parties.

Beyond this dilemma, the policy options of CD parties everywhere were constrained. In the West European case, the traditional CD cross-class coalitions were increasingly fragmented. It was increasingly difficult to reconcile the parties’ long-standing commitment to a conservative welfare state and a protective social market with a newly liberalized economy (Kitschelt, 2004). In the post-communist case, neither a social market nor a conservative welfare state (the mainstays of CD support) were even available in the first place as policy options after 1989. Instead, the demands of privatizing and liberalizing the state-owned economies, the legacies of the communist welfare state (Inglot, 2009) and the strictures of accession to European Union membership limited policy options for all political parties.
Rather than offering a distinctive set of policy options, then, CD parties in post-communist democracies relied on a reputation for coalition experience and relative ideological moderation, combined with a more conservative Christian social stance. Instead of forming close alliances with the Roman Catholic Church (or other churches) and translating Church preferences into policy, these parties tried to steer a course between appealing to a narrow and relatively conservative constituency and broadening its appeals. Where they did not command overwhelming popular support, churches were loath to get involved politically for fear of appearing partisan and losing privileges such as tax-exempt status. In the one case of explicit convergence with Church policy demands (the KDH after its split with the SDKÚ in Slovakia), the party, not the Church, was behind the translation of church preferences into policy, as an attempt to distinguish itself from its more liberal competitor, the SDKÚ. In general, however, since they could offer little in the way of distinctive policies, and since their past reputations could not serve them indefinitely, post-communist CD parties steered clear of close alliance with the Church. Even if it meant greater certainty of support, such a tie would undermine the parties’ historical claims of moderation, state-building and representing broader constituencies than the faithful alone.

IV. A. The success stories?

Where political parties had firm bases of support in the pre-war era, the benefits of resurrecting such historical identities included broader positive societal associations, an existing (if elderly) electorate and the transmission of familial political traditions. All these factors could work to build both the size and the loyalty of these parties’ electorate. Thus, post-communist Christian Democracy became most successful initially where it had historical roots in prominent political parties that built the newly independent states, repeatedly governed, and helped to defend national aspirations in the pre-war era. The four CD parties with the greatest initial post-1989 support (in Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania and the Czech Republic – and with qualifications, Macedonia) all explicitly identified themselves with powerful interwar predecessors that built both the nation and the state. They could thus build on favorable reputations for defending national interests and for the ability to govern, claims that were even more relevant given the new post-1989 independence.

Thus, in Slovakia, the main CD party (and the most popular party overall) was the Hlinkova’ Slovenska L’udová Strana, or the Slovak People’s Party led by Monsignor Andrej Hlinka. It polled as much as 34.3 percent in 1925, and steadfastly began to advance Slovak autonomy within Czechoslovakia. Its central role in proposing greater administrative and political independence meant it would become ‘the repository of Slovak national aspirations’ (Rothschild, 1974: 96). It served in the Czechoslovak government from 1927 to 1929, but otherwise maintained a steadfast opposition to what it saw as the trampling of Slovak rights. The party became embroiled in controversy during World War II: Monsignor Hlinka died in 1938, and his successor, Jozef Tiso, led the party in forming the pro-fascist Slovak government, as Slovakia gained autonomy from the Czech Republic during the war (only to become a Nazi puppet state). Critically, then,
the party’s buttressing Slovak independence and statehood did not amount simply to inter-war moderation, even if the two went hand in hand in the other cases.

Post-communist Christian Democrats in Slovakia (the KDH and its more successful splinter, the SKDÚ) drew attention to the tradition of Hlinka and the HSL’s support for Slovak autonomy, with the party’s programmes explicitly drawing the connections. Ján Čarnogurský, the head of the KDH, notoriously declared as early as 1991 (when Czechoslovakia was still a united country) that Slovakia should have ‘its own little star’ on the EU flag. The importance of the party’s association with Slovak autonomy meant that, boosted by the Pope’s visit in April 1990, the KDH received 19 percent of the Slovak vote (its highest posting) in the first free elections in June 1990. The outcome was disappointing to party leaders, who had expected to become the next CDU, but it was the beginning of a steady 8–10 percent support for the party.

Yet a favourable reputation did little to alleviate the pressure of contemporary competition. The Slovak KDH tried to steer a course between portraying itself as building on the HSL’s traditions as a nation and state-building party, and building alliances with the Catholic Church. Thus, the leader of the KDH insisted that Christianity is ‘the source of our internal stability, the inspiration for our decisions, and the source of our supporters’ (Haughton, 2005: 38). At the same time, the KDH was one of the key opposition parties against the increasingly autocratic rule of Vladimír Mečiar and the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HDZS). In 1997, the party joined an alliance of anti-Mečiar parties, the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK). After the coalition’s victory in 1998, the conservative KDH leadership began to pursue pro-Church policies in earnest, against the wishes of some of its other elites, who saw these projects as divisive and too narrow.

The result was twofold: first, the party split over electoral strategies, with several more moderate leaders departing to form the SDKÚ in 2000, led by Mikuláš Dzurinda. It was this split in the party that prompted the KDH to move even more closely to the Church in an attempt to differentiate itself from the splinter and retain its conservative religious electorate. Abortion, religion in schools, stem cell research restrictions and same sex marriage regulations were all first legislated by the KDH, who then sought the Church’s support for its stances. Second, the KDH received half the vote of the much broader and moderate SDKÚ-DS in 2002 and 2006. The SDKÚ obtained 15 percent in 2002 and 18 percent in 2006, against the KDH’s 8 percent in both elections. The SDKÚ ran not on Christian values, but on continuing economic reforms and the country’s readiness to enter the EU (Haughton and Rybár, 2004). Thus, its success was not due to a Christian identity, but to its broadly attractive policy stances and its focus beyond Church–State relations. The KDH attempted to moderate its rhetoric in the 2006 elections, emphasizing family and justice rather than religious values, but this shift came too late and was not credible. The broader, more moderate, SDKÚ option showed itself to be more attractive to the electorate, while the KDH catalysed coalition crises and pursued controversial pro-clerical policies. The KDH retained its narrow religious electorate, but obtained no new support in 2010, either.

Similarly, the Czech counterpart of the KDH, the KDU-ČSL, also drew on strong pre-war roots, in the form of the Czech People’s Party. The ČSL was a major governing party in the inter-war Czechoslovak republic, serving in the government from 1921 to 1938, and a regular member of the informal five-party consultative coalition (pětka). Its
inter-war record of 8–10 percent of the vote was reflected in the post-1989 support of its successor, which averaged nearly 8 percent, and in the party’s image, which was that of a consistently centrist, administratively competent, moderate governing party (Tworzecki, 2003).

At the outset, KDU-ČSL was the party to most successfully balance the trade-off between the certainty and the breadth of support. The Church has traditionally been weak and other parties remained disinterested in exploiting a Church–State cleavage (Hloušek and Kopeček, 2008; Houghton and Rybár, 2008). As a result, the KDU-ČSL did not face as steep a trade-off between appealing to religious voters and to the broader electorate. It emphasized its agrarian and moderate character, and the party was perceived in largely positive terms, both as far as its historical reputation and current programmatic efforts were concerned (Tworzecki, 2003). Its electorate remained relatively small (6–9 percent) and mostly Catholic, but the party repeatedly entered governing coalitions as a moderate centre–Right party, rather than as a clerical or narrow formation. As a result, the Czech Christian Democrats succumbed to competition from a new party, TOP’09, in the 2010 elections. TOP’09 offered the promise of moderation without the taint of participation in the controversial governing coalitions of the 1990s and beyond. If moderation broadened the KDU-ČSL’s support, it also left the party vulnerable.

Much like their Slovak counterpart, the Slovene Christian Democrats also made a name for themselves by advocating national autonomy. Unlike the Hlinka party, however, they were successful: the Slovene People’s Party (Slovenska ljudska stranka) was an effective organization, and its considerable political skill allowed it to adroitly exploit the divides between Serbs and Croats in the inter-war Yugoslavia to gain ‘virtual autonomy’ for Slovenia, advancing self-administration, Christian-social culture, education and Slovene self-government (Rothschild, 1974: 212). Its alliance with the Church was in the name of national protection, rather than advancing clerical policies. The SLS’s explicit and formal successors, the Slovenian Christian Democrats (Slovenski krsčanski demokrati, SKD and subsequently the New Slovenia-Christian People’s Party, NSI), together averaged a bit over 9 percent of the vote, and participated in several governments (1990–96, briefly in 2000 and in 2004–8) on the strength of their association with moderate centre–right policies and their ability to sustain a state-building reputation in light of post-communist Slovenia’s economic and political success as an independent country.

The final party to benefit from a strong pre-war precursor was the Lithuanian LKD, which became the TS-LKD in 2008 (Tėvynės sąjunga-Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai). A historical party since 1905, the LKD was closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church, and seen as a critical nation-building force in the inter-war Lithuanian Republic (until the 1926 coup). The LDK was the most powerful among the inter-war parties, shaping both the state and the institutions to its preferences (Rothschild, 1974: 379). It was an anti-Polish and nationalist party, which was the source of its support – and its downfall. When the party was unable to prevent the Vatican from recognizing Vilno as a Polish city, the humiliation cost it dearly at the polls: the party lost its majority in 1926, allowing an anti-clerical coalition of Populists and Socialists into office. The LKD then supported an ultra-nationalist coup later in the year: and by the time it realized its mistake the coup perpetrators had entrenched themselves in office (Rothschild, 1974: 379).
Re-established in 1989, still under the Soviet Union (the party relied on Catholic networks to recruit members and supporters), the LKD served in the government in 1996 to 1999 with the Homeland Union (TS, Tėvynės sąjunga), with whom it merged in 2008.

Yet these CD parties saw their support drop over time, partly as a result of their participation in government and the internal party debates over strategy prompted by the experience. In the Lithuanian case, much as its predecessor suddenly lost votes after 1926, the LKD’s 1996–9 participation in a ruling coalition that vowed to continue austerity policies led to a decisive backlash against the party. The result was that the LKD split, with the rump gaining only 1.4 percent of the vote in 2006, and the core running an election with TS in 2004 and 2008, obtaining nearly 15 percent and 20 percent of the vote, respectively. Similarly, in Slovenia, the SKD and then the NSI had their greatest base of support in 1990–2 (13–15 percent of the vote), and then declined to 8–9 percent in 1996–2004, dropping below 4 percent in 2008. Moderation was no insurance against competition.

Perhaps the most intriguing case is of Macedonia, where a CD party bucked this trend. Here, a nationalist party with historical ties to an inter-war national liberation movement became a CD party once it saw it needed broader national support. The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (Vнатреšна makedonska revolucionerna organizacija – Demokratska partija za makedonsko nacionalno edinstvo, VMRO–DPMNE) began its life as a political party in 1990 as an explicitly nationalist party. It took the name and programmatic orientation from an inter-war organization of the same name – although the inter-war VMRO was not a political party, but rather an armed organization that carried out acts of terrorism in the name of Macedonian national ambitions. It was established secretly in 1893 in Greece to establish a single and sovereign Macedonian state. The inter-war VMRO was ‘a virtual ruler in Pirin Macedonia and a State within a state in Bulgaria’ (Rossos, 2003: 146). Most Macedonians supported it because, along with the communist parties, it was one of the few to recognize national identity and claims to sovereignty (Rossos, 2003: 154).

Accordingly, the post-communist VMRO–DPMNE was initially intensely nationalist and anti-Albanian, adamant that concessions should not be made to minorities during the 1991 constitution-writing process (Rae, 2002). It won a plurality of the vote in 1990 elections, but the ex-communist SDSM retained control of government after VMRO–DPMNE refused to form a coalition with Albanian parties. It was only after the electoral defeat of 1994 that the party decided to shift its stances and forge alliances with Albanian groups. Over the course of 1995 and after its Kicevo congress, the party went from a radical nationalist position to a much more moderate and anti-nationalist (but committed to Macedonian sovereignty) CD position. By June 1995, the party began to cooperate with the Albanian PDP on local elections (Shea, 1997: 276–7). The party now presented itself as a centre-Right party that criticized the ruling SDSM coalition ‘not for its ethnic policies, but for its corruption and close ties to Milosevic’s Serbia’ (Brown, 2000: 133), and won the 2008 elections with nearly 49 percent of the vote.

The VMRO–DPMNE squared the circle: it obtained a broad electorate (unlike its other CD counterparts), while retaining both a version of nationalist and CD claims. It never had to overcome a clericalist reputation: in a country that is 65 percent Orthodox,
30 percent Muslim and only 1 percent Protestant and Catholic, the party did not rely on ties to churches or religious supporters. It used CD stances to broaden its appeal and to moderate its anti-Albanian position, while at the same time retaining its nationalist electorate thanks to the conflict with Greece over Macedonia’s name. The party was a clear and consistent critic of Greek demands, and refused to compromise on Macedonian national sovereignty. It thus both benefited from a broad, catch-all CD orientation and from its continued role as the chief representative of Macedonian national ambitions. In other words, a nationalist party relied on historical nationalist legacies – and then used this historical credibility to transform itself into a self-declared CD party.

IV. B. Weaker legacies, weaker post-communist support

In contrast to these parties, whose relative success can be traced back to a positive reputation that dates back to their earlier performance as defenders of national interest, we see far less favourable legacies in Romania, Poland and Hungary, where weaker CD parties also located their roots in historical parties.

The Romanian CD party, the Partidul Național Țăranesc Creștin Democrat, PNT-CD, saw itself as the successor to the National Peasants’ Party, Partidul Național Țăranesc or PNT, an uneasy alliance of peasants and intelligentsia in power from 1928 to 1933. In two relatively free inter-war elections (1928 and 1937), the PNT claimed 78 percent and 20 percent of the vote, respectively. However, it was never seen as an independent state-building or nation-building force – the king recalled governments at will, and the PNT was seen as subordinate to the monarchy (Dogan, 1987: 380; Rothschild, 1974: 299 f.). Its unusually strong showing in 1928 was the result of its lengthy years in opposition, the monarchy’s need for its support in Transylvania (a PNT stronghold), and the plurality premium, which regularly gave 60 percent and more of parliamentary seats to parties that cleared 40 percent of the votes (Dogan, 1987). Subsequently, the party could never replicate its 1928 success.

In 1990, PNT-CD was re-founded by some of the original PNT members. It received very little support initially, with 2.6 percent of the vote. The party could not point to a laudable nation-building past to broaden its appeal, and its leadership became increasingly radical by 1992, demanding unconditional restitution and an end to abortions, hardly popular positions in post-Ceausescu Romania (Stan, 2005). Yet it won the 1996 elections as part of the Romanian Democratic Convention (Convenția Democrată Română, CDR). Much as in 1928, the party benefited from its long years in the opposition: the CDR won on the basis of its commitment to reforms (long delayed by the incumbents), and an end to the corrupt rule and authoritarian leanings of the reconstituted communist successors, who had continued in power after 1989. Subsequently, however, the PNT-CD was unable to build or retain broad support. It haemorrhaged both voters and parliamentarians, who defected en masse. It received less than 5 percent of the vote in 2000, and by the 2004 elections it was widely ignored.

The other two cases, Hungary and Poland, have inter-war CD roots: but these legacies are decidedly mixed. In both cases, as in Romania, CD parties arose after 1989, only to quickly lose support and become eliminated from the political scene as independent entities. The Hungarian Christian Democrats (Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt, KDNP) were
re-founded by some of their original leaders in 1989, having been earlier established in 1943–4. The historical party, the Democratic People’s Party (DNP) briefly competed after the war, and won over 16 percent of the vote in 1947. An earlier predecessor was part of the Hungarian inter-war government. In post-communist Hungary, the KDNP made explicit connections to the post-war DNP, and many of its politicians had been active in the party during 1945–7 (Wittenberg, 2006: 60). It promulgated itself as the defender of broader Christian morality (both its leaders and voters, however, were mostly Catholic). Among the smallest parliamentary parties, its highest votes were in 1990 and in 1994, at 6.5 percent and 7 percent, respectively, and its electorate was clearly profiled as religious and centre-Right, just as the party ‘defined itself in Christian terms’ (Wittenberg, 2006: 60; see also Körösényi, 1999). It was perceived as chiefly focused on religious and moral issues (Tworzecki, 2003), rather than on broader economic or social problems. The KDNP was in the governing coalition from 1990 to 1994, and helped to pass several laws that favoured Church positions. While its religious voters remained loyal, the party leadership split over differences in strategy after the party’s electoral performance did not improve in 1994. The more moderate faction that sought a broader electorate was largely absorbed by Fidesz, which transformed itself from a liberal party into the dominant Right party (Enyedi, 2003). The more conservative, nationalist faction joined extremist right parties, and the rump KDNP received only 2.3 percent in 1998.

The main post-communist Polish party affiliated with the Catholic Church, the Christian National Union (Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe, ZChN), thus had little historical capital to call upon. It is not the case that there was no Christian Democracy in inter-war Poland (Bale and Szczerbiak, 2008); rather, there was no favourable record of administrative competence, governance or nation-building. The Polish Christian Democrats, led by Wojciech Korfanty as the PSChD (Polskie Stronnictwo Chrześcijańskiej Demokracji, also known as Chadecja), rapidly became part of the Christian Union of National Unity (Chrześcijański Związek Jedności Narodowej, known as Chjena). The party governed briefly in a coalition after winning the 1922 elections with 29 percent of the vote and 163 out of 444 parliamentary seats. Ostensibly centrist, it then assumed a right-wing and clerical orientation (Rothschild, 1974: 31). These close links to the Church were controversial: anticlerical sentiment in inter-war Poland ran high. After the 1926 coup of Marshal Józef Piłsudski, it joined other opposition parties in the Centrolew coalition, designed to balance the pro-Piłsudski forces (BBWR), resulting in the 1930 arrest of the party’s leaders. It never served the role of a stable, nation-building governing party that its Czech, Slovene or Slovak counterparts could claim.

Subsequently, under communism, the role of the Roman Catholic Church solidified in the 1970s as the protector of the opposition and the repository of Polish national identity. Church attendance became a political act, a way of demonstrating that there were domains beyond the reach of the communist regime (which had already recognized Polish Catholicism by not dissolving the monasteries, liquidating Church property or engaging in open animosity, as was the case in the Czech Republic, for example). The result was a post-war identification of Polishness with Catholicism, a powerful symbolic marriage that meant almost all politicians would respect the Church and pay heed to its representatives.
Yet the post-war identification of Pole and Catholic, however powerful, did not translate into either simple partisanship or into demands for Church influence on politics. Popular support for the political influence of the Church was far more limited, and conditional on the domain: moral authority and national identity was one thing, specific government policies another. As a result, ZChN was highly controversial from its very beginning as a splinter group from the anti-communist Solidarity parliamentary grouping in 1990–1, and its immediate and public support for Church preferences. Meanwhile, the Polish Church sought to translate the political capital it had earned under the communists as an umbrella for the opposition into political influence in a sovereign democracy. As the Church pushed for changes in the laws regarding abortion, divorce and education in the early 1990s, Church moral authority was so great that few parliamentarians initially dared to risk its disapproval – but ZChN was seen as the pivotal coalition player actually responsible for these policies. The party received some of the worst evaluations in public opinion, garnering nearly 70 percent negative views (Tworzecki, 2003). This was a direct consequence of its clericalism: ‘[T]he very negative reaction to ZChN had much to do with the perception that it was doing the bidding of Poland’s powerful Catholic Church, and that through it the Church was trying to exert undue influence on the political process’ (Tworzecki, 2003: 149).

Its parliamentary and electoral activity on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church meant it became widely (and negatively) perceived as a handmaiden of the Church, despite its occasional declarations of broader CD commitments. As a result, while it gained nearly 9 percent of the vote in the 1991 elections, its support dropped to 6.4 percent in 1993, and it has not held any parliamentary seats since. It participated in the victorious AWS (Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność) centre-right coalition in 1997, but neither its policy influence nor its public image ever recovered from its earlier activity. While it attempted to reassemble again in successive elections, its reputation remained as a narrow, very conservative, clerical party, and it was unable to gain broader support. The conservative and nationalist mantle had been assumed by other parties, including Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), without a CD party ever emerging. Thus, even where the electorate is overwhelmingly religious, close ties to the Church limit its electoral appeal. Given the increasing importance of governing records in successive elections, proximity to the Church was especially damaging, as the Polish ZChN and the Slovak KDH show: parties that hoped to gain legitimacy with this alliance were seen as simply doing the bidding of the Church.

The general pattern that emerges, then, is that post-communist Christian Democracy could make the greatest gains (at least initially) in post-communist democracies where it had the most positive historical legacies. Without such identities, CD parties could not count on initial electoral support, and found efforts to broaden their appeal hamstrung by either a lack of historical capital or by the parties’ alliances with the Church. As a result, they either failed to arise, or, where they did, lost both electoral and parliamentary relevance (and presence.)

Thus, it is not the case that all CD parties in post-communist democracies simply appeal to voters on the basis of their religious identity (Tucker, 2006: 186 f.). Instead, CD parties span the range from conservative and quasi-clerical formations (the Polish ZChN) to more moderate centrist parties that with sparser religious appeals and
commitments (the Slovak SDKÚ, Slovene SKD/NSI or the Czech KDU-ČSL). While no CD party claimed the plurality of the votes, some were able to obtain a larger electorate, provided they did not become too closely aligned with the Church and pro-clerical ideology. Most, however, steadily lost support as either historical resources ran out or as the parties became too closely associated with the Church. Even where they survived, these moderate parties were vulnerable to competition from new parties.

V. Conclusion

This article provides a different answer to Bale and Szczerbiak’s provocative question about the absence of Christian Democracy, and why we should care. One reason is that the fate of CD parties in post-communist democracies suggests not only that historical legacies have a half-life, but that we can measure the steep decline in their influence. Even favourable historical reputations have transitory effects: by the second or third elections, the impact of inter-war support rapidly faded. A historical reputation for state and nation-building helped to build support for post-communist Christian Democracy in ways that religious cleavages, party genealogy and Church support could not. Yet this was a brittle basis for building durable parties: the legacies of party reputations turn out to be remarkably fragile. Future research may show whether this applies to all resurrected historical parties.

Much of the literature on post-communist party systems has emphasized the initial fluidity of party politics and the ill-defined nature of party identities. Yet we can turn the question around, and ask why parties might not want to adopt a clear and salient identity, such as a CD label. CD parties were faced with the choice of preserving strategic flexibility or of addressing a narrower but potentially more loyal religious electorate. Christian Democracy often turned out to be a narrow and restrictive identity that limited both the target electorate and the party’s strategic flexibility. An earlier history of nation-state building could free these parties from negative associations of clericalism and dependence. Yet even favourable historical reputations that promoted (perhaps misleadingly) the parties’ initial electoral success were not enough to sustain the parties in the far less favourable post-communist environment.

Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Post-1990 CD parties</th>
<th>Average CD vote (^{11})</th>
<th>Highest CD vote</th>
<th>Historical CD parties</th>
<th>Avg historical CD vote (^{12})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>VMRO-DPMNE</td>
<td>22(^{a})</td>
<td>48 (2008)</td>
<td>VMRO</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>KDH, SDKU, SDK(^{1})</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>19.2 (1990)</td>
<td>HSL’S</td>
<td>8.5(^{13})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>NSI SKD</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>14.5 (1992)</td>
<td>SLS</td>
<td>5.7(^{14})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Rep.</td>
<td>KDU-ČSL</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>9 (1998)</td>
<td>ČSL</td>
<td>10.4(^{15})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>PNTCD PND CDR</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>20.5 (1996)(^{1})</td>
<td>(PNT)</td>
<td>49.2(^{16})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
### Appendix. (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Post-1990 CD parties</th>
<th>Average CD vote</th>
<th>Highest CD vote</th>
<th>Historical CD parties</th>
<th>Avg historical CD vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>LKD</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>12.6 (1992)</td>
<td>LKD</td>
<td>40.5¹⁷</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>(PPCD)</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>9.1 (2005)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>KDNP (MDF)</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>7 (1994)</td>
<td>KDNP</td>
<td>10.¹⁸</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>ZChN (PiS, LPR)</td>
<td>4.1 $</td>
<td>8.7 (1991) §</td>
<td>‘Chadecja’¹⁹</td>
<td>18.6²⁰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>KDS (LPP)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>5.0 (1993)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>(KDM)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>8.7 (2008)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>EKRP (Pro Patria)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.4 (1999)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>KhDU</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.3 (1998)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>PDK</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.3 (1996)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>(HDZ)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia-Herzegovina</td>
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<tr>
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<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Moldova</td>
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²Seat-share for KDH in the SDK coalition in 1998. Where CD parties ran in coalitions, the vote-share for that election is estimated by (coalition vote-share % * seats held by CD within coalition parliamentary representation).
$Seat-share for PNTCD in CDR coalition.
§Seat-share for ZChN in AWS coalition in 1997.

All post-communist countries that held free and fair elections are included in the analysis. Electoral results are for individual parties (except as noted in coalitions), and the average support is across all elections in which the party ran as a CD party.

Coding follows the Comparative Manifestos Project, with exceptions: two explicitly clerical parties (LPP in Latvia, LPR in Poland) and two overtly nationalist parties (MDF in Hungary, PiS in Poland) are excluded. VMRO–DPMNE was classified as nationalist in the MP dataset, but is included after 1995 and its transformation. The coding follows party programmes: CD universalism precludes xenophobic, personalist and nationalist parties. Other potential candidates, such as Croatia’s HDZ, were also classified by the MP as nationalist. Solidarity implies social market and conservative welfare states, rather than pure free market solutions, an especially important part of the CD identity, since it reflects the historical concern with accommodation of various interest groups (Kalyvas and van Kersberger, 2010). This further excludes Poland’s PO and Estonia’s Pro Patria, both of which are classified by the MP project as conservative and describe themselves as ‘openly attached to conservative-liberal values’ and ‘right-wing conservative’ parties, respectively (‘Platforma Obywatelska’ http://www.platforma.org/pl/program/, accessed 15 February 2011 and http://www.riigikogu.ee/index.php?id=35118, accessed 9 February 2011). Most of the included parties are members of the European People’s Party, but this grouping also includes conservative parties that are not CD, such as PO or PSL in Poland or Pro Patria in Estonia (www.epp.eu, accessed 8 February 2011). Membership in the Christian Democratic International does not include the Baltic parties and others (IDC-CDI.com, accessed 8 February 2011). Parties that were excluded from the analysis are given in parentheses. As a robustness check, the estimates in Tables 2 and 3 were run with and without several of these parties, and no substantive differences were found.

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Notes

1. I follow here the traditional definition of Christian Democratic parties as influenced by Catholic social doctrines of universality, solidarity and subsidiarity, but maintaining autonomy from the churches themselves. These parties thus form an alternative to both socialism and liberalism, and possess a broadly religious identity without explicit religious alliances or appeals. Specifically, given this concern with their programmatic appeals, I follow the Comparative Political Manifestos Project coding for ‘Christian democratic families’.

2. A party formed in 1992 with two small self-identified Christian Democratic parties, Pro Patria, has done well in the elections, obtaining 22 percent of the vote in 1992 and retaining over 14 percent average support. However, its appeals over the years have been explicitly nationalist and free-market (Bennich-Bjorkman, 2009; Smith et al., 2002; Pettai, 2005) The Pro Patria and Res Publica Union, formed in 2006, declares itself a ‘right-wing conservative party’ (http://www.riigikogu.ee/index.php?id=35118, accessed 9 February 2011), not CD.


4. As Bale and Szczerbak (2008) point out, the Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland emphasizes both its ties to the Church and the social market, but its insistence on nationalism, a new moral order and sweeping away, rather than protecting, existing institutions is far more radical than CD stances.

5. Specifically, a Church will form an alliance with a political party depending on (a) asset specificity (the extent to which it can obtain its goals elsewhere), (b) transaction costs (of supplying politicians), (c) market uncertainty (stability and popularity of potential allies), and (d) core competencies (Warner, 2000: 30).

6. In the exception that proves the rule, parties emerging from the former anti-communist opposition explicitly identified themselves as such, certain that this identity would benefit their electoral results.

7. This is not to say that the parties were simply ‘lifted out of storage’. Pre-war CD parties were more paternalistic and less committed to democratic competition, to the point that the nineteenth-century parties are often precursors in name only (Buchanan and Conway, 1996: 11). Nonetheless, voters coalesced around post-war CD identity, given fears of communism and the discredited right-wing alternatives.

8. Until the late 1990s, when it became the New Slovenia, NSI.

9. Two other parties called themselves Christian Democratic. The Moldovan Christian Democratic People’s Party (Partidul Popular Crestin Democrat, PPCD) is a right-wing nationalist successor to the anti-communist Moldovan Popular Front. The OSCE concluded that ‘the PPCD which has a relatively stable electorate of seven to nine percent . . . runs on a populist pro-Romanian platform and . . . should like the Communists be regarded as an “anti-system party”’ (Neukirch, 2002). The party was supported for its pro-Romanian and nationalist stance, until it entered the coalition with its former enemies, the Communists, and failed to enter parliament in 2009. The Georgian Christian-Democratic Movement (K’ristianiul-Demokratiuli Modzaoba, KDM), a quasi-clerical party, was founded in February 2008 by a television personality. Its stated policy priority is to make Orthodox Christianity the state religion of Georgia (http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17060, 7 February 2008; accessed 14 April 2010). It entered parliament for the first time in the May 2008 elections,
and remained in parliament as the main opposition party after the other opposition parties quit in protest at what they saw as a fraudulent election. Neither appears to adhere to the tenets of CD doctrine, but both are members of the Christian Democratic international organization, the Centrist Democrat International.

10. Thus, in 2002, the KDH went before the Constitutional Court to argue that Slovakia’s liberal abortion law was unconstitutional. One of its coalition partners, the Alliance for a New Citizen (ANO), reacted by trying to strengthen the legal right to abortion, and KDH declared it would leave the coalition if the law were passed. In December 2007, the Constitutional Court declared abortion on demand up to the 12th week constitutional, rendering the proposed change moot (Haughton and Rybár, 2004). The KDH had already left the coalition with SDKU in 2006 over complaints about Dzurinda’s leadership and KDH’s orthodoxy.

11. Not including coalitions.

12. In democratic inter-war elections.

13. 11.3 percent in 1920, 10 percent in 1925, 5.7 percent in 1929, 6.9 percent in 1935 in united Czechoslovakia. Source: Rothschild (1974).

14. 5.8 percent in 1923, 5.4 percent in 1925, 5.9 percent in 1927 in Yugoslavia. Source: Rothschild (1974).

15. 11.3 percent in 1920, 7 percent in 1925, 8.4 percent in 1929, 7.5 percent in 1935 in united Czechoslovakia. Source: Rothschild (1974).

16. The PNT received 78 percent of the vote in the 1928 election and 20.4 percent in the 1937 election. These were the only two free and fair inter-war elections in Romania out of the 13 elections held (Rothschild, 1974).

17. 46 percent in 1920, 41 percent in 1922, 43 percent in 1923 and 32 percent in 1926. Source: Alfonsas Eidintas, Vytautas Žalys and Edvards Tuskenis, Lithuania in European Politics: the Years of the First Republic 1918–1940 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998).

18. 1920 elections, Legitimist vote (20 percent) and 1945 elections, KDNP (0 percent).


20. 29.1 percent in 1922 and 8 percent in 1928. Source: Rothschild (1974).

21. The Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ) is not counted as a Christian Democratic party. The party was largely the electoral engine of Franjo Tudjman until his death in 2000, without espousing CD doctrine. The Croatian Christian Democratic Party, a right-wing formation, ran as part of the Coalition of People’s Understanding in 1990. It then became the Christian Democratic Union (HDKU) in 1992, along with the Croatian Democratic Party (HDS), and ran as part of the United List in 1995. The HSP and the HKDU ran together in an electoral alliance in 2000, 2003 and 2007.

References


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