BOOK REVIEWS

Party organization and electoral volatility in Central and Eastern Europe: enhancing voter loyalty, by Sergiu Gherghina, London and New York, Routledge, 2015, 195 pp., US$145 (hardback), ISBN: 978-1-315-75271-6

It is widely recognised that parties occupied a major role in the crucial decisions made during the democratisation process in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). A quarter of a century after the fall of the Berlin Wall, numerous studies have indicated that the levels of electoral volatility are higher than that of Western Europe, with negative effects on party politics and representative democracy. Within this context, with the declared aim of explaining longitudinal and cross-country variations in electoral volatility, the author investigates how certain features of party organisation can influence the levels of electoral volatility. More specifically, given the post-communist parties’ institutional origins and weak societal bonds, parties can use the autonomy of local branches, the membership rates and the renomination of candidates in order to establish a more stable connection with the electorate. These three dimensions constitute the core of the theoretical arguments that are empirically tested in the second half of the book. In doing so, the analysis follow a deductive model that starts with an overview of the consolidated literature about the topic of interest at the most general level of explanation and continues with the definition of those hypotheses to be tested. In terms of research design, the dependent variable set by the author is the net electoral volatility calculated as a weighted difference in electoral performance in consecutive elections.

By putting together individual parties from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia within a sample of 29 individual parties (a total of 116 units of observation considering the number of elections taken into account and the political parties analysed) and by covering the time period from 1990 to 2008, the analysis goes beyond the limits that characterised previous single-country studies or restraint comparisons. This methodological framework represents one of the major assets of the book, providing both an in-depth analysis of the party politics as well as broader generalisations. The balanced combination between statistic and narrative comparison further reinforces the solidity of general explanations without neglecting details and case-specific relevant variables.

In terms of organisation, the volume is extremely coherent, making it a relevant pedagogical tool to be included to graduate seminar reading lists on party politics and post-communism. It is divided into seven chapters: the introduction outlines the basic questions raised in relation to previous studies addressing post-communist volatility and synthetically presents the central argument. Chapter 1 very effectively lays out a detailed and convincing argument in relation to the differentiation between the party system and party-level volatility, providing a good summary of the existing work on party politics in the region and persuasively illustrating why empirical evidence from the CEE fails to support the theoretical expectations of classical exogenous determinants of electoral volatility. Mixed evidence and problems in explaining the
longitudinal development of volatility reveal a blurred picture that pinpoints towards the need to investigate the potential causes of volatility within the party itself. Chapter 2 continues to look at this issue, focusing on the definition of four hypotheses on the relationship between party organisation and volatility. More specifically, the author considers that there are theoretical reasons to expect that parties with decentralised candidates’ election have lower levels of electoral volatility than centralised parties (H1, 44). On the one hand, he hypothesised that political parties with large membership rates have lower levels of electoral volatility than parties with smaller organisations (H2a, 47). On the other hand, he considers that constant membership rates are likely to be connected to stable levels of electoral support (H2b, 48). In the end, he expects that the higher the number of renominated MPs is, the higher the electoral stability of the parties will be (H3, 51). In order to test these hypotheses, the analytical model focuses first on the individual relationship between the independent variable and electoral volatility at a party level with the use of bivariate analysis. Chapter 3 provides a descriptive analysis of the variations in electoral support in CEE (fig 3.4 and 3.5, 63, 67). The following three chapters systematically examine a particular endogenous dimension: Chapter 4 (candidate selection), Chapter 5 (membership) and Chapter 6 (renomination). Each of the chapters focuses on the empirical strength of the independent variable taken into account, with rich cross-country and cross-party comparisons. Chapter 7 tests the effects of the three control variables – party incumbency, party system volatility, and voter turnout – discussing their effects extensively. Overall, this is a very well structured book, which carefully lays out a coherent argument, which is as yet unexplored by the literature, in order to demonstrate that the way in which parties organise can shape the voters’ stability. However, there are a couple of points one can make about it.

The analysis focuses on those parties that have maintained a parliamentary presence in at least half of the national elections in six CEE countries over two decades. This criterion of a continuous representation is, however, questionable considering that it excludes new parties that have become central political players in the second decade of post-communism – for example, parties such as the GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) or the National Movement Simeon II/National Movement for Stability and Progress. On the other side, fading parties such as the Romanian PRM (Great Romania Party) receive full attention. Similar doubts rise in relation to the exclusive focus on parliamentary parties. Both criteria are sources of a biased volatility calculation. Notwithstanding these problems, the arguments put forward regarding the non-parliamentary parties (10) relevance for the national political system are rather convincing. However, a more detailed explanation might have been useful.

The analysis takes into account certain organisational aspects, while leaving out others. Dimensions like leadership changes can have an effect on the stability of electoral performances. Although identified as a direction for further research, the choice of the organisational variable taken into account (Chapter 2) is somehow taken for granted. Other relevant organisational variables are not really addressed, although the entire analysis would have benefited greatly from alternative dimensions.

In summary, the volume represents a solid contribution to the academic literature. Gherghina’s ambitions towards theory-building seem to be satisfied. All in all, the value of Gherghina’s findings can be evaluated according to the quality of the empirical analysis, the statistical tests and, in general, the evidence upon which they are based. Moreover, the volume is written in a clear and accessible language and it lives up to expectations even though it is no small challenge to map almost two decades of post-communism. The explanations provided are not based on country peculiarities or time specificities; the complex picture of electoral volatility is explained by
organisational features (the relevance of candidate selection and the advantage of MP renomina-
tions) that can be applied to other contexts as well.

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New mobilities in Europe: Polish migration to Ireland post-2004, by Torbem Krings, Elaine Moriarty, James Wickham, Alicja Bobek and Justyna Salamońska, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2013, 161 pp., £70 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-7190-8809-4

In the preface to the book, James Wickham reminds that “in the mid 2000s of all OECD countries apart from Canada (and tiny Luxembourg), Ireland had the highest proportion of its population born abroad” (viii). This proportion increased due to the mass immigration from new members states of the European Union, especially from Poland. The authors suggest that although there have been some attempts to understand contemporary Polish migration to Ireland, most studies have been based on quantitative methods and have not provided insight into the lives of the migrants themselves. The few qualitative studies have tended to focus on the issues of culture and identity, neglecting the migrants’ experiences connected with work. It must be stressed, however, that the book relies solely on the English language literature and does not take research that has been published in Polish into account. This omission is striking, because at least two of the authors of the book understand Polish. If they had included a review of Polish literature, their description of the state of the art would look different.

The book aims at understanding the experiences of Polish migrants in the Irish labour market in the broader context of cross-border mobility in the enlarged European Union (the authors seem to use the term “Europe” as a synecdoche for the European Union). In order to uncover how the migrants themselves interpret their own situation, the authors conducted six waves of interviews with a group of 22 Polish migrants in a two-year period. Additionally, they also interviewed employers and officers from various organisations and institutions such as the Polish Church and the Polish Embassy. It should be stressed that there has been relatively little qualitative research into immigration which has involved interviewing the same informants over a number of years. Most studies offer a snapshot of migrants’ experiences at a given point in time and do not allow conclusions to be drawn about changes in migrants’ interpretations of their situation. Thus, the study offers a relatively novel approach to the study of immigration and employment. However, one might expect a more detailed and specific description of the research methodology. For example, we do not know exactly who conducted which interviews, what kind of interviews were conducted (presumably semi-structured interviews, but this is not stated expressis verbis), how coding and interpretation were carried out, whether there were any attempts at triangulation or how did the authors co-operate to reach the common conclusions.

The central thesis of the book is that Polish migration to Ireland represents a new pattern of mobility which is contrasted with traditional migration processes. The book provides an interesting and multidimensional analysis of various aspects of this new type of mobility. There is no space to discuss this issue in more detail. However, two specific aspects can be commented on. First, according to the authors, contemporary European migration is more individualistic than older forms which relied on dense ethnic networks. Secondly, the book argues that the