

ELECTIONS AND PARTIES
IN NEW EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES
by Richard Rose and Neil Munro

Preface

FREE ELECTIONS IN A NOVEL SETTING

Free elections blow away the pretensions of dictators to speak for everyone; this was spectacularly demonstrated after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. Although elections had been held in Communist party-states, they were elections without choice. Officially reported turnout was virtually 100 percent and more than 99 percent of the electorate was counted as having voted for the ruling party. Free elections have shown that the results of Communist ballots were literally too good to be true. In place of the former unanimity, citizens register big differences about who should govern.

The purpose of this book is to report the results of free elections to analyze electoral competition comparatively in eleven new post-Communist democracies. The framework in part I sets out what we need to know to understand election outcomes in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Slovenia since 1990. In particular, it emphasizes the initiatives of political elites in creating a floating system of parties by launching, merging, splitting, and dissolving parties. The evidence is detailed in the chapters of part Two, which record in prose and tables the history, laws, and election result of these new democracies.

The outcome of an election is a function of laws that determine how votes are cast and converted into seats in parliament; the number of parties supplied by political elites; and how voters respond to the choices that are offered. While specialists address

each issue separately, knowledge of all three elements must be combined to understand electoral competition. Chapter 1 outlines a supply-and-demand model that shows the sequence how election laws and the supply of parties limits the choice of voters.

In Communist regimes the electoral system was of no importance, for the outcome was pre-determined by the party-state. Political elites of new regimes faced an urgent need to elect a parliament but could not do so until after an electoral system was adopted. Everywhere some form of proportional representation of parties was chosen and the Anglo-American method of electing individual representatives was rejected in whole or part. Faced with the need to have a head of state and fearing rule by a strong man, some countries decided to have their president chosen by an electoral college, while other countries went for the direct election of a president with limited powers. Chapter 2 compares electoral systems and their effects on the turnout of voters and the proportionality of results.

The West European assumption that political parties are organized to reflect interests of civil society does not fit Central and Eastern Europe, for civil society institutions were purged and became puppet institutions of Communist party-states. Given this legacy, at the first free elections political elites organized dozens of parties without knowing how much or how little support they could rely on. Many parties have failed to win any seats in parliament and disappeared; some have merged or split; and new parties have come forward too. Chapter 3 shows the fragmenting effects of the entry and exit of parties competing in a multiplicity of dimensions.

The Communist practice of telling subjects what to think and do has left a legacy of distrust in politicians and parties. In consequence, most electors in new European democracies do not identify with a political party and opinion polls find that the don't

knows are usually the biggest group in the electorate. Yet most citizens do have political values and outlooks that, in theory, parties could represent. Drawing on New Europe Barometer survey data, chapter 4 identifies the major influences on individual political outlooks and identifies the influences that divide electors into those with clearcut outlooks and those with fuzzy-focus outlooks.

Notwithstanding difficulties, free elections are now an established part of the political process throughout Central and Eastern Europe and Russia. Political elites depend on popular support to gain office, and governments are often turned out of office by voters. However, a high level of party competition has been led to a stable party system in which there is an equilibrium between the preferences of voters and the supply of parties. Instead, there is a floating system of parties, because, as chapter 5 shows, political elites frequently disband parties or create new ones. As long as parties float, voters are forced to float too. The result is a degree of electoral volatility far greater than in established democracies and it is difficult for voters to hold their governors accountable.

The countries covered in part II were chosen on political and geographical criteria. Politically, all eleven can be described as new democracies, having introduced free elections since 1990. Ten have had their democratic credentials endorsed by the European Union recognizing them as applicants for membership. Notwithstanding many problems, the Russian Federation holds free elections. Post-Communist countries that do not show consistent evidence of holding free and fair elections--for example, most successor states of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia--are excluded from this volume (see e.g. Karatnycky et al., 2002; www.osce.org/odihr). To treat the results of unfree and unfair elections as if they were the same as free and fair elections is to mistake form for substance.

The geographical boundaries of Europe change with political circumstances (Rose, 1996b). For most of the previous half century, the Iron Curtain divided Europe between a Western half with free elections and an Eastern half with unfree elections. In this book, references to West European or European Union countries refer to the established democracies of Europe. Post-Communist countries are referred to as Central and East European (CEE) countries, a term that emphasizes their historical roots in the Habsburg and Prussian as well as the Soviet empires.

A common set of topics is covered in each chapter. All the states included here have had radical regime, boundary and population changes during the twentieth century. In view of the great disjunction between past and present and the prevalence of unfree and unfair elections prior to 1990, the historical experience of national elections is summarized briefly. The electoral system adopted for the first free election is presented in detail, along with subsequent amendments. The references in each chapter are to articles, books, and websites with specialist information on the country's electoral history and practices.

The list of parties identifies all parties in a country that have at least once gained 1 percent of the vote or two or more seats in the national parliament. A total of 273 parties meet these criteria, an average of 25 parties per country. Where there is political interest in ethnic, green or other parties that do not meet these criteria, their results are included too. Parties that have never received 1 percent of the vote are grouped together as Others. This avoids treating all parties as equal when the electorate patently does not do so. For example, in the 1991 Bulgarian election, by winning just over one-third of the vote the Union of Democratic Forces showed more support than thirty-eight other parties, including twenty-six that each had less than 1 percent of the vote. The Christian Radical Democratic Party won the race to come last with five votes, 0.0001

percent of the total cast.

The name of each party is given in the national language as well as English to facilitate tracing information in primary sources and identifying acronyms used in national contexts. The years in which a party fights elections in its own name define start and stop points. Since splits, mergers, and electoral alliances have been frequent in new European democracies, factual information tracking the careers of parties is given, including the point at which the party ceased fighting an election in its own name (for more details, see Bugajski, 2002; Day, 2002). The numbering of parties makes it easy to link information in the party list with entries in the results tables.

Election results are reported for the principal chamber of the national parliament and for the presidency when that office is filled by popular vote. (For intermittent referendums, see Auer and Bützer, 2001). In each chapter four tables give the absolute number and percentage of votes and seats won by each party. Wherever possible, the votes and seats have been taken from reports of the government agency responsible for electoral administration. We have edited these figures as necessary to maintain consistency and clarity in reporting results.

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RICHARD ROSE***NEIL MUNRO***

Centre for the Study of Public Policy

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