Volatility and Women's Representation: How Women Can Stabilize Party Systems

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Abstract

Electoral volatility remains a significant research topic in East Europe and other newer democracies. Although our understanding of what factors stabilize party systems has improved, multiple questions remain unanswered. In particular, recent work has invested more energy into understanding how party-centric factors or traits may impact volatility levels. Candidate characteristics are notable attributes that may impact whether or not a party stabilizes or vanishes from the electoral scene. Our research continues this endeavor by examining how the presence of elected women can help decrease volatility levels in East European party systems. Our cross-national time-series analysis of roughly 15 East European countries indicates that women play a statistically and substantively important role that warrants additional consideration. Our findings and implications, however, raise some pressing questions for future work on the topic of volatility.

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Introduction

Electoral volatility research has experienced numerous changes and updates over the past few decades. Related to this, studies on East-Central European electoral volatility has concluded that some promising trends seemed within reach. Yet, volatility levels in this region remain a mixed bag: in some countries noticeable downward trends have emerged, hinting at a settling or stabilizing party system. Elsewhere, however, volatility figures either reveal sustained languishing party systems or worrisome patterns of backsliding. Given this puzzling array of scenarios, how can we account for volatility levels in the region?

In the current manuscript, we contend that women's representation impacts electoral volatility in ways that have gone underexplored. This alone, however, is not enough to warrant an analysis. Women's representation is an interesting topic in East-Central Europe and, not surprisingly, has engendered an increasing amount of research in recent years. One primary reason for this spike is the emerging trends in women's representation in the region. More specifically, in many countries, we see that women's representation has risen in the past five years (see Figure 1). Additional work on the implications of this increase are in order and use this development as an opportunity to evaluate how electoral volatility and, by extension, party system development, may be impacted. To this end, we hypothesize that women's representation should be inversely related to volatility levels and attribute this to the various benefits attached to female representation. Furthermore, in still-developing political settings, women can be seen as helpful ways to stand out, carve out a political niche, and to connect with voters; particularly educated female voters who have been overlooked for some time.

<Figure 1 about here>

This work builds on the existing volatility research in multiple ways. First, it continues earlier research efforts to understand the complex electoral volatility patterns in this region. Second, it integrates a salient emerging trend into our understanding of volatility. Lastly, it makes use of a unique dataset on volatility to evaluate how the nature of a party system's candidates can impact overall stability.

With that said, the rest of this study is organized in the following manner. The next section provides a brief overview of the volatility research and presents a discussion of where volatility levels in East-Central Europe stand today. Afterwards, we discuss the hypothesized link between women's representation and volatility levels. Then, an overview of our research design is provided followed by a discussion of our evidence and implications for future research.

Volatility Research

Research on electoral volatility has examined a number of factors in the past. For starters, numerous studies examine how racial, ethnic and religious structures impact party system structures (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Lipset 1967). Often times, these works conclude that these divisions can serve as foundational organizing cleavages on which parties may be built. Tavits (2005) extends this discussion by also studying the urban-rural cleavage. Likewise, Roberts and Wibbels (2005) find that class divisions significantly impact Latin American volatility levels. Bartolini and Mair (1990) reach similar conclusions regarding class cleavages.

Macroeconomic indicators also have been linked with volatility levels. Whether it is East Europe or Latin America, multiple studies find that ebbs and flows in volatility coincide with economic performance (Birch 2003; Tavits 2005; Roberts and Wibbels 1999). The burgeoning

consensus in these studies is generally that economic malaise leads frustrated voters to cast votes for alternative partisan options, thus causing spikes in volatility levels.

Aside from economic performance and social structures, scholars have stressed the role political institutions play in predicting volatility rates (Birch 2003; Horowitz and Browne 2005; Tavits 2005). In this vein, electoral system features have a documented effect on volatility. Overall, studies show that permissive electoral systems may correspond with a rise in volatility levels since party emergence is easier. Conversely, restrictive electoral systems hinder new party emergence thus resulting in lower volatility rates. How do researchers operationalize electoral system effects? Conventionally, measures such as district magnitude or some measure of ballot control have been used (e.g., Birch 2003; Tavits 2005). Beyond electoral systems, other researchers have posited a connection between regime type (i.e., presidential systems) and volatility levels (Mainwaring 1999).

These works are just a few that have examined the underlying factors associated with volatility. Taken as a whole, we see that all of the factors considered are factors that exist and occur outside of parties and party systems. Though still important, such emphasis shows no consideration of internal party factors. And, while many studies reference party structures (e.g., Smyth et al. 2011) as an important element of party stability and, by extension, electoral volatility, rarely do researchers actually attempt to measure such dynamics. The next section discusses why this is an important omission in understanding volatility more fully.

The Impact of Women's Representation on Volatility

As noted in the preceding section, internal party traits, i.e., who runs or serves in a party, is expected to electoral volatility. To this end, we argue that party systems with higher levels of women's representation in the legislature should see lower volatility rates. The intellectual

motivation for this is built on earlier works in both the volatility and women's representation literatures.

Women's representation in many contexts, not only East Europe's, often lags behind men's (Jalalzai 2004). Niven's (1998) study finds that party leadership bias may work against women. That is, party leaders may prefer to run male candidates rather than female candidates. Party leaders are not the only ones with a predisposition to certain candidates: Dolan (1997) finds evidence that constituents have preferences (or biases) as well. Others, though, focus on the female candidates themselves and conclude that women often eschew politics and campaigns due to personal obligations or concerns about political vitality (Elder 2004). However, even though women may face greater challenges in some contexts over others, women's success with securing top leadership positions remains sporadic.

In Phillips' (1995) widely noted study, she discusses the value of descriptive and substantive representation vis-à-vis women's representation. In this study, we argue that both can impact volatility levels though in different ways. Regarding the former, descriptive representation can give parties an additional tool in their political tool boxes to augment campaign efforts. Simply having women on the party's ballot can serve to reach out to certain voters, especially women, who may have felt alienated previously. After all, Dolan's study (1997) concludes that female candidates may be more desirable to female voters. An increased number of female candidates, then, could attract more (and more steady) support from female voters, thus leading to lower volatility levels. East European examples, however, indicate that simply convincing party leadership to run more female candidates is often times not enough. In some cases, such as with Hungary's Socialist Party, female members sought to implement a quota system to ensure their representation within the party. These efforts, however, have remain a work in progress as

Hungary, overall, has female representation levels that are well below other East European countries.

Substantive representation is also relevant to our discussions here. After all, Thomas and Welch (1991) find that men and women have different policy priorities—even though this is based on evidence from the U.S. Much of the existing research concludes that more women decision-makers alter in nontrivial ways policy-making (Flammang 1985; Saint-Germain 1990; Skard and Haavio-Mannila 1985; Swers 2002; Taylor-Robinson and Heath 2003; Thomas and Welch 1991). The conventional wisdom is that more women representatives correspond with improved or increased benefits for women's rights, education, health care, maternity leave, etc. Accordingly, if more female representatives are elected and similar policy changes are implemented, then could strengthen parties' ties with voters (especially those supportive of these policies), thus leading to less turnover and lower volatility levels. This, of course, is likely a function of which parties are involved with this as women's representation levels clearly vary across parties.

The previous discussion suggests that increased women's representation is expected to be a boon for volatility levels for reasons stemming from both descriptive and substantive representation. Accordingly, the primary hypothesis for this study is:

Hypothesis: Higher percentages of women representatives are expected to be inversely related to volatility levels.

Data and Variables

The data used for this cross-sectional time-series analysis is derived from 15 East-Central European states from 1992-2012. Those countries included in the analysis reached a "6" on the Polity2 measure from the Polity IV (20024) dataset and thus some countries appear in the analysis for more years than others (Marshall and Gurr 2002). Two separate units of analysis are employed (for two separate estimations): country-year and election-year.

Calculating Volatility

As seen in existing work, volatility, the analysis's dependent variable, is calculated using Birch's (2001, 2003) approach which uses the total vote shares accumulated in two consecutive elections as the denominator. The reason for this is that Birch's measure provides a more accurate calibration of volatility since it uses the "sum of the fractional shares of the total vote at each election of the parties which are included in the calculations" as the denominator (2001, 5). This is a noted departure from Pedersen's (1979) volatility measure (which uses '2' as the denominator). Thus, electoral volatility is measured as the absolute change in vote share among those parties that have participated in consecutive elections. Expressed formally as:

$$V = \frac{\sum \left| c_{i,t+1} - c_{i,t} \right|}{\sum c_{i,t+1} + \sum c_{i,t}}$$

In this equation, V denotes the aggregate volatility and c_i represents the vote share for party i at election t, while $c_{i,\, t+1}$ indicates the vote share of party i at the second, or next, election. To calculate this measure, we have obtained data from the University of Essex's website and country-level electoral sites.[i] As stated above, higher volatility rates typically represent less stable party systems.

Independent Variable: Percentage of Women Represented in the Legislature

Numerous methods have been used to gauge women's representation (Camobreco and Barnello 2003; Eto 2010; Kanter 1977; Siaroff 2000). In this study, however, we measure representation as the percentage of seats held by women in the lower legislative chamber; a practice that is in line with earlier work on women's representation (Childs and Krook 2009; Thames and Williams 2010). The data for this variable were collected from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2012) dataset. Given that women's representation figures and electoral volatility statistics are created simultaneously (i.e., after an election has occurred), there are concerns with causality between these two processes. To redress this issue, we have estimated the models below with a lagged measure of women's representation (i.e., women's representation from elections in 't-1' rather than at 't'). As an aside, the separate models were estimated with women's representation figures from year 't' and the findings were stronger than those seen here but were omitted given the expressed methodological concerns.

As mentioned elsewhere in this paper, there are significant differences between women's representation in East Europe and other, more advanced democracies. The mean for women's representation for the countries under review is just over 22% with a minimum value of just over 3% (in both Ukraine and Macedonia) and a maximum entry of 32% (also in Macedonia as well as Slovenia). Important temporal trends are evident too: in the mid-1990s only around 4% of MPs were women whereas this number has increased to over 20% in 2012. Nevertheless, there are numerous instances where women's representation is substantially lower than what is seen in many advanced democracies. For instance, compare these figures with representation statistics from countries such as: Finland (42.5%), Norway (39.6) and the Netherlands (38.7%) to name a

few. Although things are improving in East-Central Europe, significant differences remain between this region and Western Europe. We include the countries used in the analysis along with their respective mean values for both volatility and percentage of women's representation in Table 1. Meanwhile, in Figure 1, we see longitudinal illustrations of the percentage of women elected to each country's respective legislature.

<Table 1 about here>

<Figure 1 about here>

Control Variables

Electoral volatility has been linked to a number of other control variables. These measures reflect political conditions, electoral institutions, underlying social context and economic conditions. To control for underlying social conditions we include the ethnic fractionalization measure available from Fearon and Laitin's (2003) dataset. Multiple political controls are included: District magnitude, the effective number of parties, electoral threshold and a binary measure for presidential regimes. District magnitude captures the (average) number of seats per electoral district up for grabs while the electoral threshold measure refers to the percentage of votes a party must win to secure parliamentary representation. One additional note regarding district magnitude is in order: in this study we use the natural log of district magnitude given the sizable variance with this measure (using the untransformed district magnitude data does not alter our findings however). As well, the effective number of parties is included as extant research has surmised that the parties available can impact volatility levels (Tavits 2008). These political measures were collected from Beck et al.'s "Database of Political Institutions"

(2010). As for the remaining controls, we also include two economic indicators and one measure for urbanization (i.e., the percentage of the population residing in urban centers). The aforementioned economic variables are unemployment percentage and GDP per capita (in US dollars); both measures are lagged one year and are borrowed from the World Bank's "World Development Indicators" site (2014). The summary statistics for all variables in this analysis are listed in Table 2.

<Table 2 about here>

Findings and Discussion

The analysis in this study was conducted in two primary ways. First, we utilize a time-series cross-sectional analysis to study these trends over time. The estimation technique used is a population-averaged linear regression model. This is done to estimate the causal effect between women's representation and volatility and to control for group-specific characteristics. As an aside, we also have estimated our models with random- and fixed-effects estimations and the random-effects models returned results that were stronger than those presented here. However, all three approaches produce results that are similar to those seen here (both in statistical and substantive terms). For this first analysis, the unit of analysis is country-year.

As noted previously, we employ a second methodological approach to investigate further the link between women's representation and our dependent variable. For the second approach, we isolate our unit of analysis to country-election years. This approach can stave off suggestions that our results are inflated by (repeated) entries that artificially support our findings. In other words, this second approach should test the robustness of our models even though we are left

with far fewer observations than seen from the first analysis. For the models listed below, we also include a lagged dependent variable to address problems stemming from autocorrelation in volatility levels since levels at year 't+1' are likely to be influenced by levels in year 't'. This is more of a problem in the first model (with country-year as the unit of analysis) than in the second though; however, the same covariates are seen in both models. Nevertheless, both models are statistically significant and provide a number of interesting discoveries.

<Table 3 about here>

The findings from Model 1 (Table 3) provide support for our hypothesis: states that had more women elected in the previous round of elections exhibit lower volatility levels. This linear relationship affirms the stated hypothesis and provides support for the idea that women's representation may act as a buoy for the still-developing East-Central European party systems. After all, a number of studies have remarked that East-Central European women's representation has risen consistently over the past 15 years and our results echo this trend: just over 3% of East European legislatures consisted of women in the 1990s but this figure has increased to well over 30% as of 2012. Similarly, countries such as Croatia and Macedonia showed marked improvements over the period examined. Croatia's female representation increased to over 25% in 2012 from around 5% in the early 1990s. Likewise, Macedonia's increase was even more impressive, going from around 5% in 1991 to over 30% in 2012.

The relationship between women's representation and volatility levels are in line with this general trend: rising representation among women corresponds with a nontrivial decrease in volatility levels. For each percentage point increase in women's representation, volatility levels

fall by a margin of approximately .38. To put this in perspective, the average change in women's representation was just over 1% for the countries studied. This includes a sample minimum of -.83 (Moldova) to a maximum increase of over 6% (Slovenia). For those countries that saw a notable increase in women's representation, the corresponding drop in volatility levels would be approximately 2 points—a figure that corresponds with the average drop in volatility levels for the countries and years under review. Furthermore, for countries such as Albania, Estonia, and Latvia as prime examples of states that saw increases in women's representation and decreases in electoral volatility within their party systems. As a corollary, we could also look to countries such as Moldova, Romania and Ukraine to find examples of countries who have lower levels of women's representation and higher volatility levels. Another interesting finding from this analysis involves recent developments in Hungary. In this country, we see a number of concerning trends related to the party system, particularly with respect to FIDESZ's recent dominance. For years, scholars have identified Hungary as one of the beacons of hope for Post-Communist party systems. However, after years of progress, Hungary has exhibited higher volatility levels and, related to this study, a falling number of women represented in the National Assembly.

The finding for the percentage of women is once again statistically significant in the second model. As mentioned, the figures in Model 2 are derived from the secondary analysis that considers only election-years (thus eliminating repetitive entries in non-election years). The number of observations is paltry but the primary results are similar to what was reported previously: the percentage of elected women again exerts a statistically significant effect on volatility. However, one notable difference here lies with the coefficient size. In Model 2, the coefficient nearly triples from what was seen above. This is even more telling given the fewer

cases while retaining the litany of control measures commonly seen in other volatility studies. Consequently, the rise in successful women candidates does make for a promising impact on party system stability in a region that, in multiple places, is still plagued by instability.

A third separate analysis was conducted in Column 3 (i.e., Model 3) due to the paucity of observations from Model 2. Here, we estimate a simple estimation between the main independent variable and our dependent variable and our unit of analysis remains country election years. In this model, we isolate the two main variables to further evaluate the expected connection and to increase the number of observations (which increase to 59 in Model 3 from 23 in Model 2). Once more, we see a statistically significant relationship between women's representation (still using the lagged measure) and volatility scores for our dataset.

As for other findings, we discover results that dovetail with earlier volatility work. As expected, the effective number of parties is significantly and positively related to the dependent variable. As such, more effective number of parties translates into more electoral volatility. Likewise, woeful economic conditions appear to undermine party stabilizing efforts but this effect manifests itself only through unemployment rates. In both models, unemployment rates are statistically significant and thus we see that higher unemployment rates are linked with more electoral turnover. Lastly, ethnic fractionalization also is significantly related to volatility rates. It is hardly surprising, moreover, that more homogenous countries also yield more stable party systems.

Robustness Checks

The findings above demonstrate a strong link between women's representation and volatility; however, additional steps were taken to more carefully examine the robustness of this

connection. Namely, we replaced a number of the variables seen in Table 3 with alternative measures. For instance, we estimated the models with other electoral system measures (e.g., a dichotomous indicator for proportional representation (PR) and mixed electoral systems) but the main findings were unchanged. More importantly, neither variable reached statistical significance. As well, other economic indicators were tested (e.g., inflation rates, GDP growth) but these too failed to change the main results or reach statistical significance. Conversely, one measure that did reach statistical significance was Siaroff's (2003) measure of presidential strength (this was used in place of the presidential dummy measure). The findings with this alternative measure have been provided in the Appendix for a comparison with the main findings. One troubling aspect to including the measure in the main findings is that it further reduces the number of observations, which is particularly worrisome for Model 2's estimation.

Conclusion

The results above provide unambiguous support for the notion that women's representation has yielded a number of salient impacts on East European politics. More specifically, those polities that elect more women to their legislatures are likely to see party systems that, over time, exhibit greater stability. This work has offered a contribution to both the volatility and women's representation bodies of work that has generally been overlooked—the impact of women's representation on party system stability.

Moreover, the findings have implications for descriptive representation though more work needs to be done in this regard. As seen in other studies, e.g., Matland and Bojinova's (2013) recent work, one approach would be to disaggregate the findings in order to see, in more concrete terms, how specific parties are impacted by women's representation. After all, these

broad approaches to analysis are useful but only insofar as the underlying dynamics reflect these trends. Another potentially beneficial line of research would be to examine how women's representation in cabinet portfolios affects volatility—such an approach could build on Siaroff's (2000) related study. This metric has been employed in other work and would be theoretically interesting since cabinet-level positions could deliver greater notoriety for those parties that seek to secure political gains for successful female representatives.

Research on volatility has experienced several ebbs and flows over the past 20 plus years. Early work placed great emphasis on the Communist legacies while the next wave of research studied the signs of promise. By now, some scholars expected stable party systems to have taken root in many of East Europe's political settings but recent developments have cast renewed doubt on these prospects. Nevertheless, volatility research continues to develop in various ways and this study hopes to continue in this endeavor by expanding the scope to consider the types of candidates running for office. The analysis from this study indicates that such endeavors can produce noteworthy contributions to our understanding of volatility even if additional work remains.

Figures and Tables

Table 1: Countries with Mean Values for Volatility and the Percentage of Women in the Legislature

Country	*Mean % Women in Legislature*	*Mean Volatility*
Albania	9.04	17.28
Bulgaria	20.06	25.38
Croatia	19.11	17.38
Czech Republic	16.94	17.21
Estonia	18.31	24.61
Hungary	9.51	25.63
Latvia	18.63	34.59
Lithuania	17.86	36.65
Macedonia	19.96	9.06
Moldova	16.58	27.68
Poland	18.85	31.99
Romania	10.39	24.15
Russia	10.90	28.44
Slovakia	16.67	21.77
Slovenia	14.35	21.44
Ukraine	7.26	23.15
Sample Statistics	15.42	22.97

Table 2: Summary Statistics

Variable	*Mean*	*St. Deviation*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
Volatility	22.97	14.10	0	83.22
Pct. Women	15.42	6.43	3.30	32.5
Fractionalization	.70	.15	0	.93
Dist. Mag. $_{log}$	2.74	1.36	1	5.01
Elect. Thresh.	2.65	4.34	0	7
Unemploy. Pct.	18.30	21.19	.60	94.58
GDP Per Capita	6,402.24	4,320.48	570.03	20,706.67
% Urban Pop.	61.18	9.87	8.09	75.22

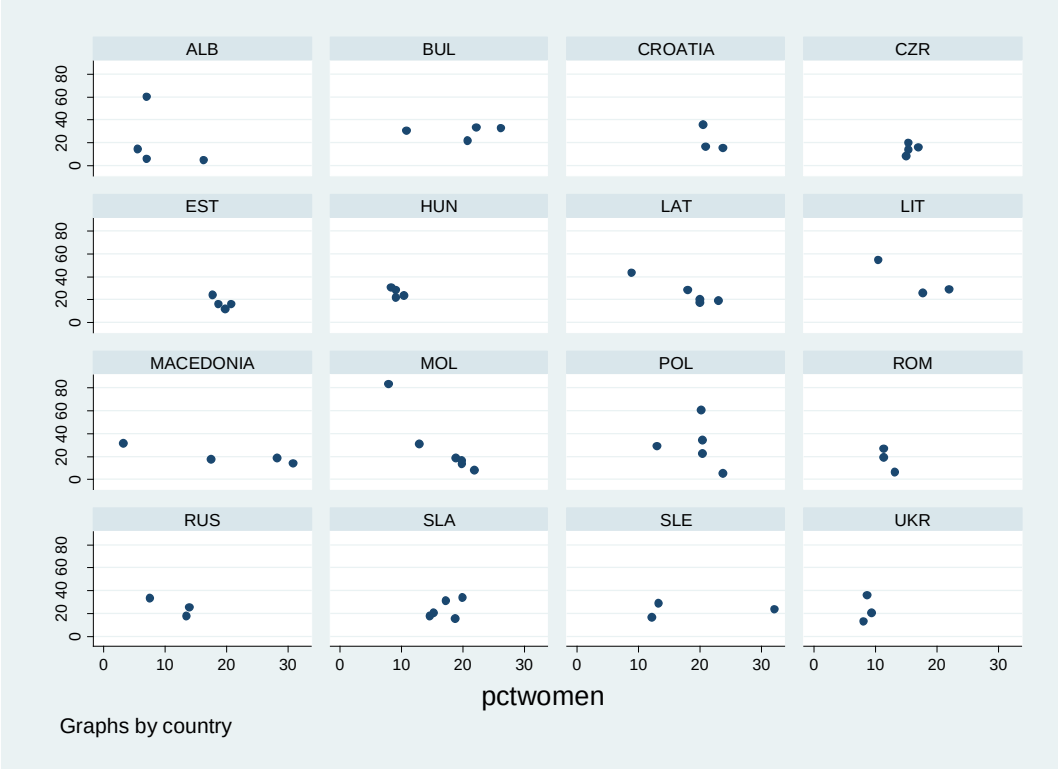
Table 3: Regression of Percentage of Women Represented in Legislature on Volatility in East-Central Europe

Variable	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Model 3*
Volatility $_{t-1}$	.58	-.02	--
	(.05)***	(.10)	
Pct. Women $_{t-1}$	-.38	-1.15	-.58
	(.14)**	(.43)**	(.32)*
Eff. # Parties	1.64	2.82	--
	(.49)***	(1.17)*	
Presidential (0,1)	-4.20	-7.34	--
	(1.42)**	(5.70)	
Eth. Fract.	-31.21	-61.50	--
	(5.29)**	(19.80)**	
Elect. Threshold	.59	1.60	--
	(.11)***	(.46)**	
Dist. Mag. $_{log}$	-.21	-.96	--
	(.32)	(1.56)	
Unemp. Pct. $_{t-1}$	.69	1.70	--
	(.12)***	(.43)***	
GDP Per Cap.	.00	.00	--
Presidential $_{t-1}$	(.00)	(.00)	
Pct. Pop. Urban	.24	.44	--
	(.06)***	(.28)	
Constant	.17	10.33	33.62
	(4.37)	(17.43)	(5.44)**
Number of Groups	15	14	15
N	94	23	59
Wald X^2	1995.49***	62.28***	3.22*

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001; Standard Errors in parentheses

Appendix

Figure 1: Volatility and the Percentage of Women Representatives in East-Central Europe



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[i] All East European electoral data were obtained from the University of Essex's site "Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe" http://www.essex.ac.uk/elections/ and was accessed 31 August 2006.